This plot bunny just suddenly came to me. So I wrote it to get it out of my system. Basically, this story is about a mysterious group going back in time to change what is a very bad future, by attempting to fix what they think went wrong. This is a story about their quest to stop Darkseid, and enlisting the help of both Clark and Lex.

There will be some strong hints of Clex but more of a emphasis on their friendship. I mainly want to do this due to Lex and Clark's difference in age, which would undoubtedly be illegal in the state of Kansas. I might do a serious Clex relationship in the future later down the road however. This is a fanfic about time travel after all. Also, there will be some very mild Lana bashing before Lana wisens up and become a good character. It's pretty much a fix-it fanfic where we fix what I think went wrong in the show. So if that isn't your thing, then you can go ahead and move on elsewhere. :)

by AuroraMoon
For over 40 years, Planet Earth had been ruled by a dark vile being named Darkseid.

Darkseid had subjugated everyone who had been against him completely, inducing Superman himself. A human named Lex Luthor and a few others had been the last resistance that held up against Darkseid for awhile, until Lex had been killed in battle. Once Darkseid's victory had been complete, he used his dark power to transform the planet Earth into a version of Arpoklis, his homeworld.

Now, this secret little base in the rocky mountains was the only thing left the last of the remaining resistance had as an weapon against that intergalactic monster. That, and a time machine that Lex Luthor had invented and left behind along with his video diary.

The video diary was quite detailed, with Lex listing everything he had ever done up to this point. How he had discovered that there was an alien invasion coming... about his friendship with a person named Clark Kent until a meta-human named Lana Lang made things between the two men tense until their friendship was shattered beyond repair.

It turns out that Lex made a fatal mistake... he had mistakenly assumed that Clark had been helping the aliens invade earth, and had turned on both Clark and Superman as a result.

At first, all the remaining survivors of the resistance had been confused over the connection Clark Kent had to Superman and Lex Luthor. They all only knew him as that quiet, timid reporter who had died during the second wave of Darkseid's invasion. But it was made clear after some investigation into Lex's old files dating all the way back to 2005. Turns out that Clark Kent had opened up some sort of alien artifact in the caves, which resulted in the appearance of Superman somehow.

The army theorized that Clark Kent also had been warned of the Alien Invasion somehow decades before it happened, just like Lex. Maybe the two them had been together at the same time when they got the warning, and that was how Clark knew it was coming too. However, Clark had taken a different route than Lex did. Rather than build up an army of illegally cloned meta-humans like Lex did, Clark had gone looking for friendly aliens who could help them by seeking out alien artifacts that had been left behind on earth by past alien visitors.

So as a result Clark Kent had managed to summon Kal-El, aka Superman to Earth to act as their defender. But a tragic misunderstanding occurred between Lex and Clark, due to Lex witnessing Clark's activities in the caves. Lex thought that Superman was the vanguard for the upcoming Alien Invasion and that his former best friend was aiding the enemy. So as an result, two powerful men worked separately to combat the Alien invasion instead of working together. And that led to both their downfall when Darkseid finally invaded from the planet Arpoklis.

Lex's video diary supported this theory.

Lex lamented over that, as he clearly grieved the loss of both Superman and Clark Kent in the video diary. His exact words were, “God... I was right but for all the completely wrong reasons. The Kryptonians weren't the aliens I had to watch out for... and thanks to my mistake, Clark Kent is dead. My best friend is dead... I should have listened to him, and shouldn't have been so stubborn when Superman asked for my help against Darkseid. Even when the truth was right in my face, I still didn't trust Superman until he died for us. God. I was such a fool. If we all had worked together from the start, then maybe this world had had a chance against him...”
That had been the very last entry Lex made, as he died shortly afterwards battling Darkseid's parademons.

There was also some evidence that Clark Kent was a meta-human, infected by the meteors just like the rest of the citizens from Smallville. According to Lex’s old files. Clark had a decent fair amount of speed and strength, although he was not invulnerable like Superman. Clark could be cut, and had serious bloody wounds from battling other meta-humans occasionally. So Clark Kent obviously was a vital part of the Resistance until his death... despite his timid, geeky appearance.

Once the army discovered all of this new information... they knew what they had to do. They had to send a group back in time to prevent Lex and Clark from breaking off their friendship over a tragic misunderstanding. If Lex and Clark had worked together from the very start, then they could stand a chance against Darkseid. With the time machine, the future could be changed to a more positive one!

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--Year 1996--

A 10-year-old girl named Lana Lang was playing outside, trying to catch as many butterflies in her jar as she could, and failing badly at it. She was the very picture of a wholesome, cute innocent girl...she was wearing a pink sundress with white lace and frills all over it. Her dark hair was braided into twin pigtails, and topped off with pink bows.

Unknown to her, there was two mysterious men dressed in black from head to toe hiding in the bushes a fair distance away from where the young girl was playing. They were slowly and methodically assembling together what seemed to be a syringe shaped like a gun, with a glowing white vital of liquid.

It just so happened that they were on a mission to disable the powers of all meta-humans who might hinder their ultimate goal of changing the future. They had been given a list by the higher ups, on which meta-humans they needed to neutralize... and it just happened that this little girl was on the very top of their list.

They had no idea what this girl had done in the future to warrant being first on the list, or even being labeled as being the most dangerous... but they had experience with meta-humans and knew that appearances could be deceiving. Besides, there was a strong chance that this girl's life could turn out for the better with her powers removed completely. So they didn't feel the slightest shred of regret for what they were about to do.

They burst out of the bushes, running at the young girl at fast speeds.

Lana Lang gasped, dropping her empty jar to the ground. She turned and ran towards her home screaming for her aunt. But she was too slow, and she was harshly tackled to the ground by two grown-up men. They promptly injected her with the glowing white serum.

It was then that one of the men noticed the glowing green stone that Lana was wearing. “Hey, check this out. She's actually wearing Kryptonite as a piece of jewelry. Who the hell does that?”

The other one replied, “That explains how this one got her power. If I recall in this time period it wasn't that uncommon for people to use those rocks as jewelry, because Superman hadn't arrived yet and nobody knew what it really was. I know we just took her powers away... but maybe we should play it safe and take it away too?”

So they ripped the necklace away from the 10-year-old girl against her protests, and roughly tossed
her aside. Just at that moment Aunt Nell choose this time to look out her window and see a bunch of suspicious, masked men standing over her niece's still prone form.

Naturally Aunt Nell couldn't help but jump to the conclusion that anybody might have if they saw a bunch of creepy masked men attacking an 10-year-old girl. She screamed her niece's name as she rushed out of the house to stop what she thought was an kidnapping... but to her surprise the men were now gone, and Lana was still here.

Lana sat up, sobbing heavily as she rubbed her left arm where she had been injected with the white serum. Aunt Nell rushed over to her, and pulled the young girl into her arms. “Lana! Are you alright? What did those men do to you?”

“T-they...” Lana sobbed some more before she said the rest of her sentence, “They stole my necklace and injected me with something. Like how the doctors do at the office, but the injectors the bad men used looked funny... not like the ones at the doctors.”

“Come into the house with me. I'm calling the cops!” Nell replied, now highly upset when she saw the red welt on Lana's arm.

Lana wasn't the only one to experience such a thing... soon, all of Smallville was in an uproar over strange reports of masked men breaking into families' houses or hiding at schools so that they could attack children and inject them with something strange.

Only 8 kids had been attacked, but that didn't stop anybody from feeling like it could happen to any one of their kids. The cops weren't able to do anything because the men often seemed to disappear into thin air before they could even get to the perpetrators.

The strangest part? Once all 8 kids had been injected, the attacks were over quickly just as it had started. People had been rather upset that the masked men hadn't been caught, but time passed and so people slowly started to forget about the bizarre attacks. It helped that none of the kids had been harmed, or kidnapped.

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--Year 2001--

Chloe couldn't believe the fact that there was a giant glowing green pig the size of a two-story house on a rampage in the fields just behind the Kents' house. Yet, there it was.

Just when she thought she had finally gotten used to Smallville's brand of weirdness, it just had to up the ante and test her tolerance.

Apparently some farmer named Ben Hubbard, who happened to own the neighboring farm next to the Kents', were attempting to breed a new type of giant pig that would be harvested for it's meat. Ben had reasoned that the bigger the pig, the less pigs he needed to raise in order to successfully corner the pork market in Smallville. AND, naturally Ben just had to put meteor rock into the pig feed too.

Seriously, what was with people putting a space rock into food meant for humans or animals? It's like nobody even stopped to think that eating rocks wasn't exactly healthy for you, and especially not for animals like pigs. It just made Chloe think that maybe some of the Smallville citizens were already insane long before they got mutated.

Anyway, This pig had done a lot of damage today as it was rapidly growing to the giant house-size it was now. Earlier today, it had simply been the size of a car and had been mostly manageable behind
some thick fencing. Ben had been so proud of his success that he had invited everyone he knew, and even the local newspapers to come gawk at the car-sized pig. Word spread about the pig, and so naturally the Torch Crew had to come and check it out... even if it was just a pig of unusual size.

The universe had a twisted sense of humor, and so naturally the pig only started growing uncontrollably once the Torch Crew arrived. It then had burst though the metal fencing, and actually crushed the front half of Lex's Porsche when Lex accidentally ran into the pig on the road. Lex was shaken up by the incident, but he was fine otherwise.

The Giant Pig then had rampaged though the town, before finally ending up in the fields just behind the Kents' house. And because it had made such a public spectacle of itself, most of the smallville police force and a mob of armed farmers had actually chased after the pig all the way out there. The torch crew naturally followed as well, and it turns out that even Lex was here too to see what would happen to this countryside freakshow.

Clark was staying at a fair distance away from the glowing green pig (for obvious reasons), and were standing by Lex behind a barricade. Chloe on the other hand, had sneaked beyond the barricades so that she could have a closer look at the house-sized pig as well as take some excellent pictures.

Pete was trying to record the entire event with his cam-recorder, so he was standing at an distance further away from where Clark was so that he could capture the whole scene... down to how many police cars there were to how big the pig really was in comparison.

Meanwhile, all the police were shooting everything they had at the pig... everything from tranquilizer darts that was enough to take down an elephant to live ammo. But, nothing was working. The mob consisted entirely of farmers with shotguns certainly did not help much, because the shotgun shells only seemed to make the pig angry.

The giant green pig actually let out a loud guttural roar and started charging at the men who were attacking it.

All the farmers and cops screamed, and dove out of the way of the green beast's path. Chloe couldn't help herself, she was gleefully taking as many pictures as she could on her camera.

The pig broke though the barricades, and jogged towards the road. Clark moved away from the other people in the crowd, and rushed towards the direction of the pig.

He looked around to make nobody was looking at him, and broke into a fast run so that he could catch up with the pig. Once he was parallel to the pig he turned his head to look at the green beast's head... and his eyes glowed red. A blast of red flew out, and burned a hole right in the giant pig's head... causing it to stumble over.

There was a strong smell of pork being barbecued as Clark continued to use his heat vision on the mutated pig from a distance. Finally, he stopped his heat vision once he was sure that the pig was dead.

The sounds of police cars came closer, so he sped away before anybody could see him.

--Later that day--

“I can't believe how awesome that was! That's certainly one event that all of Smallville can't sweep under the dirt and pretend like it didn't happen... like they usually do.” Chloe said with glee as she looked though the pictures she took on her digital camera.

She was sitting inside the pizza place with the rest of the Torch crew and Lex Luthor.
was there with them mainly because his car had gotten totaled due to the run-in with the pig, and had to hitch a ride with Chloe if he wanted to find out what was going on.

“So, what you’re telling me... is that this sort of thing happens all the time around here, but everyone refuses to acknowledge it?” Lex Luthor asked as he looked at Clark Kent.

Lex was still new to Smallville, so he honestly didn't know what went on in Smallville. He had only had been here for a few weeks, and had been saved from a watery death by Clark. Which was actually the only reason why he was even sitting with them. Otherwise why would a 19-year-old business man sit with a bunch of 15-year-old teenagers?

Clark nodded. “Pretty much. But most of the weird stuff tends to be pretty low-key, you know? It's usually stuff that people can just explain away or pretend that it never happened. For instance, that time where a guy had two of his fingers on his left hand mysteriously transfer over to his right hand somehow. It's weird, but the sort of thing you can easily ignore because it doesn't directly impact your life.”

Pete grinned. “If you just want to know more, just check out Chloe's website. She catalogs all this stuff.”

Lex nodded with a wry expression on his face. “I'll keep that in mind. And here I thought I had been exiled to a boring little town where nothing happened.”

Pete ignored the billionaire and turned to face Chloe. “So did you find out what they're going to do with that giant pig?”

Chloe replied, “You'll never believe this. Apparently, when the police chased after the pig they found it lying in the middle of the road dead.... with a large hole burned into it's head. The brain was completely fried... like somebody had cooked it with a laser or something.”

Clark shifted in his seat, trying to look casual and innocent like he hadn't done anything. Lex noticed the movement, but he didn't say anything.

“Ben wants his pig back though. Apparently he wants to start selling the meat off the pig already despite all the damage that the pig caused...” Chloe finished her story, with a little hint of disbelief in her voice.

Pete laughed. “I'm just picturing Mr. Hubbard building the biggest barbecue ever. You think he could get into the Guinness world of records for that? Owning the biggest pig ever and for the giant cookout?”

Clark made a face at that. “I don't know about you, but I'm definitely staying away from green-colored meat. I mean, what would that do to a normal human being if they ate an mutated pig that had been treated with radioactive meteor rocks?”

Chloe nodded in agreement with Clark.

Pete shook his head. “Yeah. But if nobody eats it then it's just such a tragic waste of pork... you know what I mean?”

“600,500 dollars....if you add up how much a house-sized pig would go for if you sold it pound by pound... that's a lot of money.” Lex Luthor murmured thoughtfully to himself, “If there was a way to raise giant pigs without them getting out of control or turning green then it'd be a highly lucrative business. Ben Hubbard's method might seem crazy at first... but he did have something there with this idea of his.”
All three teenagers turned to stare at Lex. The businessman shrugged his shoulders. “What? I'm just speaking generally from a business viewpoint. It's not like I'm actually going into the pig business, I already have my hands full with the crap factory... thank you very much!”

Both Clark and Chloe snorted in amusement at this, while Pete just rolled his eyes. Lex then looked at Clark with a slightly regretful expression on his face. “Speaking of which... it might be Saturday, but I still have to work. I have an appointment at the factory, so I'll be seeing you around.”

With that, he got up and waved at everyone as he left. Clark waved back, and then turned his attention back to his friends once Lex was out of sight.

They started chatting about various topics, such as the school newspaper... when Lana Lang came over.

She was dressed in a waitress's uniform that matched the red plaid tablecloth on the tables, with an apron around her waist that had the words “Pizza Palace” sewed on it. She stood in front of the Torch crew's table and asked: “So what will you be ordering?”

Clark frowned when he recognized Lana Lang. “Weren't you working at the Beanery part time?”

Lana smiled sheepishly at this. “Well, I was, but then I got fired. Apparently I kept on getting everyone's orders wrong....”

Clark's eyebrows rose at this, but he honestly wasn't surprised. He remembered going into the coffeehouse that called itself the Beanery on an errand for Chloe. He was supposed to get her a hot latte but Lana had given him an iced frappe drink that had way too much whipped cream in it. Lex had been there too, and he had gone through something similar too. Lana Lang wasn't clearly cut out for working at a coffeehouse at all.

Clark decided to be tactful, and responded, “Well, the Beanery always have those weird names for their drinks. No wonder why you couldn't keep track of them all.. I would had been the same way if I worked there. But thankfully you can't really mess up a simple pizza order, right? I'll have a cheese pizza and some sprite. How about you guys?” He turned to face both Pete and Chloe at the last part.

Chloe nodded. “A cheese pizza does sound good. I'll have Dr. Pepper.”

Pete replied, “I want a sausage pizza... how about we order half a cheese pizza and half a sausage pizza? I'll have a Dr. Pepper too.”

Everyone agreed to this order, and Clark turned to look at Lana. “You got all of that?”

Lana was writing it all down, and nodded with a big smile on her face. “Got it. I'll be back with your order in a short while.”

As soon as Lana was out of earshot range, Clark shook his head. “Wasn't Lana working at the Beanery for only one week? It got to be some kind of record to be hired and fired in only one week.”

Chloe snorted. “That's nothing. I heard that her Aunt Nell had Lana help her out at the flower shop for one day.... and then told Lana to never help her again after she messed up all the orders. I have to say, retail isn't probably Lana's strongest suit.”

Clark couldn't feel but feel bad for Lana Lang. She didn't seem to be good at anything she did. First she had tried out for horse-riding and dressage... but while she was decent at riding a horse she only managed to win third place on occasion. Then she had tried out for cheer-leading so that she could follow in her mother's footsteps,
but again it turns out that her talent at cheer-leading was mostly subpar and mediocre... so she
couldn't make it on the cheer-leading team.

Lana Lang was still very beautiful to Clark, even though he got over his crush on her when the two
of them had been ten years old. He had been convinced that he was going to marry Lana Lang when
he was only 8 years old, and so had been somewhat shocked when his feelings suddenly frizzled out
for no reason at all two years later... his dad had explained to Clark that it was perfectly normal to
have crushes that came and went like that. That what he had felt for Lana was nothing but puppy
love.

Whatever feelings Clark had left for Lana Lang had evolved into neighborly feelings... he saw her as
a nice girl who deserved to find her lot in life... to find something she was actually good at. Lana at
least deserved that, especially after she had lost so much as a young girl. Which is why he couldn't
help but feel some second-hand embarrassment on Lana's behalf every time she tried her best but
failed anyway.

The Torch crew chatted for a little bit as they waited for Lana to bring the food they ordered...and to
their dismay Lana had ended up bringing them the wrong food.

Instead of the Dr. Pepper drinks that Chloe and Pete ordered, they had been given cherry cokes.
Clark had been given Serra Mist instead of Sprite. And the pizza? Well, she had at least gotten the
order half-right. Half of it was sausage pizza like Pete had asked for. But the other half was
pepperoni instead of plain cheese.

Pete raised his eyebrows. “Yeah, I see what Chloe meant about Lana. I don't think Lana was meant
to work in retail of any kind. She might end up getting fired from the pizza palace too if she keeps
this up.”

Clark sighed, and felt bad for Lana once again. “Yeah.”

Chloe shook her head. “That's it, I'm call Lana over. It was one thing when she got my latte order
wrong at the Beanery, but now this? It's just ridiculous! Somebody needs to tell her what she's doing
wrong.”

“No!” Clark cried out as he reached out to grab Chloe's arm before she could do anything rash. Both
Chloe and Pete looked at him quizzically. Clark flushed slightly at his own outburst but he tried to
smooth things over. “I mean... Lana obviously needs this job right? And don’t you feel sorry for her?
I mean, she'll never learn how to work in retail if she keeps on getting fired over the smallest things.
It takes skill and time to learn.”

Chloe's eyebrows raised at this, and then she scoffed. “What's with the sudden jump to Lana's
defense? .... Oh, I see. Are you re-developing your crush on Lana Lang?”

Clark blushed slightly at this. “What? No! It's nothing like that.... I just think she needs to be able to
find her own niche without people breathing down her neck for screwing up. That's all.”

Pete smirked. “Well, nobody would blame you if you developed a crush on her again. After all, she's
gotten very hot as a lady. She's got that exotic beauty vibe going on... I can understand why you
would dig that, actually.”

'Ugh, not you too Pete.' Clark mentally groaned to himself, as Pete continued to tease him about his
so-called “crush” on Lana Lang.

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Deep in the wild, there was a secret underground base where a meeting was being taken place in the dark. There was a large circular table at which shadowy beings sat, chatting among themselves.

“The time finally came.... that moment we've been waiting for.” the shadowy leader replied, “Lex Luthor came to town and had his life saved by Clark Kent. Now we can finally start preparing them for the battle of Darkseid.”

“Hold on just a moment. I have a few concerns I'd like to address at this meeting.” One of them raised their hand.

“Very well. Tell us.”

the second figure lowered their hand. “I'm concerned that we might had altered the time-line in a way that we did not intend to. By removing the powers of those who had the ability to negatively affect both Lex and Clark, we might had accidentally set forth a kind of ripple effect in the space-time continuum.”

“So? We knew the dangers of that when we traveled back in time to this time period. There's even a chance that one of us could be erased out of existence because of our actions here. The only thing that should matter is that Lex and Clark see how important their friendship is to the future.” a third shadowy being scoffed, highly dismissive of the second person's concerns.

The second person bristled at this. “If you haven't noticed, we're having strange events that never occurred in the original time-line. There was no record of a giant, glowing green pig on a rampage.... until now. What if new threats crop up that we never planned for?”

The entire group went silent at this, as they considered what that might mean for their mission.

The third person cleared his throat. “Well, I'm sure it'll be fine. Remember, we still have the two serums. One to take away an meta-human's power, and another one to restore it or awaken powers in an latent meta-human. We also have a god-damned time machine! As long as we have those items, we can prevent any new threats from existing in the first place.”

A fourth person, who had been silent this whole time, finally spoke up. “I think we need more insiders on the police force, the school and possibly the Lex mansion. From my reports, those are places where trouble is most likely to stir up on a regular basis. So, It's only logical that we plant more spies around those areas. We could also benefit from setting up different alarm systems that alerts us to whenever somebody needs their powers to be neutralized, and so on forth. After all, we shouldn't simply use the time machine as a reset button every time something goes wrong. It could wear out our time machine, and quite possibly send out more ripples in the space-time continuum. We should only travel though time when it's truly urgent to do so.”

The shadowy leader nodded. “Agreed. We should being making preparations for any eventual outcome, and have backup plans in place should our mission somehow end up jeopardized. Make it so.”

All five shadows nodded at each other, and they slowly left the table one by one.
Author notes: As you can see by the first chapter, some things are already different. Lana Lang is no longer a meta-human who uses the power of love and empathy to influence others... and as a result never grew up to be the super-popular girl she was in the original series.

So how different is Lana's life now? Yes, part of this chapter is going to be a Lana-eccentric one but it's so we can see how much she changed, and hopefully all the Lana-haters might find my version of Lana to be far more likable. We also see how some minor changes made a huge difference in others' lives at school.

It always annoyed me and creeped me out at the same time how the writers of Smallville thought it was okay that Lana Lang, a 14-year-old girl, would end up with a 17-year-old senior boy like Whitney. Especially one that was about to turn 18 anytime. It was like they never even heard of statutory rape laws, etc.

My theory is that in the original time-line, Lana Lang still had her meteor powers where she made everyone love her no matter what she does. She had an crush on Whitney, an older boy... and of course, Lana Lang tends to get whatever she wants with her meteor powers. So that's how a 14-year-old girl landed herself a 17-year-old boyfriend... and made everyone around her think it wasn't unusual.

Well, this chapter changes all that.

Lana Lang sighed as she left the Pizza Palace. Yet another business she was fired from. She had been only there for two days, and already she was fired. That had to be a record. At least, at the coffeehouse she managed to last a week before they got sick and tired of her screwing up again.

She started walking home by herself, and allowed her thoughts to wander as she did so.

She wondered if she was ever going to be good at anything outside of school... almost everything she did seemed to be a failure. The only constant thing in her life right now was the theater club at school, where she at least seemed to have a decent talent for painting background scenery and creating costumes. The drama teacher often praised her on how realistic her scenery looked, but she was sure he was just being nice.

She was also fairly good at English, math and what not to the point of tutoring other students.

Lana at least was able to take pride in some of that... but her Aunt Nell was a different story. She sighed, as she thought back to the fights she had constantly with her aunt.

Aunt Nell meant well, but she had this habit where she would constantly compare Lana Lang to her mother Laura. Nell would always go on and on about how Laura Lang had the perfect life, etc... and just how much she wanted Lana Lang to have the same thing.

So naturally Nell was always let down when Lana failed to live up to Nell's perfect ideal. Nell had practically thrown a hissy fit when Lana couldn't get into the cheer-leading team... and she had said a
lot of hurtful things.

Hurtful things such as, “How could you fail at this? Laura's blood is in your genes, and she was such a perfect athlete. Are you sure you're trying hard enough? I refuse to believe that any daughter of Laura's could be such a failure.”

Truthfully, Lana didn't really care about things like cheer-leading but only had tried out for the team because Nell had been so convinced that Lana would have the perfect life if she joined. But Lana was starting to realize that her own idea of a perfect life was completely different than Nell's ideal.

That had been why Lana had applied for all those part-time jobs, so that she could at least attempt to create her own life outside of the one that Nell had created for her.

But for some reason it just didn't work. Lana Lang might do great in school, but for some reason she had difficulty remembering orders even if she wrote them down. But that was due to the massive amounts of people that came in on a regular basis. Clearly, she wasn't meant to work in retail. So maybe she should do jobs that had nothing to do with retail?

Lana was pretty good at taking care of horses, so maybe one of the farms around here could hire her?

Her train of thought was derailed at the sound of a car honking loudly. Lana snapped her head around, but relaxed when she saw that it was Whitney in his car driving up besides her.

“Hey, Lana. Going home, I see. Need a ride?” Whitney asked as he pulled up besides the young lady.

Lana frowned when she noticed the empty seat besides him. “Where's your girlfriend? Every time I see you two, you're usually joined at the hips.”

Whitney shrugged. “Joanne had cheer-leading practice.... so she's busy right now.”

Once upon a time, Lana used to have a crush on Whitney when she was younger. Lana used to fantasize about what it would be like if Whitney was her boyfriend, but now she was loathe to even think of him that way. Her feelings had faded over time and had been replaced with a sibling-type of love. It had helped that Whitney was much older than Lana was.... he was 17 going on 18, while she was only a 14-year-old freshman. So when they grew up together, he had acted more like a older brother to him.... hence the sibling-like love Lana now had for him.

Whitney Fordman had hooked up with another senior by the name Joanne Varnes, and they made for quite the striking couple. She was head cheerleader while Whitney was the lead quarterback. And they pretty much matched each other with their blonde hair, blue eyes and sun-kissed skin. A true match made in heaven.

Lana quirked one eyebrow. “And you don't have football practice today? As I recall, you usually practice with your team at this time of day too...”

Whitney cringed slightly at the mention of football practice. “Yeah, I was supposed to... but, Coach was having one of his bad days and kept on throwing a fit over each little thing. So it wasn't exactly a productive day. His assistant coach Wayne managed to talk him into giving us a day off until he calmed down.”

Lana winched in sympathy at this. Everyone knew about Walt Arnold and his tendency to be a real hothead. He was always throwing temper tantrums over every little thing... and the only reason why anybody even put up with it? Coach Arnold just happened to be one of the best coaches in the state, and his hot-headed ways often got them winning results. So all the adults tended to turn a blind eye
to his borderline abusive ways, and often stated that Walt Arnold was simply a very passionate man when it came to football.

It was amazing how much people would tolerate if they thought it meant that it would get their town recognized.

Lana walked around the car and got into the passenger seat. “Well, then in that case I guess you can take me home then.”

Whitney shifted his car into gear, and they rode off not noticing that a teenage boy had been watching them the whole time.

Greg Atkins shook his head as he watched the car drive away. He thought to himself, “Man, what an asshole Whitney is.... stringing two girls along like that. He thinks he can have it all? Well, not anymore!”

He wondered how Joanne might react if he told her that Whitney was cheating on her with a girl 6 years younger than she was? He chuckled to himself as he fantasized over how Joanne Varnes might fall into his arms sobbing over that piece of news, and how she might be more amicable to going out with him as revenge against Whitney.

Greg had used to be a geeky-looking man, but not anymore. He had undergone a kind of metamorphosis, and now he felt as if he was the most powerful person in all of Smallville. He was now the new alpha male on campus, and now he needed a new lifestyle to go with that. And as part of his new life, he now needed a queen bee by his side to help him rule all of Smallville.

Only the most beautiful, and the most popular of women would ever suit Greg Atkins' taste... and who else fit the bill but the head cheerleader of Smallville High school? Oh yes, Joanne Varnes would be his queen... he just had to find a way to make her see things his way.

He smirked evilly to himself as he walked away.

--The next Sunday--

It was farmer market's day today, so Clark was helping his folks out at the Kents' stall as they sold fresh produce and pies. He was honestly starting to feel bored, and the fact that his friends Chloe and Pete had briefly stopped by had done nothing to alleviate the boredom.

At least the hot sun felt nice on his skin.

He perked up when he saw Lex Luthor walk towards their stall. “Lex! What are you doing here?”

Lex smiled wryly. “Well, apparently when I moved here I forgot that I needed to order enough food not only for myself but also for the staff at the mansion. So that's why I'm here.... I'm trying to do the right thing by buying fresh food locally.”

“Oh? Well in that case I can tell you which farms have the best local food...” Clark responded.

Lex leaned against the stall with a slight smile on his face as Clark animatedly told him about all the farms that encircled Smallville. His parents came over just as Clark was telling Lex where to get the best fresh bacon around.

“Ben Hubbard raises some really high-quality pigs and so as an result the bacon is really out of this
world. Of course, I do worry about that weird new diet he's trying out on his pigs... but I think the giant pig was probably just a freak occurrence?” Martha overheard Clark say, as she walked over to Clark's side.

She smiled at the bald young man, knowing well who he was. This was the first time she had ever met Lex Luthor, however.

“Oh!” Clark looked over at his mother. “Lex, this is my mom, Martha Kent. I don't think you two met yet? I know you already met my father at the bridge.”

The two adults shook hands as Clark introduced the two of them. Lex then spoke, “You should be proud of your son... he's really a special guy. I honestly don't know of anybody else who would dive into a cold river just to save a total stranger's life.”

Martha smiled a genuine smile at this. She responded, “I know. I'm always so proud of him no matter what he does.”

“Err, guys...” Clark couldn't help but blush at how the two of them were complimenting him while talking like he wasn't even here. It was both flattering and kind of annoying at the same time.

Lex couldn't help but smirk at Clark's obvious discomfort. “What? It's completely true. You need to accept it as fact.”

“So, Lex, want me to tell you about the other market stalls here? I told you all about the farms around here but you don't know which stall belongs to those farms...” Clark was desperate to change the subject before he died of both flattery and embarrassment.

At Martha's questioning look, Lex told her about how he needed fresh local foods for all of his staff working at the mansion. She nodded as if making up her mind about something and then told Clark, “Why don't you show Lex around? I can take over here...”

Clark visibly perked up at this. Finally, he could stop being bored! But he continued to play the role of a dutiful son, and asked: “Are you sure? You don't need help with anything else?”

Martha smiled. She knew her son all too well, and knew that Clark always found it boring to mind the Kents' market stall every time it was market day. “I'm sure I can handle all the customers on my own.”

Clark didn't need any more convincing at this point, and quickly took off his work apron. He handed it over to his mom and then ran around the market stall over to Lex's side. Clark smiled at Lex as they started walking off.

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Clark was doing his best to introduce Lex to all the farmers he knew in the marketplace, even though some of the farmers couldn't help but stare at seeing Clark and Lex together. But they had already heard and read about the story where Clark had saved Lex's life, so they quickly got over their curiosity at seeing the young farm-boy with the bald billionaire.

They got over any misgivings quickly, especially when Clark told them that Lex was looking to buy the local produce, and were shopping around to see who were the best. Naturally, they all claimed that they had the very best vegetables and fruit, and tended to exaggerate how great their stuff was too much to Lex's amusement. It was clear that they wanted him to buy from them rather badly. After all imagine the business they would get if they told everyone that Lex, a famous billionaire, brought their products?
Mrs. Henderson, a stereotypical-looking farmer wife, seemed to puff up with pride when Clark turned to face Lex and tell him that her fresh strawberries were the best around.

“We don't grow strawberries on our farm, so we buy them from Mrs. Henderson. I have to say, her strawberries are always big and juicy. My mom swears by them, and makes the best homemade jam with those strawberries.”

Mrs. Henderson felt compelled to give Lex one large strawberry as a sample, and Lex couldn't help but look shocked at how big it was. It was almost the size of his entire palm! And it was a large wedge-shaped one. He looked to Clark, and asked: “They actually can grow this large? This wouldn't be enhanced by anything strange like that pig was, right?”

Clark couldn't help but laugh. “Yes, they do grow that big naturally. At least, if you know how to grow them correctly... but there's also some species of strawberries that grows at a small size and won't get any bigger. So it depends on the type of strawberry and farming method, I suppose.”

Lex was eating the strawberry as he listened to Clark's explanation with a thoughtful look on his face. He smiled as he told Mrs. Henderson, “Well, it was a very delicious sample. I definitely would buy from you when I need strawberries. It was nice to meet you, Mrs. Henderson.”

The portly farm-wife beamed at him, and told him that he was free to come by her farm anytime to buy from her.

As they walked away from Mrs. Henderson's stall, there was a loud ruckus over at the stall that sold crystal figures and jewelry. Both Lex and Clark glanced over, wondering what was happening.

“Get away from me, freak! How many times do I tell you that I'm not interested in you?” A blonde girl in a cheerleader outfit was yelling, as Lana Lang stepped between her and some teenage boy in what seemed to be a protective manner.

The teenage boy twitched at being called a freak. “Come on, Joanne. Don't be like that. How come you have to act like that when all I'm trying to do is warn you that Whitney's cheating on you with that girl right there?”

“What??” Lana Lang couldn't help but stare at the boy in disbelief, and Joanne started laughing.

“Okay, now I know for sure you're completely delusional. Anybody who knows Whitney at all would know that Lana Lang is like a little sister to him. Plus, he's almost 18 years old... so he'd be in a lot of trouble with the law if he ever did anything to Lana.... who I might add is only 14 years old? Whitney would never be stupid enough to throw away his own future just so that he could get himself a piece of young pussy.” Joanne explained very carefully to the boy in what was a very condescending tone of voice.

She glanced over at Lana, and told her “Erm, no offense meant when I called you a piece of young pussy?”

Lana shook her head, and replied, “None taken. I know you were just making a point. Besides, Whitney is like a big brother to me, I would never do anything like what Greg claimed we did.”

Greg scoffed. “My god, you're so delusional. What would it take to make you see that Whitney isn't right for you?”

Joanne raised her blonde eyebrows at this. “And you are?? Pfft, please! I would never go out with a sick pervert like you.”

Clark choose this moment to come over, because Greg looked like he was going to do something
crazy. He interrupted the conversation while looking at Greg, and he asked: “Hey, Lana. Is there a problem here?”

Lana seemed grateful to see Clark, and she answered, “Joanne and I were just chatting over here by ourselves when Greg Atkins here came up to us and tried to chat up Joanne. As you can see, things kind of escalated?”

Clark blinked, as he suddenly recognized the boy in front of him. Greg looked completely different than he was a week ago when Clark saw him last. Talk about a dramatic makeover....

“Wait... Greg Atkins? The same boy that used to explore the woods with Pete and myself back then when we were all kids? Uhh.... you've certainly changed.”

Greg glared at Clark, clearly not pleased by the fact that he choose to butt into the conversation he was trying to have with Joanne. “Well, most people do change. Now butt out, this is none of your business.”

Unfortunately for the young teenage boy Whitney had perfect timing and appeared right next to Joanne. “Hey, Jo-Jo. What's happening?”

Joanne grinned at her boyfriend, feeling very relived that he was here now. Now maybe that creep would leave her alone. “Hey, babe. Nothing much, but this jerk-ass won't leave me alone.” She pouted prettily as she said the last part and she thumbed in the direction where Greg was standing.

Whitney looked over at Greg, and scowled slightly when he recognized him. “Say...you wouldn't be the same creep who were sitting on the bleachers recording everything the cheerleaders were doing last week? As I recall, I told you to stop doing things that made the cheerleaders uncomfortable. Yet you're here, trying to chat up the head cheerleader... who also happens to be MY girlfriend?”

As he said the last part, he grabbed Joanne close to him in what was clearly a possessive display. Joanne couldn't help but swoon a little at this caveman-like behavior. She loved it so much when Whitney acted so jealous and possessive of her. Not many women were into that sort of thing, but Joanne herself couldn't help but feel turned on by this kind of thing. Hey, maybe Greg did turn out to be good for something despite his creepy behavior.

Clark leaned over towards Lana and asked, “Is it really true? Did Greg actually record the cheerleaders without their consent?”

Lana nodded. “Yeah. He was doing it for weeks.... at first Joanne and Whitney thought he was just recording all football activity for the school records, or for the school newspaper. But Joanne's crew started to feel creeped out by him, so they asked around... turns out that Greg isn't recording for the school or anything like that. In fact, he doesn't work for the school newspaper even though many thought he did. He's simply recording the cheerleaders just because. Last I heard, Joanne was considering getting a restraining order against Greg.”

Clark whistled at this softly. “Wow. No wonder why Joanne called Greg a sick pervert. I'd probably think the same way if Greg never gave them any good explanation for why he was recording them without their consent.”

Lana shrugged. “yeah. I used to give Greg the benefit of doubt, saying that he could had been using the videos for non-perverted purposes. But after seeing his behavior towards Joanne, I'm not so sure now.”

Greg scowled because he couldn't have a peaceful chat with Joanne now that both Clark and Whitney was here. “Whatever.” He replied as he turned around to leave.
Whitney called out after him, “This isn't over! You are definitely going to have a long talk with me later!”

10 minutes later, Clark was walking with Lex again. “Sorry about that. Lana and her friend looked like they were about to get into trouble, so I had to step in. You know, just in case.”

Lex nodded. “I did overhear some of what went on over there.” he then added with a slightly sarcastic tone of voice, “It's nice to see that the school-related drama teenagers put themselves through hasn't changed over the 5 years since I graduated from high school. It's things like that, it makes me glad I don't have to go though that again. I know other adults talk about how life was so much easier when they were younger, but I tend to disagree. I just think adults in general forget how teenagers tend to make everything overly complicated than it really has to be....”

Clark raised his eyebrows. “I take it that high school wasn't a happy experience for you?”

Lex chuckled ruefully. “Sorry for ranting like that. It just annoys me when elders go on and on about the good old days, completely forgetting that they actually had a shitty time as an kid. They only remember the good but not the bad. Of course, my school-related experiences weren't all bad. I did have some friends.”

Clark nodded. “I kind of see what you mean, tho. Some people have this idealized image of certain time periods, but don't even think about all the rampant disease, sexism and racism during that time period. And, they also failed to realize that if they traveled back in time, they wouldn't be exempt from many of the problems that the people had to experience back then. Grass is always greener on the other side.... but it's better to be happy with what you have right now.”

Lex smiled, glad that Clark understood where he was going with this conversation. “Exactly!”

Clark then looked at Lex questioningly. “Still, if you could travel back in time... wouldn't you like to change something so that the future turned out for the best? For instance preventing an accident that caused somebody to be paralyzed, etc.”

Lex’s face shifted between some of the most interesting expressions that Clark had seen on him so far. Lex’s expressions varied between fascination at the thought of time travel and regret as he thought about his own past. Lex was quiet for a few minutes as he thought about the implications if he was actually able to build a time travel machine, or gain possession of one.

Finally, he answered Clark in what was a very soft, quiet tone of voice. “I admit it. There's a lot of things in my past that I would love to change, or prevent from ever having happened. Yes, it would be very tempting to use a time machine for those purposes. But at the same time I'd be worried about the butterfly effect.”

Clark frowned. “Butterfly effect? Like in that movie with Ashton Kuntcher in it?”
At Lex's blank stare, Clark then chuckled nervously. “I guess you never saw it...”
So he told Lex about the general gist of the movie, without spoiling it too much in case Lex might want to watch it one day.

Lex was thoughtful once again, as he pondered over the movie's message. He then nodded. “Yeah, that's the same general idea I was talking about. It's been theorized that time is like water, and that anything you do... no matter how small it might be, would send ripples across time and space. So you stop a favorite pet dog from being run over by a car, and return to your own time only to discover that a completely different president was in office compared to your original time-line. You
may never know how the hell saving your pet dog could affect the elections, but that might be one outcome thanks to the ripples in time."

“So, you're saying that time travel is too risky to even do in the first place... because there's always going to be consequences for everything you do back in time. People could even easily get erased from existence by accident.” Clark replied, with a equally thoughtful look on his face.

Lex nodded again. “Yes, exactly. The only way time travel use could even be justified is if it was done in extreme emergencies such as preventing the end of the world itself.”

Clark thought about this for a while, and then he started chuckling. At Lex’s questioning glance, he asked, “How the heck did we start talking about high school experiences and then jump right into the topic of Time Travel? Now that's a topic derailment if I ever heard of one...”

Lex chuckled softly in response to this, and simply shrugged his shoulders. Clark smiled back, and added, “It was very interesting, however. It was kind of fun discussing it with you.”

They walked around the market stalls for the rest of the day talking about various topics, until it was time for Clark to go home with his parents.

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Unfortunately for Clark, the day didn't end so peacefully...

On their way home, the Kents had been driving their truck when all of a sudden they came upon Whitney's upturned truck in the road. It was just starting to catch on fire, So Clark jumped out of his truck and rushed over to pull out Whitney... which happened to be the exact moment that the damaged truck exploded and went up in a large fireball.

Jonathan and Martha gaped at the wreckage in shock and fear, as they thought that they might have watched their son die trying to save somebody else. But then they saw something move though the flames, and their shocked faces morphed into that of relived yet proud parents when they saw Clark Kent walk out of the flames carrying Whitney in his arms.

Honestly, Clark had said that he was pretty much indestructible now, having discovered that the hard way when Lex’s car hit him. But Martha and Jonathan had never really believed that, and now reality had just given both of them a swift slap against the back of their heads. It was clear, their son was now changing into somebody completely different from the rest of the human race... somebody truly special. But right now, they were still too shell-shocked to deal with the implications of what they just realized... instead, they fussled over Whitney when Clark brought him over to the Kents so that they could check him over while he called 911.

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The rest of the week was just as hectic, and it was rather difficult for Clark to get a single moment of peace.

Chloe had grilled him over what happened to make Whitney's car flip over and catch on fire like that... but Clark responded that he didn't know at all as seeing none of the Kents had seen what really happened. All he had gotten out of Whitney when the blond jock woke up was that something had attacked the truck.

Whitney didn't see what it had been, but he knew it had dropped onto the truck out of a tree. It had started punching down on the truck’s roof, causing it to somehow flip over.

Naturally this piece of information had Chloe excited, as she speculated that it might be another
mutated animal on the prowl or somebody with a grudge against Whitney.

It was then that Clark had told her about what happened at the marketplace between Greg and Whitney's girlfriend. Chloe had gone off then, saying she had to look into this thing some more.

And of course during her investigations Clark and Pete found themselves being dragged along to Greg's house, simply due to the fact that they used to be friends with Greg Atkins. The house had been in complete disarray, which was pretty unusual considering how much of a neat freak Greg's mother was. The Torch Crew then discovered that Greg had truly gone off the deep end and murdered his own mother.

Also, He had been doing far more than simply recording the cheerleaders at practice. He had been spying on Joanne Varnes for a while though her window, and recording her while she changed clothes or while she slept. Both Clark and Pete had been shocked that the guy would go that far just because he had a insane crush on a girl. Chloe on the other hand, had been both angry and horrified on Joanne's behalf. You just did not violate a girl's privacy like that!

And of course, that wasn't enough creepiness for Smallville. Greg was also mutating into a bug-boy who were seeking to mate with somebody. That somebody being Joanne Varnes.

Clark had rushed off to warn both Whitney and Joanne, but it had been too late. Apparently while the Torch Crew had been at Greg's house, Greg himself had been rather busy.

Joanne had been hanging out at Whitney's house along with Lana. The two girls had gone over to help Whitney feel better, since he was now injured from the truck crash and couldn't come to school for a while. He had been complaining about how it was only a minor head injury, and how he shouldn't be suspended from practicing football because of it.

And Greg choose that moment to break into the house though the window that was two stories high. Both Lana and Whitney had tried to stop Greg by acting as a shield between Joanne and him, but it was in vain. Greg simply tossed the two around like rag-dolls, and then ran off with Joanne in his arms.

So by the time Clark rushed by Whitney's house there was already cop cars there with their sirens flashing. So Clark ended up having to tell the cops and Whitney about what he found at Greg Atkins' house.

Mrs. Fordman and Lana gasped simultaneously when Clark got to the part about how Greg had murdered his own mother, and did it again when he mentioned the videotapes he had found of Joanne undressing and going to bed.

The policemen and Whitney's expressions grew more grim and horrified when they realized what Greg was up to. Everyone was rather worried that Joanne Varnes might end up a desiccated corpse the same way Greg's mother was.

Thankfully, This event ended up having a happy ending, so to speak...

Both Clark and Whitney agreed to work together looking for Joanne, while the policemen combed Greg's house for evidence and clues. Lana Lang had wanted to come along with them too, but Whitney told her it was too dangerous, and told her to stay with his mother for now. It had been a stroke of luck when Clark suddenly remembered the tree-house that Greg Atkins used to have in the woods, where they all had explored as young kids.

Of course, there had been a little bit of bad luck for Clark Kent himself considering the fact that he
ended up having to fight Greg all alone in some abandoned factory.... that just happened to be full of meteor rocks! But on the plus side he happened to discover that Lead could shield him from the harmful radiation of the rocks, so there was that.

Random luck also had been on his side when a piece of dangling machinery suddenly dropped down on Greg by itself, effectively squashing Greg.

Bizarly enough once Greg was defeated, his body had turned into a large swarm of insects that just scattered everywhere. And at the tree-house Joanne was safe once again, wrapped up in the loving arms of her boyfriend Whitney.

Joanne did seem to develop a serious phobia of bugs after that incident, though... not that Clark blamed her. He wasn't sure if he would be able to look at insects the same way again neither.

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“Greg Atkins has been successfully captured, with nobody the wiser.” A mysterious female voice said, as the four shadowy beings sat at the desk within a dark room.

“I heard that Clark Kent was there. How did you manage to capture Greg without him seeing you?” One of the shadowy beings at the desk asked.

The female person standing before the four shadowy beings was silent for a few seconds before answering. “It wasn't easy. I did manage to keep myself out of sight while Clark Kent and Greg Atkins were fighting... but it looked like Greg was about to kill the Kent kid, so I rigged some dangling equipment to drop down on Greg, effectively knocking him out. I know causal use of our portable time machines were forbidden, but in that moment I used it.”

She took a deep breath before continuing her story. “So I used it to freeze time temporarily to get Greg from under the machine, and then I collected as many as bugs as I could to make it look like Greg had simply turned himself into a million bugs when he was killed. Far as I know, Clark Kent most likely thinks he was just lucky that Greg just happened to get squashed like that. Nobody even knows that Greg is still alive.”

The shadows murmured among themselves as they mulled over this. “I see. That's very impressive work”

“Yes, very nice.”

“Well done”

“Keep this up when capturing the others, and you might just get an promotion.”

The girl grinned at the words of praise. She then asked, “Permission to ask something, sir?”

“Permission granted.”

“I thought our primary mission here was to prevent Lex and Clark from becoming enemies. So why are we capturing all the meta-humans we can?” she wondered.

One of the shadows answered, “We cannot depend solely both on Clark Kent and Lex Luthor alone to ensure ourselves a bright new future. They definitely were vital to the human race's survival, but two men alone cannot do everything by themselves. This is where we come in. We're to collect all the meta-humans we can, and persuade them to join our cause. If we cannot change Clark Kent and Lex Luthor's destiny, then the very least we can do is train those meta-humans to prevent Darkseid
from killing Superman and the rest of the Justice League.”

The girl nodded. “Makes sense.”

“You may leave now.”

The girl turned around and left the dark room.
the Hothead goes off the rails

Chapter Summary

Chapter summary: It starts out exactly like the hothead episode but then suddenly starts going in a non-canonical direction where the coach is focused on less and less. Clark wants to desperately fit in with all the cool kids, etc... but he might find out that in order to fit in he would be forced to look the other way every time one of his new buddies does something that's highly illegal.

What will Clark do, now that he's faced with the choice between doing the right thing and popularity? Jonathan Kent also isn't as against Clark Kent playing in the football team like he originally was... what made him change his mind?

--Smallville, in the high school locker room--

Dozens of teen-aged football players rushed into the room, cheering loudly. They had just won yet another game. The coach walked in after them, and then he yelled, “Hey. Pipe down guys!”

The teenage boys all quieted down, as they turned to face their coach.

Walt Arnold grinned as he said, “Listen up! There is another team who's going to eat crow tonight, gentlemen!”

The guys let out a loud cheer at this. Walt continued his speech, “Not is it going to put us in the state championship...but it'll be my 200th win since I took up this coaching job! How about that for a record?”

The Smallville crows team let out loud whistles at this, and then started chanting, “Coach Walt! Coach Walt!”

The coach smiled smugly as he soaked up their praises, and his ego couldn't help but swell up some more... which was amazing considering that it was already at gigantic portions.

Finally, he said, “Okay, that's enough... time to hit the showers, guys!”

As the guys went to undress and hit the showers.... the coach decided that it wouldn't be too bad to do the same thing himself. He just happened to have his own private sauna too, so it seemed like a good way to unwind.

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Unfortunately for Walt, he barely had time to relax before the principal came into his private sanctuary and started rambling about how his players were cheating on the math midterms.

And what's more, Principal Kwan refused to keep the whole thing quiet until after the games were over!

Walt Arnold scoffed. Great, this asshole thought he ran things around here?
“You've been here, what, six months? I've been here 25 years. We're not just talking a game.. we're talking about my legacy here.” Walt Arnold tried to reason with the Korean-looking man, or at least he assumed Kwan was Korean with that name.

Kwan kept his face impassive as he responded, “I don't care about your legacy. I'm here to educate young people.”

Walt tried to keep his temper under check as he fired back, “I've been educating people my whole life. Do you know how many boys got to go to college because of me? How many of them got jobs because of my recommendations?”

Kwan's impassive face morphed into that of a bored-looking one, as he replied, “I know that most people think that you walk on water, Coach. But I think you're dangerous. I've seen your temper, your methods. I know a few players were hospitalized in the past because you pushed them too hard. Just because you win games, doesn't mean you're right.”

He turned to walk to the door... and before he left, Kwan said, “I'm suspending the football players until their grades improve. End of story.”

with that, he left.

The coach growled loudly, and threw down his towel in frustration. To his shock, it started bursting into flames!

He stared at the flames in shock, as it started shifting and moving as if it was alive...

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The next morning.

“.. Pete thinks I'm being too hard on the Coach.” Chloe told Clark as they were walking towards class. She was looking at the Torch school newspaper that had the headliner, “Football: Sport or Abuse?”

Pete shrugged. “I mean, look at it this way. He coached my brothers and my father. He used to come over to our house to watch the Superbowl with us. I just don't think he's a bad guy.”

Chloe shot Pete a look as she remarked, “Well you don't get points for subtlety in journalism. Besides, I've started getting hate mail!”

Clark looked at his blonde friend strangely. “You seem happy about that.... why?”

Chloe grinned. “It means I've struck a nerve!”

As Chloe and Pete bantered some more Clark's attention was diverted when he overheard an growing argument between Lana and Joanne.

“I can't believe it. You don't even care if your boyfriend was cheating?” Lana Lang asked, staring at her friend in shock.

Joanne just shrugged, shaking her head. “I just don't see what the big deal is. I mean, we've all done it at one point in our lives. I've even did it a few times when I needed to focus more on my cheerleading instead of pointless subjects like algebra. Seriously, when are we ever going to need algebra in our lives anyway?”

Lana was shocked upon hearing this. She couldn't believe it... not only was Whitney doing this too
but so was his girlfriend Joanne. “You may not think it's a big deal at all, but it is to me.” She said, as she stomped off.

Chloe overheard the whole thing too once she noticed where Clark had been staring, and she snorted. “That's something you don't see everyday. A meltdown between the pom-pom cheerleader and her shadow.”

Clark was about to comment on this, but then all three of them were distracted by Coach Walt's voice in the distance.

“I don't want to hear any rumors going around, okay? No false accusations....” Coach Walt was addressing the entire football team and some of the cheerleaders.

“Where did you think they got the midterm answers from?” Clark wondered aloud, and Chloe held up her camera.

“Still a mystery, but I'm working on that part,” She told him as she started snapping a few pictures.

One of the football players noticed Chloe, and scowled slightly. He turned and threw an football straight at her camera, intending to break it. but it was caught by Clark.

Pete laughed. “Wow, nice catch!”

Chloe glared at her friend. “One of your teammates tries to assassinate me, and all you can say is nice catch?”

Pete smirked. “I thought you wanted to hit a nerve?”

Chloe just scoffed at this, and stomped off. Pete frowned, not understanding why Chloe was so angry. He called out as he went after her, “Hey, wait up!”

Clark glanced back at the backs of his retreating friends, and threw the football hard as he could without using any of his super-human strength. A side of him couldn't feel viciously satisfied when the football player caught the ball, only to be bowled over by the sheer force of the ball's velocity.

He grinned, and ran after his friends... missing the thoughtful glance the football coach was throwing his way.

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It was lunch time, and today was apparently the day that the cafeteria decided to serve gross food that couldn't possibly appeal to any teenage. They were actually serving pea soup, dried bread that you were supposed to dip into the soup, and some weird drink that nobody could pronounce but apparently was very healthy for you.

So, today was the day that Clark and Pete choose to get their lunch out of a vending machine. Pete and Clark was waiting in line behind other students who had the same idea, when somebody called out Clark’s name.

“Clark!” Coach Walt called out, as he jogged up to the teenage boys. Clark and Pete turned around to face the coach as he told them, “I saw your arm out there, Kent. Technique was lousy, but you've got real power.”

Clark wasn't quite what to say so he just said, “Um, thanks?”
The middle-aged man ignored Clark's slightly puzzled expression and plowed on with his speech. “Listen, we're short a few players and the big game is on Friday. Would you be willing to be a substitute player for us?”

Pete's face visibly brightened up at this, and he stared at Clark with a slightly pleading, ecstatic expression that silently told Clark to say yes. His face fell slightly when Clark responded that his dad needed him on the farm.

Before Coach Walt could even say anything, Pete took the words straight out of his mouth.

“Clark, are you kidding me?” Pete cut in front of the coach as he turned to face his best friend. “Your school needs you on the field!”

“But my dad--” Clark protested, but Pete cut him off.

“Hey, listen, okay. Coach said you were going to be a substitute player, right? So this would only be temporary... I'm sure your dad would understand.” Pete pleaded with Clark to see the light, and he turned around to look at Coach Walter. “Right, coach?”

Coach Walt had been rather surprised, but pleased by Pete's action and words. He recovered just in time to give Clark the speech he had so often given to pressure young boys into joining the team but with a few names and words changed.

“Jonathan Kent was one of the best athletes that I ever coached. A lot of god-given talent. It's in your genes, boy.” Coach Walt did his best to sound completely sincere. Truthfully, Jonathan Kent actually had been just a mediocre player, to the point where the talent scouts didn't really pay him any attention, and he couldn't even get a sports scholarship to college. Mr. Kent had to pay his own way into college... but really, his son didn't need to know about any of that did he?

“Actually, I'm adopted.” Clark Kent replied, and that made Walt falter a little bit. Pete couldn't help but snicker slightly.

Coach Walt sighed, and told Clark, “I'm giving you a chance to be a part of history. To be a part of something special. I've seen you stare at your father in the football group picture inside the trophy case. Don't you dare tell me you don't want this. What's the real reason you won't suit up?”

Clark couldn't help but roll his eyes slightly at the coach's words. He didn't take kindly to being pressured like that, even if he did want to play football. “Look, I'll think about it, okay?” With that, he left.

The coach growled loudly, trying not to lose his temper too much. Pete managed to diffuse the situation by telling him, “Don't worry, Coach. I'll sweet talk both Clark and his father into seeing the light, I promise.”

Walt smiled at the young boy. “Thanks, Pete. You might not have much talent, but you've got a lot of heart.”

Pete's smile faded at the backhanded compliment. “Gee, thanks.... um, I have to catch up with Clark now....” With that the dark-skinned teenage boy ran off after his best friend.

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After school, Pete Ross was following Clark Kent into his house and chattering up a storm.
"Just let me do all the talking, okay? I'm sure I can get your dad to understand." Pete instructed his friend, and Clark couldn't help but smirk slightly at this.

"Pete... I know you mean well, but you don't know my dad. Once he's made up his mind about something, that's it. He wouldn't change his mind for anything. He's just stubborn like that."

"Who's stubborn?" Martha asked as she walked into the kitchen, having only heard the last part.

Clark raised his eyebrows as he answered, "Dad. Pete thinks that I should try out for the football team again, and he came with me to try talking my dad into letting me do it. I tried to tell him but..." He shrugged helplessly as he said the last part.

"Ahhh." Martha let out an exhale at this, and she raised her eyebrows as well at that. "Good luck, Pete. You'll need a lot of it."

With that she turned towards the fridge to fix her family dinner for later.

Clark couldn't help but let out a short bark of laughter at Martha's reaction. He looked at Pete meaningfully and said, "See, even my mom thinks it's a lost cause. You might as well as give up now."

Pete's expression only grew even more determined at this, and he replied, "You know the saying, you never know until you've tried it. Where's Mr. Kent?"

Martha smiled as she answered, "He's out in the barn, fixing the farm tools."

Pete turned to go, and frowned when he noticed that Clark wasn't following him. "You coming or not?"

Clark shook his head. "Nah, I'm not going to bother when I know what my dad's going to say anyway. I'll stay and help my mom."

Pete shrugged. "Suit yourself."

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Some 20 minutes later, Both Pete and Jonathan was walking into the house, amicably chatting with each other.

"And you say it'll be only temporary, until the football players can come back?" Jonathan asked.

Pete nodded his head very swiftly, his face growing more eager by the minute. He couldn't help but remind Clark of a little boy begging for a toy that they really, really wanted badly. To the point that they swore up and down that they'd be good all year if they'd get it for Christmas.

Clark would never ever admit this out loud to anybody, because men did not simply think of each other in this manner out loud, but... he secretly thought that Pete looked cute begging like a little child right now. He honestly felt bad that his father was going to crush Pete's hopes, and just hoped that Jonathan had the sense to let Pete down gently. After all, Clark did not want to see the kicked puppy expression on Pete's face!

Clark was so sure that his father was going to say no any minute.... and that's why he nearly fell over in shock when Jonathan simply nodded and replied, "Alright. I guess Clark can be their backup player if he really wants to be one. But remember, this is just temporary because I still need his help around the farm."

Pete grinned. "Great! You won't regret it!"
Clark looked over at his mother to see if she actually heard the words coming out of Jonathan's mouth, and to his relief his mother seemed equally shocked as he was. Great, that meant he wasn't imagining it after all.

“Who are you, and what did you do with my father? You know, the father who kept on telling me that I couldn't ever play football because of..... certain reasons?” Clark wondered out-loud as he continued to stare at his father in disbelief.

“I'm wondering that myself as well.” Martha muttered under her breath.

Jonathan raised one eyebrow at Clark and Martha before replying, “Can't a man be allowed to change his mind about something once in a while?”

“You'll have to forgive us for being so shocked. I mean.... you almost never change your mind on most things, especially when it comes to things relating to... well, you know. You're usually so set in your ways, not that it's a bad thing of course.” Martha said, with a slightly sheepish look on her face.

Pete smiled smugly, as he said, “Well, with my mission here done I'm going home now. See ya, Clark.”

Clark replied, “I'll walk you out.”

Once the teenage boys were outside, Clark swung around to face Pete. “Just what the heck did you say to my father to make him change his tune like that? I've never seen him like that before.”

Pete smiled smugly again. “Oh, nothing much. I just started off by saying how worried I was about your social life... how isolated you seemed from the rest of the school, and that you needed an activity that would help you make more friends. I also kept on stressing on how they were looking for a temporary football player... emphasis on the temporary part.”

Clark shook his head at this. “I can't believe that would be all it would take to change my dad's mind.”

Pete shrugged. “What can I say? I'm just that good.”

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The next day, Clark was following Pete outside wearing an red football uniform, and he glanced around nervously.

Despite the fact that he was nervous, there was a slight smile on his face.

Clark had always wanted to play with other kids for as long as he could remember. It didn't matter which sport, whatever it be basketball, soccer, or football.... he just wanted to be able to connect with others socially in a fun environment. but his parents had never let him do that, because they were always so worried that he would somehow hurt others, or accidentally out himself as an alien with super-human abilities.

And now, he was finally doing what he always wanted to do!

“As say, isn't that your father over there?” Pete pointed his head towards the bleachers, where Jonathan was sitting.

Clark's face lit up at this, and he jogged over. “Hey, dad! I'm glad you're here. It means a lot to me.”

Jonathan returned the smile with a warm one of his own. “Anything for my son. Just remember what we talked about last night, though. Be careful.”
Clark's smile faded at this. How could he forget, after the long talk Jonathan had with him last night after Pete left?

It had been one of the most tedious talks that he ever had with his father so far, and that was really saying something considering how many talks they had in the past about his powers and how to use it wisely.

It had started off so well, with Jonathan telling Clark that he was now old enough to start making his own decisions in school. And that Jonathan trusted him to do the right thing. Clark thought his heart would burst with joy upon hearing this, but then Jonathan had to ruin the moment by giving him what was especially a long verbal list of what not to do on the football field.

His dad then had lectured him that it might feel very tempting to show off his abilities or get caught up in the heat of the moment, but that he must never forget who he was... or that he had the power to easily hurt somebody by accident.

Clark couldn't help but wonder if Jonathan was really worried about all of that, why did he let Clark play football?

Clark turned around and rushed out into the football field to join Pete and the others.

Jonathan watched his son run on the football field, frowning slightly. He let out a loud gusty sigh. To be honest, he didn't really want Clark playing football. With his powers and abilities, it would be unfair to all the other players on the field. Not to mention the risk that Clark could be found out and labeled some kind of freak.

He had made a show of letting his family believe that it had been Pete Ross who changed his mind on that front, but the real reason why he let Clark play football was because of those goddamned Luthors.

Jonathan wasn't blind, nor was he a fool. He had seen the way Clark was hanging out with Lex Luthor a lot lately, to the point where he clearly preferred chatting with the bald man over his school buddies. Clearly, there was some kind of social and emotional component that Clark was getting out of his new friendship with Lex Luthor that he wasn't getting from Pete Ross or Chloe.

And he couldn't let Lex Luthor take advantage of that fact.

It wasn't the first time that Jonathan had wondered if he was doing the right thing by cutting off his entire family from the entire town when it came to social actives like potluck parties and whatnot. He knew that his wife Martha had often wondered the same thing, but both of them had agreed that it was to protect their son Clark. Still, he often wondered if there was a difference between protecting a secret and being overprotective of their son.

If Clark was able to make more friends at school, would he even be friends with Lex Luthor in the first place? Surely a teenage boy like Clark would prioritize his school friends over that of an boring man who managed a crap factory. So when Pete Ross had stopped by and told him about how Coach Walt wanted Clark on the team...

Well, Jonathan saw this as a chance to test the waters. Clark would get to play football for a short while like he always wanted, and Jonathan would see whenever Clark could keep his cool under pressure and not reveal himself to the entire football team. If Clark proved himself to be mature enough to handle that, then Jonathan might consider letting Clark play football for the rest of his high school years. Clark could easily become popular in school this way, and therefore would be too busy
with school-related activities to hang out with Lex Luthor.

Of course the moral part of him felt guilty at the idea of a superhuman competing unfairly with normal football players. He would had preferred that Clark join a chess team or something like that... at least Clark couldn't possibly use his superpowers in a chess team. But the more ruthless side of him replied that breaking his own moral rules were worth it if it meant that Clark would be way too busy to associate himself with the likes of the Luthors.

His son seemed to realize this was some kind of test set forth by Jonathan, because Clark kept on nervously looking his way every time he did something. It was almost as if he was gauging his father's reaction to make sure that he didn't go too far.

"Hey, kent! Quit looking at the stands! Your father isn't coaching the team, I am!" Coach Walt roared as he stomped over.

The coach roughly yanked Clark by his helmet, and continued to yell some more. "Get angry and kick some butt!"

Jonathan tensed slightly at this, and his expression just grew more worried. He couldn't help but get flashbacks to his teenage years where the coach would goad him into playing dirty even though he didn't want to. Coach Walt had a terrible way of getting under your skin, and making you act like an aggressive jerk on the playing field.

How could his son Clark stick to Jonathan's rules with Coach Walt breathing down his neck like that?

Clark got into position with the other football players, and took a deep breath.

It was obvious that Jonathan only agreed to let Clark be a temporary backup player for the Smallville Crows because he wanted to see if his son was mature enough to play with others. Clark really wanted to show his father that he could handle this, and be able to play with each other without being a showboat.

But, Coach Walt might not let Clark play for the team if he laid low for too long. What was Clark to do in this kind of situation?

Clark's eyes lit up when he realized what he could do without showing off. As he caught the ball he only applied a tiny portion of his speed and managed to avoid being tackled by the others, then threw the ball far and wide towards one of his allies that had been standing by. His ally caught the football, and ran to the end goal before tossing the football down on it in victory.

The coach nodded approvingly. He had honestly wanted a more aggressive playing style from Clark Kent but his arm was still good. Sometimes simply having a good arm that threw the football long distances was still a good thing to have, even if they couldn't do anything else.

"Alright! Great throw, keep that up and we'll win the game on Friday for sure!"

Jonathan overheard one of the spectators say, "That guy isn't much of a football player, but he definitely has a good arm on him."

He couldn't help but smile. Only if they knew what he did... but it was a good thing that Clark choose not to show off on the field and instead let his football buddy take the spotlight.

If Clark could keep that up, then he could actually be a part of the team without getting noticed too much.

Clark turned in time to see his father smile, and he couldn't help but grin. Alright, his dad actually
approved of what he did... So all he had to do was not show off, and just throw the football to the others so that they could do the touchdown instead of him. He showed his father that he could contribute to the team as an whole without using his powers.... and that meant that he had passed dad’s test!

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--Later, after school--

Pete and Clark was walking though the empty school hallways towards the exit as they chatted about how well they did at practice.

“Man, that was great. You have no idea how pumped up I am right now to have you on the team with me!” Pete enthused over the fact that they now had another thing in common to bond over.

Clark grinned. “Yeah. My dad looked so proud of me when he was watching me earlier. Wait until I tell him that I made it as a wide receiver. I was hoping to be quarterback or at least a fullback like my dad was... but I guess we can't always get what we want.”

Pete snorted. “Whitney would be so pissed off if you actually took the quarterback position from him! But speaking of your father, why did he leave? I thought he was going to stay for the whole game...”

Clark shrugged. “He still needed to tend to the animals on the farm, so he couldn't stay long. He did tell me what a great job I was doing and to keep it up though.”

Pete made a face. “Is there really no time for breaks? For farmers I mean.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “Dude, you have no idea how tough a farmer's life is. There's always something going on... not to mention that I have to get up at like 5am every morning to help my dad run the farm. Then I get to have a small nap before I go to school so that I don't get too tired before school even starts.”

Pete looked shocked at this. “5 am?! Dude, no wonder why you're always so late for school... a nap wouldn't cut it for me, I would want to sleep in so badly.”

Clark was chuckling at Pete's reaction when they finally reached the exit. But the joviality was short-lived because a car just suddenly caught on fire!

“Go get help!” Clark cried out, and Pete promptly rushed back into the school building as Clark ran towards the fire.

To Clark's horror he discovered that there was somebody inside the car... so without thinking he just pried the front door off the car and pulled the man out. The car was about to explode, so Clark super-sped away from the car in time and shielded the unconscious man from the explosion.

Once the fire quieted down some, Clark sat up and he realized then who the man he saved was. “Principal Kwan??”

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--the Kent farm--

“Okay, thanks. Bye.” Martha responded to the phone she was using, and then she hung up.
She walked over to the dining room table where the rest of the Kent family was eating, and told them, “Kwan's going to be in the hospital over the weekend.”

Clark turned around with an concerned expression on her face. “Is he going to be okay?”

Martha smiled reassuringly at her son, and answered, “He just has some minor burns and smoke inhalation. But he'll be fine once he recovers.”

“Did anybody see you?” Jonathan wondered.

Clark shook his head. “Pete was the only other person around, and he went inside to call 911 while I saved Kwan. I told the paramedics that I wrapped my jacket around my hands before pulling him out. I guess it was a good thing that Pete wanted me to stay behind so that we could bond over being in a football team together.... otherwise who knows what would had happened?”

Martha simply nodded at this.

Jonathan smiled. “By the way... you never said which position the coach put you in?”

Clark flashed his dad a brilliant grin at this. “The coach said I was really good at eluding everyone who tried to tackle me, and also great at throwing and receiving. So he made me a wide receiver.”

“Really? That's great. I'm proud of you son.” Jonathan replied, as he affectionately slapped Clark’s arm. Clark grinned brightly at this praise.

Clark ate what was left of his supper at super-speed, and then told his parents, “I have to do my homework for tomorrow. I'll see you guys tomorrow.”

He then super-speed upstairs to his room.

Martha took Clark's seat, and then gave Jonathan an skeptical look. Jonathan couldn't help but ask his wife, “Why are you looking at me like that?”

Martha then asked: “Are you sure we're doing the right thing? I mean, Clark's so much stronger than the average human being... and there had been times when he didn't know his own strength. We'll be lucky if our son only gets accused of using steroids.”

Jonathan grimaced slightly at this. She hadn't been the only one who had worried over that little fact. But instead he choose to focus on the positives as he answered his wife. “I know that. But, Clark is growing up and we can't always be around to to forbade him from participating in group actives. And you know what, I don't think Clark should be scared of participating in group activities in the future. I think it's time that Clark learns how to control himself in group settings... and if he's successful, then that just shows how successful we've been at teaching him when it comes to controlling his own powers.”

Martha mulled over this with a thoughtful expression. “You do have a point, dear. But, did it have to be football? We could had started off with something safe, like the chess club. That doesn't require strength far as I know.”

Jonathan couldn't help but smile at this. There were times when he and Martha appeared to be sharing the same brain-space, with the way they kept on thinking of the exact same things. It was just like that old saying, great minds think alike.

“I agree... but Clark choose football. So let's see if he can handle that responsibility. We can always pull him out of the football team if we feel that he isn't handling that responsibility in a way he should
be doing.” Jonathan replied.
Martha simply nodded at this.

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--The next day, at 8am--

“I'm telling you, it doesn't make sense. Cars don't spontaneously combust on their own.” Chloe replied, as she was walking side by side alongside her male friends.

“They said it was faulty wiring.” Pete pointed out.

Chloe scoffed at this. “Whatever. At any rate I've already got my headline for the newspaper. 'Jockstrap saves principal from burning car'.

Pete groaned as he pleaded, “Will you please knock it off with the jockstrap bit? That joke wore out after the fifth time you said it.”

Chloe laughed as the three of them walked into the Beanery, “Sorry, but I still can't believe that Clark was blinded by the Friday night lights. I mean, what next? Next thing you know I'll be joining the pom-pom brigade.”

Clark rolled his eyes at this. “I joined a football team, not a cult.”

The Beanery was getting full, so they rushed over to the nearest empty table before it could be occupied by other people.

It was then that Clark noticed that Lex was sitting at a nearby table, poring over his papers with a thoughtful yet troubled expression on his face. Clark turned to look at his friends, and told them: “I want to talk to Lex for a few. I'll be back, okay?”

Both Chloe and Pete simply nodded at this, and Clark walked over.

“Hey, Lex.” Clark greeted the man as he walked over. Lex looked up from his reports, and gave Clark a warm smile.

“Clark. Rumor has it that you joined the football team.” Lex wondered, as he arranged his papers so that it was all in a neat pile.

Clark sat down by Lex, still smiling. “Yep, that rumor turns out to be true.”

Lex raised his eyebrows. To be honest, he was kind of surprised at that... Clark didn't strike him as the type who would become a football jock despite the fact that he was built like a linebacker. Clark just didn't seem like he had the personality for that kind of thing, if that made sense. He didn't dare say this however... so instead he just said, “Your parents must be proud of you.”

 Clark smiled so brightly that Lex couldn't help but think that if smiles could blind you, then this one could easily make everyone in the building blind permanently. Clark's smile then faded slightly, as he confessed, “I'm still shocked that my parents were okay with me joining the football team. Usually they say that I shouldn't join any sports team because I'm needed on the farm or something like that. I'm kind of waiting for the moment where they change their minds and say I can't play anymore.”

Lex frowned. “They never let you play with other kids when you were younger??”

Clark shrugged at this. “It wasn't like that. I did play with other kids, I just wasn't allowed to join
teams or anything else that could cut into my time on the farm. I had to do a lot of chores on the farm, you see... so this is my first time joining an sports team.”

He then glanced at the papers that Lex was working on. “So, what were you working on?”

Lex groaned as he made a face at this. “You had to remind me, huh? My father wants to cut 20% of the workforce despite the fact that I'm against it. So I'm looking over all those papers to decide which poor bastard gets the ax.”

Clark grimaced in sympathy at this. He couldn't even imagine himself firing anybody... even if the guy might be doing a horrible job.

“Any way around it?”

Lex sighed. “I wish. Once my father's made his mind up.... he's difficult to turn around.”

Clark leaned towards over the table so that he could look Lex in the eye. He then said in an encouraging tone of voice, “I know we haven't known each other very long, but already I know what kind of guy you are. You're the kind of the guy who can find a way around this if you try hard enough. You're brilliant.... you can do this.”

Lex's face showed surprise at Clark's words but it morphed into a warm, friendly expression.

“Thanks, Clark. Oddly enough that helped lift my bad mood.”

Clark smiled. “No problem. I have to go back to my friends now though. I won't bother you anymore...”

Lex simply nodded at this, the smile still lingering on his face.

Clark walked back to his table, only to find Chloe gone. Pete was still here, and he was drinking some latte he had ordered.

“Where's Chloe?”

Pete rolled his eyes and shrugged. “She was eyeing the football jocks who were caught cheating... they were leaving for some place, and she decided that she'd follow them. You know Chloe, she's always chasing after a story.... even if there might be none there.”

Clark frowned slightly at this, but he decided to let it slide. He sat down by Pete, and waved over an waitress so that she could take his order. After he shot off his order, he started chatting with Pete about normal school-related stuff.

The moment Clark finally realized that something was wrong with the football team he joined? When he spied several of the football players all sharing a syringe off in one corner of the locker room. Clark instinctively hid himself out of sight so that they wouldn't hide whatever it was that they were doing.

They were all shooting themselves up with some kind of clear liquid that had been inside a small medical bottle of some kind. Once they were done, they tossed the bottle and syringe into the trashcan and left.

Clark took a deep breath as he pondered the implications of what he had just seen. This was terrible... it was one thing to be caught cheating on a math test, but now they were doing drugs??

He shook his head, as he thought to himself. 'no way. There has to be some of explanation for that... maybe they're all diabetic?"
He groaned, as his cynical side laughed at the idea that the jocks were all diabetic. There was just no way they were... if they were then they would had each had their own medical equipment, instead of sharing one needle... which he knew to be a big no-no in the medical field. Didn't you also get STDs and AIDS though needle-sharing?

He walked over to the trashcan and dug out the syringe and medical bottle. There was only one thing he could think of in this situation.... he had to go to Chloe and find out what it was that the jocks were injecting themselves with.

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Clark found Chloe inside the Torch office, furiously typing away at her computer. She had this intense look that indicated that she had gotten a hold of a really great story that she couldn't just wait to print.

Out of curiosity, Clark walked up behind Chloe and glanced at her computer screen. “Playing with fire? You're putting that as your headline? What's with that weird picture of Coach Walt and the others?”

Chloe jumped in her seat, and then took a few breaths when she realized it was just Clark. “Jeez, don't sneak up on me like that! Anyway, what do you think? You wouldn't believe the scoop I got when I followed those cheating jocks... who would had thought that Coach Walt was a Pyrokinesic?”

“Wait, Walt can control fire?” Clark couldn't help but sound skeptical.

Chloe gave Clark a dirty look, as she replied, “You seem to have forgotten that we're living in Smallville. The land of the weird and unexplained phenomena? Or was that giant pig two weeks ago just a figment of our imagination?”

Clark grimaced slightly at this. “Okay, okay. You do have a point. Oh, I came here for a reason... I want you to find out what this is.”

With that he held up a clear see-through zip-seal bag that contained a syringe and the bottle of medicine that had something labeled on it.

“What's that?” Chloe asked. Clark told her then about how he had caught the jocks shooting themselves up with this stuff, and he wanted to know what this stuff was.

Chloe's eyes lit up at this. “Oh man. I can't believe it. Not only is the jocks cheating in math, they're using drugs? And on top of it Walt is a meteor freak too... this is going to blow everyone out of the water once this goes into the next newspaper edition!”

Clark sighed. “It's kind of creepy how you get so excited over this stuff. Would it hurt you to act appropriately shocked once in a while?”

Chloe ignored what Clark was saying to him as she grabbed the bag out of Clark's hands, and started reading the label on the medical bottle. “hmm...dexamethasone. I'll have to google that.”

Chloe rushed back to her computer, and started typing as soon as she brought up the google homepage. Her eyes lit up when the results to her question came up. “Oh, Dexamethasone is the medical word for a type of steroids typically used in hospitals to treat various illnesses.... so our beloved jocks are using steroids. What a shocker.”

Clark groaned slightly at this. “I was afraid of that.”
all of a sudden, all the computers burst into flames. Clark instinctively pulled Chloe away from the
flaming computers, which was a good thing because the fire seemed to have a mind of its own as it
spread all over throughout the area.

Clark dragged Chloe out of there fast as he could without reaching super-human levels, and
thankfully the fire hadn't reached the doors so they could easily escape that way.

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Some minutes later, they were back in the room staring morosely at all the damage that the fire had
done before it was put out.

“All of the backups and the evidence I had on both the football players and Coach Walt is gone. I
can't print my article on them without the evidence.” Chloe sighed, as she stared around.

“Yeah, and I forgot to grab the stuff I brought to you...so it burned up in the fire too. I don't have
evidence that my football buddies are using steroids to get by in the game neither.” Clark replied.

The two of them glanced at each other, and sighed in union. Chloe's depressed expression grew
more angry the more she thought about how the fire started.

“Damn that coach! He must had done this to cover his own ass...” Chloe growled.

“You think Walt is behind this?” Clark couldn't help but act skeptical because he wanted Chloe to be
wrong so badly. Even though a part of him knew that she was most likely right. After all, Chloe was
usually right when it came to bizarre events like this.

Chloe started pacing the floor, as she answered Clark, “Think about it. Kwan launches an
investigation into the cheating scandal, his car gets caught on fire. One of his players tries to come
forward, and the coach threatens them with pyrotechnic sprinklers. I'm about to print the picture, and
the torch office goes up in flames.”

Clark looked down at the floor with an troubled expression. “I know. I just find it hard to believe that
somebody could go this far...because of a football game? Is a football game really worth all the
trouble that Walt caused?”

Chloe's angry face softened slightly when she saw the distress on Clark's face. She walked over to
him, and started caressing Clark's face in what was a comforting manner. She spoke then about how
corrupt the sports culture could be.

“I know, Clark. You only started playing football, so you haven't seen how crazy football culture can
get. How obsessed their fans can get with it. Unfortunately, Coach Walt isn't the only one out there
who resorted to illegal activities just so that they could win a football game. Hell, even the
professionals had their share of scandals over this kind of behavior.”

“Wasn't that just isolated cases, though? I find it hard to believe that the entire football culture could
be set up like this to allow people getting away with that kind of thing.” Clark glanced up at Chloe
with puppy dog eyes, as he tried to make sense of what Chloe told him.

Chloe looked at her best friend with a pitying expression on her face. “Oh Clark. The football game
business is a powerful institution in itself and It makes a lot of money. You should learn by now that
both power and money can corrupt people very easily. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the real
reason why Coach Walt was allowed to get away with this for so long, is because he helped
Smallville High make a lot of money from winning those football games.”
Clark shook his head. “That isn't right at all. My dad used to tell me that football was supposed to be a team sport that instills the values of leadership, responsibility and teamwork. He used to tell me about how he bonded with other men though the sport ... how it helped him become a better man. Football shouldn't just be about money and power.”

Chloe smiled wryly at this, as she let go of Clark. “If that's true, then you can't allow Coach Walt to get away with this. He can't be allowed to ruin football for Smallville any more than he already has.”

Clark nodded. But then he pointed out, “But how? We lost all of our evidence....”

“Trevor Campbell.” Chloe said, “He was the one who stepped forward when Kwan asked everyone how they got the answers to the math tests. He wants to talk, I know it. But with the recent events he's been scared to talk to me. But, now that you're on the football team... he might be more comfortable talking to you?”

Clark nodded. “Alright, I'll talk with him. Hopefully we can dig up some new evidence that way.”

---Later after school---
---In an nice neighborhood full of Victorian houses---

“Oh, I'm glad one of his friends are here for him. Trevor's been acting strangely and he won't tell me what's wrong.” Mrs. Campbell replied in a worried tone of voice, as Clark told her that he was here to check on Trevor since he hadn't been at school all day.

“Alright. I'll see if I can get him to open up. Where is he?” Clark asked.

Trevor's mother pointed to a door. “He's in the basement.”

He walked down the stairs to find Trevor huddled up in a corner, with fire exhausters all around him in a protective circle. The blonde boy startled badly when he heard Clark walk down the steps. He yelled, “Stay away!”

Clark came into view, holding up his hands. “It's just me. My name is Clark Kent... I recently joined the football team, remember?”

Trevor relaxed slightly at this, but he was still tense. “Why are you here?”

“I'm here to talk about what happened between you and the coach.” Clark replied honestly.

Trevor shook his head. “Just leave, please. I don't want him to come back... which will be what happens if I talk to anybody again.”

Clark noticed the way the teenage boy was shaking, and he frowned. “What did he do to you?”

Trevor sighed. “You're not going to leave until I tell you, huh?”

Clark simply shook his head. The blond boy sighed, and then told his story.

“When he gets angry... he rides me and the others pretty hard. He acts like he's our second father... that's how he justifies it anyway. At first, it wasn't so bad, you know? But then he would get worse, more violent over the years. Once I fumbled a pass so badly... so he gave me a ride home, and then punched me in the stomach so badly that I threw up. He told me not to screw up again.” Trevor said.

“Why didn't you tell anybody?” Clark asked.
Trevor let out a mirthless bark of laughter. “You're kidding, right? You've seen the way that everyone seems to think that Coach Walt walks on water. It doesn't matter how out of control he gets, they often say he's just very passionate about football or something. They don't want to know the truth. If I went out there and spoke about the truth... they would just ostracize me. They would just see me as some punk who were trying to ruin an innocent man's name.”

Clark didn't know what to say to that. Trevor continued as tears formed in his eyes, “The most damning thing of all? I'm still going to stay on the football team despite everything he's done... and I'm starting to hate myself for it. I need it, you know. The football scholarship to get out of this damn town into a good college. Otherwise, I'll never be able to go to college. And you know what? Most of the time playing on the field isn't so bad. I have all those good friends around me. And at times Coach Walt does act like a decent coach, so I often tell myself that if I just tried harder and acted like the perfect football player then Coach Walt wouldn't yell at me or hit me. That it was my fault for screwing up.”

Clark frowned at this. He touched Trevor's shoulder, and told him: “Trevor, it's never your fault. Everyone screws up, okay? It's impossible for any one of us to be the perfect football player that Coach Walt wants us to be... in fact I don't think you're the only one that Coach Walt hurts on a regular basis. I think if you were to talk to some of your friends about what Coach Walt does to you, they might have similar stories to share with you. You're not alone in this.”

Trevor looked down at the ground, hiding his tears from Clark. “Yeah. But I'm still scared... Last night, Coach Walt did something... something he's never done to me before.”

He then pulled up his sleeves, revealing large burn gashes on his arms. Clark couldn't help but notice that the burn gashes on Trevor's arms were in the shape of hand prints. Like Coach Walt just had grabbed the teenage boy's arms and channeled his pyrotechnic abilities though his hands.

Clark felt a part of him burn in anger, and he blurted out, “This has to stop.”

“How? He's too powerful.” Trevor pointed out.

“Talk to your friends... see if they can testify alongside you that Coach Walt was the one who gave you the math answers, and were the one who supplied you with the steroids. They might not believe one teenage boy, but they would surely investigate if it was a entire group of football players testifying against Coach Walt. They just can't ignore that kind of thing.”

Trevor shook his head. “There's no way I'm going to do that. I mean, what will Coach Walt do if we actually go though with that? Look at what he did to Principal Kwan. What if he goes after my family and friends?”

“Are you really going to spend the rest of high school scared? Are you really okay with having five more years of abuse heaped on you?” Clark demanded to know.

Trevor just looked away and refused to answer that.

Clark sighed. It looked like he wasn't getting anywhere with Trevor. “Look... at least talk about this with somebody you trust, okay? It's not good to bottle this up... and you might find that you're never as alone as you think you are.”

With that, he stood up and left.

Trevor stared after Clark's retreating figure. And he closed his eyes, mulling over Clark's words.

After a while, he opened up his flip cellphone and dialed his best friend's number. “Hey, Brad? This
is Trevor. Um... I need to tell you something, but it needs to be between us, okay?"

--evening, at the Beanery--

Clark met Chloe at the Beanery, and told her about the conversation he had with Trevor.

“IT was just like you said, Chloe. He's too scared to come forward about what's been happening to him and the other players.” Clark said.

Chloe let out a long exhale upon hearing the whole story. “Wow. I knew Walt was being a jerk towards his own players, but I never knew he was so abusive towards them. Do you realize this completely changes everything? The players might not have been taking steroids and cheating on their math tests out of their own free will. They might had been forced to do it by their coach.”

Clark growled slightly at this. “You know, I have half a mind to show up on Friday and tell Walt that he can go stuff himself where the sun don't shine. There's no way I could ever play for an abusive coach like that.”

Chloe grabbed Clark's hand and replied: “Don't do anything stupid, okay? I don't think you should confront the coach by yourself... who knows what he would do to you? I think the best thing to do is play along with whatever he wants until we've collected new evidence on him. That's the only thing we can do right now, since Trevor refuses to testify. So just act like everything's normal, and play your part.”

Clark groaned slightly at this. “Do I have to? It just feels right to confront that creep soon as possible. It feels wrong to act like there's nothing going on...”

Chloe sighed. “I know, I know. But we need to play it smart. If we alert him to the fact that we know about him... then it'll be impossible to collect new evidence on him. Walt needs to go to jail for what he did, so we need him to lower his guard around us, okay?”

Clark hated to admit it, but Chloe was right once again. It was certainly tempting to go after the coach by himself, but it wasn't like he had the authority to arrest Coach Walt much less stop him. Kansas didn't even have citizen's arrest laws on the books.

--Friday, the day of the big game--

“This is so awesome! I can't believe we're finally going out on the field.” Pete Ross gushed, as they stood by waiting to go out on the field. Much as Pete hated to admit it, it was his first time out on the field too despite the fact that he had joined the football team long before Clark did. He just had been way too short and skinny for the guys to take him seriously as a football player, so he mostly warmed the bench for other guys instead of playing.

He felt sorta guilty over the fact that he was happy that the main star players had been caught cheating, as this gave back-up players like Pete the chance to prove himself as a real football player. What's more, his best friend was now alongside him as a football player too. He couldn't ask for anything more on this very great day.

He glanced over, and were surprised to see a very gloomy-looking expression on Clark Kent's face. “Dude, what's wrong? This is our big game!”

“Heh, yeah... I know. Smallville Crows is so going to kick the asses of... what was the other team's name again?” Clark tried to sound cheerful and normal but he failed.
Pete frowned. Clark normally didn't forget details like what the other team's name was. There was definitely something going on here...

his face cleared up when he realized that Clark was most likely just as nervous as Pete was right now.

“Relax, dude.” Pete replied cheerfully. “I know this is your first game ever... but there's no need for stage fright, okay? Let's just do our best and kick the asses of those Granville Knights!”

“Sure. I'll try to relax and do my best...” Clark responded half-heartedly. He just couldn't believe that he was going to play this football game for Coach Walt and pretend that he wasn't the kind of scumbag who abused young men who had placed their trust in him. Chloe said to play it smart and wait until they got evidence, but he still wanted to confront Walt Aronald so badly. He still couldn't get the image of Trevor's burnt arms out of his mind.

He glanced up at the benches, where Chloe was sitting. His parents were coming over, and she waved at them indicating that they should sit by her. She then said something and pointed straight at Clark. All three smiled and waved down to him... and Clark couldn't help but smile back at them.

Well, maybe this wasn't so bad... at least he had his parents and friends here to support him no matter what he did. The least he could do was play this football game for his parents, and then quit afterwards after coach Walt was indicted of everything he did.

He felt better now that he had a plan in mind, and rushed out with the rest of the football players to meet the Granville Knights.

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The Granville knights all wore sky blue and white uniforms, which contrasted strongly against the Smallville Crows' Red and yellow color scheme.

Clark Kent did his best to coast by in the football game, keeping the spotlight off himself by constantly passing the ball to others soon as there was an opportunity to do so. Near the end of the game, he even managed to have Pete Ross become a football hero by tossing the ball at Pete just as he was running towards the touchdown goal. The rival team had been rather surprised, because they never thought that Clark would pass the ball to a scrawny runt like Pete. They thought that Clark was going to pass the ball to the stocky-looking guy next to him, and had moved accordingly. Which was a huge mistake, because that had left Pete Ross wide open to receive the ball coming his way AND for him to run all the way to the touchdown goal.

So at the end of the day, the Smallville Crows won thanks to Pete Ross who had scored an touchdown for the entire team. The dark-skinned boy was beaming from ear to ear as the entire team lifted him up into the air, and started chanting his name.

Even the Smallville citizens were chanting Pete's name, as they celebrated their victory over Granville.

Clark couldn't help but grin at the evident happiness on his best friend's face. This was definitely Pete's big moment, that was for sure.

But Clark's good mood was instantly ruined when Coach Walt told everyone to gather inside by the trophy case so that he could give a speech. Once everyone was inside, he dived into this long speech about how this was Smallville's 200th win thanks to Coach Walt's coaching, etc. Clark couldn't help but grind his teeth at this. How the hell could Coach Walt make it all about himself, when Pete Ross was the one who won the entire game thanks to an unpredictable game play that not even Coach
Walt himself would've made? Coach Walt's ego knew no bounds at all.

That was when policemen came in, asking for Coach Walt. Everyone turned to look at the policemen curiously, wondering what was going on. “What's going on here? What's this about?” Coach Walt walked over to the policemen.

“Do you have any idea what's going on?” Pete Ross asked Clark, and Clark simply shook his head.

Clark was just equally as surprised as everyone else when the policemen suddenly started cuffing Coach Walt, and started reading him his rights.

“Now, why are you doing this?? I haven't done anything wrong!” Coach Walt roared, and he was about to struggle when he suddenly realized that the entire student population was now watching him get arrested. He chuckled weakly, now that the spotlight was now on him in a way that he didn't want it to be.

Unfortunately for Coach Walt, the policeman arresting him choose to answer Walt's earlier question rather loudly for the entire school to hear. “You're being charged with illegal distribution of steroids, and child abuse.”

a loud murmur went though the crowd as they overheard this. Clark suddenly realized that Trevor and the other suspended football players must had gone to the police after all. He smiled to himself, and murmured softly: “Way to go, Trevor. You stood up to him.”

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--Late night, around 12am--

There was a loud explosion in jail, and as the flames consumed the entire building that housed the Smallville jail the football coach casually walked out of the flames without a single scratch on him.

He growled, and couldn't help but curse the people who had dared to rat him out. All of them were going to pay for this public humiliation.... he would make them burn in their own homes!

He stomped angrily towards the direction of Smallville, but stopped when he noticed that there was people walking towards him in the darkness of night. He couldn't help but wonder who would still be up at this time of the night.

By one by one, the spots where their eyes should be suddenly lit up in a blue glow.... giving the mystery people a very alien-like appearance. And they just kept on slowly walking towards Walt in a rather eerie manner.

A chill went up Walt's spine, as he pondered the possibility that those people might not be human after all. He turned to run in the opposite direction, but to his shock there was alien-like people coming towards him from that direction too. He was surrounded!

“Back off!” He roared, “I have powers of my own too... so you better stay away if you don't want to get burnt!”

With that he created a large arch of fire over his head in an attempt to scare those mystery people off. But they seemed unfazed by his abilities, and kept on walking towards him. If anything, they seemed to be walking towards him quickly now.

They lifted their right hands to him, and a glowing blue circle were all on the palms of their hands...

That was too weird for the middle-aged firestarter. So he decided the hell with it, he was going to
murder them all. He was already planning to murder Trevor and the others in town anyway, so why not start with those creepy weirdos?

He snapped his fingers to let out a large blast of fire in the direction of the alien-like beings.... but to his shock his fire ability wasn't working!

At this point the bizarre beings finally spoke. “You should have noticed by now that we have neutralized your ability. Put simply, you cannot use it anymore unless we allow it.”

another one spoke. “Resistance is futile. You shall come with us peacefully or else.”

Coach Walt started to hyperventilate from fear as they closed in around him... and he fainted.

The shadowy beings started to snicker loudly, as they turned off their googles that could glow in the dark.

One of them couldn't help but ask, “You just had to say that line, didn't you, Tom? You're such a nerd.”

The one called Tom snickered again. “I couldn't help myself. Did you see the look on his face? Classic! I swear he looked like he was going to piss his pants any minute.”

Another one spoke. “I have to confess.. that was more fun than I thought it'd be. We should stage fake alien abductions more often.”

Tom nodded his head in agreement at this. A loud fire truck's siren sounded in the distance.

“We should hurry... we don't want to be seen. At least, not yet.” the first one spoke, and all of them quickly moved to carry Coach Walt off into the forest.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The following weeks had all of Smallville in an uproar over Coach Walt's scandal, especially when it was discovered that he was the one who was behind Principal Kwan's car “bombing”, etc. Most people had never really pegged Walt as an arsonist.

For some reason some people were focusing more on that than about his physical abuse of the football players, which nobody seemed to want to talk about. There was even a few people who kept on denying this abuse could had happened. Pete had been one of those people at first, because he had been one of the lucky ones that Coach Walt never physically and verbally abused in any way at all.

Chloe wasn't surprised about that for some reason. She had told Clark, “It's one thing if they all had been 5-year-old boys. But it's hard for people to wrap their minds around the fact that young men, who are nearly adults, couldn't defend themselves against that kind of abuse. People always assume that all men are tough, and would fight back... thus they'd be immune to that kind of verbal and physical abuse. Especially football players. But they don't understand that football players in particular tends to look up to their coach as the ultimate authority figure... which made Coach Walt's offenses all the more heinous.”

She perked up at her own speech, saying that she was definitely going to use that in her next article on the football abuse scandal.

Clark, on the other hand, were struggling to get around to doing the toughest thing he had to do so far. Namely, telling both Pete Ross and his own parents that he was quitting football.

--Saturday morning--

“Um, guys... I have something to tell you guys.” Clark replied, as he piled on as many pancakes as he could eat.

“What is it, dear?” Martha wondered, as she was cooking some scrambled eggs for Jonathan.

“Clark... where are you going with this?” Jonathan asked, as he raised one eyebrow.

Clark took a deep breath as he started reciting the speech that he had been practicing all week. “I don't want you to think that I'm the kind of kid who tries something for one week before getting tired of it. Because I'm not! That's just... well, my whole life I wanted to be in a sports team just like Dad was. But mainly because he kept on saying that it was the sort of thing that exemplified what America was supposed to be all about. You know, teamwork and male bonding...How it taught you to work with others and also to instill leadership qualities in you.”

“Clark... where are you going with this?” Jonathan asked, as he raised one eyebrow.

“Hold on, I'm getting there.” Clark answered, as he continued his speech. “However... I've discovered that the ideal is very much different than the reality. When I got to play football for real, I discovered that there was a ugly underbelly to High school football. That there was people who didn't really believe in the ideal that football was supposed to represent... and instead were just in it for the money and fame. That they were more than willing to do a lot of illegal stuff if it meant that they would win. The truth is.... I don't really want to be part of that in any way or form. So even
though I promised Pete I'd be a backup player for the Smallville Crows during their playing season... I've decided that I'm going to quit.”

Jonathan mulled this over, and shrugged. “Alright... That's fine by me.”

Clark blinked. “huh? Aren't you going to make some speech about how people shouldn't quit once they made a promise to other people? How winners aren't quitters?”

Martha chuckled. “He's got you there. It does seem like something you'd say.”

Jonathan scoffed slightly, with a slightly annoyed expression on his face. “Well... normally I'd say something like that. But Clark here did make a very good case for himself... how he wasn't just simply quitting for no good reason. He's quitting for moral reasons, and pretty good reasons at that. I think that, in certain cases if something is going against your moral code then it's alright to quit whatever it was that you were doing. You have to stand by your own moral codes no matter what, even if it means breaking a promise.”

“So you aren't disappointed in me?” Clark wondered.

Jonathan shook his head. “How could we be disappointed in you? You showed us during that game that you could play with others in a very public setting without revealing anything about yourself. You've shown a greater control in your own abilities than you used to have. And now you've shown us that you aren't willing to ignore illegal activity among your fellow players just so that you can continue to play with them and become popular with everyone. You've really matured a lot.”

Martha smiled at this. “That's right. We're actually very proud of you, Clark.”

Clark couldn't help but beam at the unconditional support and love that his parents were sending his way. “Thanks, mom. Thanks, Dad.”

He then grimaced slightly when he thought about Pete. “Now, if Pete can be just as understanding as you guys are...”

He couldn't help but think that Pete wasn't going to accept this gracefully as his parents did... considering all the trouble Pete went to just to get Clark on the football team.

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Clark didn't go visit Pete yet, he still had the chore of delivering groceries to everyone in the area, and on the last stop he was delivering the food to the Luthor Mansion.

And he wasn't using that as an excuse to delay giving the bad news to his best friend Pete Ross. Not at all...! Plus, he wanted to know what his other male friend was up to today.

He entered the mansion though the staff entrance, and dropped off the groceries in the kitchen where the cook started inspecting all the food with a critical eye to make sure that everything was satisfactory for Lex Luthor's needs.

He then walked though the hallways, trying to remember where Lex's office were. It had been a while since he was in this building last, and the whole place was like a maze!

All of a sudden, his head started to hurt.... his head started pounding, like somebody was taking an heavy hammer to his brain. Clark staggered, and leaned against the wall for support as he tried to will the pain away. He blinked, and that was when his vision went hay-wire.
Everything turned black and greenish-blue, like an inverted picture, and he could see everything—the plumbing, the electrical wiring and everything else that was hidden away inside the walls. And beyond the walls, he could see the skeletons of the mansion's household staff working their butts off to keep this place running.

“What the heck?” Clark blurted out, as he tried to blink the vision away and get his eyesight back to normal. Thankfully it did get back to normal, but Clark was still freaked out by what just happened. He mentally debated going back home straight away instead of meeting with Lex, but he thought to himself that this might just be a fluke and might never happen again.

Plus, wouldn't it be weird of him to come all the way here and not even see Lex? He could head straight home after this anyway.

So he kept on walking until he found the office again. He peered inside, and found two white figures in white sword-fighting each other.

Their helms were off, so Clark was able to recognize Lex sword-fighting with some older bearded man that had a mane of brown-gray hair. And without meaning to, he ended up eavesdropping on what they were chatting about as they fought against each other.

“Look at your moves, Lex. They're rash, no thought to their consequences.” The man mockingly said, as he tried to goad Lex into making a mistake.

“If I wanted your commentary, I would buy your books on tape.” Lex snapped back, as he took the defensive position.

The other man just laughed. “You know what your problem is?”

“I'm sure you'll tell me anyway, so go ahead and enlighten me.” Lex couldn't help but sound slightly sarcastic as he parried away from his opponent, who were pushing back against him in an offensive move.

“You're ruled by your own emotions. You always have been.” the other man said, and Clark couldn't help but blink at this part. Clark had never really pegged Lex as an particularly emotional guy... every time he saw the guy, Lex always came off as a cool and serene man who were completely in control of everything.

“And that can be a fatal flaw—” the guy started gloating as he moved in for the kill, only to be surprised when Lex did some fancy footwork that gave him the upper hand in their sword-fighting session. He found his chest being poked very uncomfortably by Lex's sword, and Lex smirked.

“You were saying?” Lex said in a smug tone of voice. “I win this round, Dad. So...therefore, as agreed those workers stay. You see, I've found a way to reduce our budget by 20% without firing a single worker. You're going to have to accept my decisions, and the way I run this factory, without trying to override me every time.”

Clark raised his eyebrow slightly. So that was Lionel Luthor... and did the Luthors just seriously have a sword fight to decide the fate of the workers at the factory? No way, that was too ridiculous for words... right?

Lionel looked supremely annoyed that he lost, as he remarked, “You get one chance to defy me... next time, I will not be so kind.”

This only made Lex laugh. He then told his dad, “I don't know which you hate more...the fact my plan works very well or the fact that you weren't the one to come up with it.”
Lionel shook his head at this. “Just remember, empires aren’t built on clever bookkeeping.”

Clark had enough of peeping on the Luthors like some kind of stalker and decided to make himself known. He opened the door all the way, and knocked on it. “Hello?”

Both Luthors turned around soon as Clark opened the door. Lex had a mixture of pleased surprise and apprehension on his face when he realized it was Clark. Maybe because both his father and his first Smallville friend were in the same room now?

“Clark. What a pleasant surprise. What are you doing here?” Lex wondered, as he went over to the fridge to get himself some water.

“This was the last stop for my deliveries today. So I thought I’d pop in and see how you were doing... But I didn't realize you had company.” Clark answered.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me to your friend, son?” Lionel asked in a very pointed tone of voice.

Lex looked like he had to fight very hard not to roll his eyes as he replied, “Clark Kent... this is my father Lionel Luthor. Lionel, this is Clark Kent.”

Clark simply nodded at the older man, while Lionel stroked his beard thoughtfully.

“Ahh, yes. The Kent family... It's been a while since I was acquainted with them. Last time I saw you, you were just a toddler. How is your father?” Lionel remarked in a conversational tone of voice.

So, Jonathan Kent actually had some history with Lionel Luthor and that was why he hated him?

Clark knew there was more to the whole story to why the farmer hated Lionel other than the fact that Mr. Luthor apparently swindled the Ross family and others into giving him the factory. He wanted to ask Lionel how he knew Jonathan, but he was kind of scared that he might trudge up some decades-old grudge between the two.

Clark simply nodded at the older man, while Lionel stroked his beard thoughtfully.

“Ahh, yes. The Kent family... It's been a while since I was acquainted with them. Last time I saw you, you were just a toddler. How is your father?” Lionel remarked in a conversational tone of voice.

So instead Clark just answered, “He's doing very well, thank you.”

That stabbing pain in his head returned, which nearly bowled him over. He was able to keep on standing however, but what freaked him out next was when Lionel suddenly looked like he had been skinned alive. His clothes and skin had disappeared, revealing only the sinews and muscle tissue on his body. It was both disgusting and fascinating all at once.

“Clark? Are you alright? You don't look so hot.” Lex's concerned voice asked, and Clark could hear him coming over. He didn't want to see Lex Luthor's body without skin neither, so he closed his eyes before Lex came into his range of vision. He covered his eyes for good measure too, even though he was sure it wouldn't do anything if he could see though things.

“It's nothing. I just have a really bad headache... I didn't have anything to drink all day and I was busy making deliveries all day in the hot sun. So that's probably it. I'll be fine after I get home and dehydrate myself.” Clark half-lied, as he moved over to a seat to sit down while studiously avoiding looking at the Luthors.

“You should have my water then... here, have it. There's no way I'm going to have the delivery boy faint on my doorstep. What would the neighbors think?” Lex replied, as he dangled the water bottle in front of Clark's face.

Clark smiled, as he took the bottle. “Thanks.” He chugged it all down almost too quickly, but it did make him feel a little better. He looked up at the Luthors as to test his vision, and to his relief Lionel looked normal again. Lex was hovering over him, looking supremely concerned as hell.
Clark stood up. “I guess I should be going now anyway. Thanks for the water.”

“Are you sure you're alright to drive? Maybe I should have somebody escort you home.” Lex wondered.

Clark snorted at this. “Lex... It's a headache brought on by hard labor. I'm not drunk or incapacitated. I think I'll be fine.”

Lex looked skeptical at this, but he simply nodded. Clark turned and left the room.

As he exited, he couldn't help but overhear Lionel comment on his looks. The last he heard was a scandalized Lex yell, “He's 15 years old! So stop suggesting that I would do such a thing.”

Clark wasn't going to think about the implications of what he overheard, he was too busy getting home fast as possible.

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His parents were understandably freaked out when Clark told them the entire story. But it seemed as if Jonathan was way more freaked out than Clark was, just simply because he had been in front of Lionel Luthor when it happened.

“Are you sure the Luthors didn't do anything strange to trigger this?” Jonathan asked for what seemed to be the tenth time since they had this conversation.

Clark sighed. “Yes. I'm pretty sure. I told you, it started long before I got into the room with both of them. And they didn't even know I was there. Until I knocked on the door.”

“Well, it's clearly another new ability. You should probably stay home for now and practice using it?” Martha suggested.

“How am I supposed to practice using it? I keep on getting those awful headaches every time I use it by accident. This is worse than the time I developed heat vision!” Clark cried out.

He still remembered the time he got heat vision very vividly. He had been ten years old, and had been very angry with his dad over something trivial. It had been something he wanted to buy at the time so that he could fit in with other kids who owned the same toy at the time. His dad had said that he wasn't going to waste money on what was clearly just a stupid fad among the kids... and Clark had been so upset that his dad didn't understand. It wasn't about owning a toy that was only popular for a short time... he just wanted to fit in with the other kids for once. It had been like all of his frustrations just bubbled up to the surface.... and unleashed itself though his eyes in the form of a heat beam. He was just thankful that he hadn't been glaring at his dad when it happened... otherwise this story would had a rather dark, tragic ending.

And let's not get started on when Clark finally hit the hormonal phase of puberty and suddenly found people of all kinds to be sexually attractive. His heat vision had triggered again, and it had been very humiliating getting the sex talk from his parents. Clark seriously wanted to scrub that particular memory from his head forever... but unfortunately he had way too good a memory and remembered everything in photographic detail. For some reason Clark's memories didn't seem to fade over time the same way humans' memories did. And at times it kind of sucked, and Clark couldn't help but envy other people for that ability to forget if they wanted to.

“Well, maybe it's like trying to use muscles that hasn't been used for a long time. I had a buddy who had to lie in bed for a long time thanks to a war injury, and he told me that his legs hurt a lot when he
tried to use them again after he had the doctor's permission to finally leave his bed. He had to go through physical therapy to use his leg muscles again even though he wasn't crippled by his wounds from the war.” Jonathan thoughtfully wondered out loud.

“So my headaches are really just under-used muscles that hurt thanks to being used for the first time? That's just great.” Clark couldn't help but be sarcastic towards his dad's theory.

“Well at any rate we can't have you developing those headaches and x-raying people at random. What happens if it keeps on continuing even in school? That's why you have to learn how to keep this under control, so that you can stop those headaches before it even happens.” Martha said.

Clark had to admit his mother had a point. It would be way too inconvenient if his headaches kept on popping up randomly. Especially if he was talking to his friends or something. He didn't want to see Chloe or Pete without their skins, seeing Lionel without his on was already nightmarish enough.

He felt another headache coming on, and he couldn't help but groan.
“I feel another one coming on... this completely sucks.” He told his parents.

“Maybe you should go lie down. I'll bring you an Advil. I don't know if it'll help but...” Martha suggested.

Clark simply nodded at this, and went upstairs to his bed. It was just until later that he remembered that he was supposed to talk to Pete today. But by then it was already too late.

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--Monday--
--Smallville high school--

Pete was having the best week of his life. Ever since he scored that touchdown and won the football game for Smallville high school, the people around here was treating him like a god.

Well, maybe not a god but he definitely had a lot of people coming up to him to congratulate him and compliment him on a game well played. And it was a very good feeling.... being recognized like this.

Well, maybe those football fans would learn not to underestimate somebody just because they didn't have the typical muscular build that a lot of football players had. There was something to be said for fast slim guys like him.... heh, heh, heh.

“Well, well. It's nice to see that all this praise hasn't gone to your head yet... or have it?” Chloe sarcastically said as she appeared at Pete's side while he was walking though the school hallway.

Pete chuckled. “I can't change the fact that I helped win the football game against the Granville Knights. So I might as well enjoy the attention while it lasts... right?”

Chloe was about to make a witty joke at Pete's expense when she noticed Clark coming their way, and he didn't look good. “Whoa, Clark. What happened to you? You don't look so good...”

Pete glanced up at his best friend, and frowned slightly. Chloe was right, Clark didn't look so hot today. In fact he was looking pale and looked kind of sick, like he just caught something. Clark just smiled weakly when Chloe pointed out how he looked.

“I'm fine... just had this bad migraine that lasted all night. I couldn't get much sleep.” Clark replied. Chloe looked instantly sympathetic at this, because she knew what it was like to have migraines.

“Oh man, that sucks! I have some painkillers in my purse for that sort of thing.... so if you feel it
coming back again you can come to me, okay?” Chloe replied. Clark smiled at his blonde friend, and nodded.

“Sure, Chloe. Thanks.” Clark then turned to Pete and said rather nervously, “Can I talk to you now or later on after classes are over? I need to tell you something.”

Pete looked slightly puzzled. What could it be that got Clark so worried and nervous when he said he needed to tell Pete something? “Sure, man. You can tell me anything... you know that. We can meet up after school though, I have things to do today?”

Clark simply nodded at this, and he was quiet as the three of them went to class.

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For some reason, Pete had to go to a meeting that had the entire football group sit down with the school psychiatrist. Clark was registered as an emergency backup player and also had played for the Smallville Crows during the game before Coach Walt got arrested... so he was also required to come to the meeting as both the school psychiatrist and the principal said it was important.

“Do you have any idea what's happening?” Pete wondered, and Clark simply shook his head as the two of them took seats in the back row as seeing the rest of the seats were already taken up by the other football players.

Once the school psychiatrist saw that everyone was here, she launched some speech about how abuse victims shouldn't have to keep silent and seek support for the emotional trauma they endured.

Pete groaned, and rolled his eyes. This again? There was just no way that any of his fellow football players could had been abused by Coach Walt. He would had noticed something like that happening... right? Plus, even if coaches were the ultimate authority for football players like Chloe wrote in her article, there was just no way a bunch of Jocks would even let themselves be pushed around like that by a middle-aged man who didn't look like he could do a single push-up. Right?

'of course, Chloe and Clark did mention something about Coach Walt being able to control fire. How would a bunch of jocks fare against a fire-starting meteor freak? Maybe being abused by a meteor freak would make the whole thing less implausible?' a traitorous voice in his voice whispered.

The psychiatrist droned on, “Of course I know there are also a few of you who hadn't been physically or emotionally abused by coach Walt... and thus had no idea that it was even happening under your noses. So therefore I'm also handing out brochures that will help you to spot any future abuse in the future.”

With that she had one of the players pass out the brochures. She then talked about everything that was listed in the brochure...

“So how do you spot psychological abuse when it doesn't leave bruises? Let's look at the warning signs-- number one, they humiliate or embarrass you. Number two, Constant put-downs. Number 3, Hyper-criticism. Number 4, Refusing to communicate. Number 5, Ignoring or excluding you....”

To Pete's growing discomfort, he realized that many of the things that the school shrink was listing seemed to perfectly describe Coach Walt's behavior down to a tee. But he didn't think that was abuse... that was just being a overly passionate football coach... right?? Of course, Coach Walt had been the only coach for miles around, and the adults had acted like his behavior was normal... so Pete had naturally assumed that was how a Coach was supposed to act. But many of the adults had been in the Smallville crows’ team as kids themselves when Walt was coaching them... so maybe they also didn't realize this wasn't normal coach behavior??
Pete couldn't help but feel slightly confused. He had came in believing that no abuse occurred, and that the only thing that Coach Walt did wrong was set fire to Principal Kwan's car and the torch office. But now the way the school shrink was explaining it, it suddenly made too much sense how a bunch of football players could be abused. Pete didn't like his sense of reality being altered like this...

After all, a young man who were nearly an adult shouldn't ever be able to get abused. They usually had the size and muscle to throw off anybody if they wanted to! It was typically women who got abused, not men. This was how he had basically been raised to see the world. And now, it's like reality wanted to mess around with how he saw the world?

To his growing horror, a few of the football players started to open up about what they had experienced with Coach Walt... and how he did almost everything on the list mentioned by the brochure. And how it made them feel. Men simply did not talk about their feelings like that!

He glanced over at Clark to see if his best friend was freaked out by this as he was, but to his dismay Clark didn't seem bothered by any of this. He just had this weird determined expression on his face as he was memorizing the brochure, like he was on some kind of mission to prevent this from happening again.

Well, that was weird.” Pete couldn't help but comment as the two of them finally left that room.

“Well how? I thought it was pretty informative. I never knew there was so many different subtle ways to abuse somebody... it's actually kind of creepy how different types of abuse could go on right under your nose and you'd never know it. I'm glad I got to learn how to spot those signs.... you never know, I might end up having to help somebody who's in an abusive relationship.” Clark replied as the two of them walked down to the lunchroom since it was now lunch break.

Pete couldn't help but roll his eyes. That was such a typical Clark response. “You know what I mean, man. I've been playing alongside those guys for a long time and never noticed anything. Plus, they don't exactly fit the archetype of an abused victim. They're like the top predators at the top of the food chain. You'd never think that they could get hunted by other predators out there. And Coach Walt... he was like a clumsy cow that tried to pass itself off as a wolf.”

Clark chuckled at the metaphor. “Actually, cows and steers can be kind of evil in their own right. They kill more humans than sharks do every year... and given the chance they'll eat a little bit of meat in addition to grass if the meat is unable to fight back. I've caught some of the cows on my farm eating baby chickens that strayed too far from their mother, or stomping on injured mice before eating them.”

Pete scoffed. “Come on, you're just making that up…”

Clark shook his head. “I swear, it's true. You can google cows eating baby chickens to watch gruesome videos of that if you want... it happens all over, just not in Smallville. Trust me, I checked... I had to make sure that our cows weren't suddenly turning into carnivores or something like that. This is Smallville after all...”

Pete made a face at that. “Seriously? Ugh... now I don't feel so bad for eating so much beef.”

Clark nodded. “Nature can be cruel. You'd think a herbivore would be nice and peaceful, but they're actually more hardcore than any natural meat-eating predator. I guess you have to be to survive in a harsh world.”
Pete was so engrossed by the weird turn the conversation took, that he didn't exactly pay attention to where he was going. And so, he accidentally bumped into Tina Greener.

Tina's papers went flying everywhere, and Pete automatically bent over to help her collect the papers. “I'm so sorry, I wasn't paying attention to where I was going.”

Tina smiled as Pete helped her collect her papers. “That's alright. Say, you're Pete Ross, right? The guy who did a touchdown and won the Smallville football game?”

Pete smiled shyly. “Yep, that's me.”
Tina grinned back. “That's so awesome.”

An awkward silence descended as they finally collected all the papers and made sure everything was in order. Finally Tina spoke again. “Thanks for helping me pick up the papers. Um, this might seem forward but... I'd like to ask you out on a date.”

Pete opened his mouth, but no sound came out. He was just so surprised... normally he had to be the one to approach girls and not the way around. He found himself being poked in the back by Clark, and snapped out of it. “Oh? Oh! Yeah, I'd love to go out with you.”

Tina Greener grinned. “Great! How does meeting at the pizza place tomorrow at 5pm sound?”

Pete simply nodded at this, and Tina Greener walked away with a big smile on her face.

Pete turned around to face his best friend with a look of awed disbelief, while Clark himself was simply grinning.

“Good for you, Pete. Got yourself a date with a hot girl.” Clark replied, in a slightly teasing tone of voice.

Now how could Clark tell Pete that he was quitting football for good? He didn't want to be the one to ruin Pete's good mood.

--Tuesday, Pizza place at 5pm--

Pete was sitting at a table that he had reserved for both him and his date, but his date hadn't shown up yet. Finally she showed up in tow with her mother, and they seemed to be arguing.

“Look, it's just a date... it's not like I'm rushing off to get married or something. Really, mom.... you need to quit stop being so clingy! Let me have my normal teenager experiences, dammit!” Tina Greener snapped.

Mrs. Greener just looked upset. “Look, I can't help it if I'm worried. You're my only child... and the only precious thing I have left ever since your father died. If you ever become a mother I'm sure you would understand how I feel.”

“I do understand, but I think you need to understand that there’s a difference between a mother who worries and a mother who over-smothers her child to death! Frankly, every time you act like this it feels like you're trying to kill me slowly. Now leave me the fuck alone and let me have my date already!”

With that she stomped off towards where she saw Pete sitting. She plastered on her best fake smile and sat down.
“Sorry. I'm not late, am I?”

Pete smiled and shook his head. His smile faded slightly when he noticed the worried expression on Mrs. Greener's face as she left. Curiosity got the best of him, and he asked: “So, what was that about? I saw you arguing with your mother at the entrance.”

Tina Greener just shrugged. “Eh, it's just my mother being overprotective as usual. I had to tell her to go away so that I could have a normal dating experience.”

Pete smiled slightly at this. “Maybe I could meet with your mother. Show her that she doesn't have anything to worry about with me... I'm a total gentleman, after all.”

Tina chuckled, and shook her head. “That's not it. Not many people know this, but when I was a baby I was born with Osteomalacia. It's a soft-bone disease... so I would get all those broken bones very easily, no matter what I did. When I was a toddler, I would run around the house and the activity would be enough to break one of my legs.”

Pete made a face at this. “Ouch. That must had sucked a lot for your family. How about now, do you still suffer from it?”

Tina smiled. “That's the weird part. The doctors said that I would have to deal with this for the rest of my life. But after the meteor shower it was like it never existed. It was like the meteor rocks cured me of it.”

Pete frowned slightly at this. It seemed like something Chloe would be interested in. He replied, “Yeah, that's weird alright. But if you're cured, I don't see why your mother's so worried about you being out on a date.”

Tina sighed softly. “Well, you see, that's only a part of it. You see... when I was ten years old, I was attacked by a bunch of masked men. They broke into the house, held me down and injected me with some sort of fluid. And then just like that, they just ran off.”

“What!” Pete couldn't help but exclaim in surprise. “Did they ever catch the guys? I'm sorry, but that sounds creepy as hell.”

Tina shook her head. “Apparently, I was one of the eight kids that they randomly attacked... they did this all over Smallville, but they managed to get away before the police could arrive in time. They were never caught.”

“Huh. That doesn't really sit well with me to be honest. I mean, that would mean that those creeps could still be walking alongside us and nobody would even know.” Pete remarked with a slightly troubled expression on his face.

This sort of thing sounded like it would be right up Chloe's alley. In addition to bizarre stuff, she loved solving unsolved mysteries. Pete made a mental note to mention this to her later on.

Tina smirked, and replied, “Now you know why my mom's so overprotective of me. But enough of this... let's get us some pizza!”

Pete smiled and nodded at this. “Sure thing.”

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Meanwhile, Chloe and Clark was busy cleaning up what was left of the torch office, and seeing if there was anything they could salvage. Coach Walt might had set fire to the entire torch office, but he wasn't able to destroy everything. Chloe was using an spare room downstairs in the basement to keep
on producing her school newspaper, but Chloe still missed her old office something terribly. After all, it wasn't exactly nice down there in the basement.

Chloe scoffed when Clark told her how he didn't want to pop Pete's happy bubble with his news that he was quitting the football team.

“Jeez, Clark. You can't keep putting it off, you know. I mean... how do you think Pete would feel if he was the last one to find out? Or what happens when he wonders why you haven't been showing up to football practice all season?” Chloe replied as she swept the floor.

Clark was scrubbing the white walls to get rid of the blackened soot, and he turned around to look at Chloe. “I know...but I've never seen Pete so happy like this for a long time. I don't want to be the person who wrecks his happiness. I'll just wait for the right time to tell him.”

“Oh, Clark. You're such a chicken sometimes.” Chloe shook her head and kept on sweeping.

There was a knock at the open door, and Lex Luthor peered in.

“Lex! What are you doing here?” Clark's face lit up when he saw his friend come in.

“I heard that the school had some outdated equipment, so I came by to talk to the principal about making a donation to the school. I thought that while I was here, I'd check up on how you were doing, Clark. No more headaches?” Lex Luthor answered, as he walked into the room. He frowned when he noticed all the damage that the fire had done.

Clark shook his head. “Nope, no more migraines. I told you I was going to be fine, Lex.”

Lex let out a loud exhale as he made a point of glancing around. “Let me guess, Coach Walt did all of this?”

Chloe nodded. “He sure did. He set fire to all of my computers, and while I was at one too. I'm just thankful Clark was here to pull me away from the computers at the time... who knows what would had happened? I bet I would had been set on fire too...”

Lex actually started to look slightly furious at the thought that Walt could had easily killed both of the teenagers, but he got himself under control. “Well, from what I hear there's been a lot of that going around. I mean... First Clark saves me... then Whitney... then Kwan. Now you. Clark could easily make a good living rescuing people.”

Clark shifted nervously at this, as to silently say, ‘Who me? Nah, I'm just a normal farm-boy!’

“I know, right?” Chloe couldn't help but agree, “But Coach Walt was naive to think that just destroying all of the evidence would make me stop so easily. Even if Trevor's group hadn't turned him in, I would had found another way to expose his crimes to the world.”

Lex smiled at Chloe's slightly determined face, and remarked, “Speaking of which, I was spending my free time reading all the articles you wrote on your newspaper's website. I especially liked your wall of weird segment... and your theory that the meteor rocks were behind all of the bizarre events in Smallville. Usually people blame it on the fertilizer factory.”

“Thank you?” Chloe was caught off guard by this, and she glanced over at Clark as if he could explain it. Clark just shrugged.

“I just find it hard to believe that people could willfully turn such a blind eye to whatever occurring in this town. It's like nobody's even curious enough to investigate how it's all happening. Not even
that giant pig incident was enough to make everyone question what was going on?” Lex frowned as he wondered this out loud.

Clark just shrugged at this. “That's Smallville for you. People would rather ignore it than do something about it.”

Chloe smiled. “I understand how you feel, Lex. For the longest time, Dr. Hamilton was the only other person in Smallville besides me who were even willing to look into the bizarre events that Smallville had on a regular basis. He even had the same theory I had, about the meteor rocks altering the cellular makeup of everything it touched.”

“Dr. Hamilton?” Lex repeated the name, wondering who that was.

Clark answered, “He was some crackpot mineralogist who sold plastic meteor rocks to tourists.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “He's not that much of a crackpot. Remember, he stopped doing that when some laboratory outside of Smallville hired him to study the meteor rocks?”

Clark squirmed slightly. For some reason the idea that people would study meteor rocks made him feel uneasy. “Yeah, but he's isn't a trustworthy guy... he's kind of shady, you know? I heard that he got fired from metropolis university for having inappropriate relationships with some of his students. I wouldn't put too much stock into his research if I were you.”

“Yeah, he does sound like a shady guy....” Lex agreed, as he turned to leave. Before he left though, he looked at Chloe and said: “I'll see if I can get the principal to build you guys a new computer lab. You guys look like you seriously need it.”

“That would be nice, thanks.” Chloe replied as she waved at Lex’s retreating back. She then glanced at Clark with one eyebrow raised as to silently express that she thought it was kind of weird that Lex stopped by like this. Clark simply shrugged, and they got back to work on cleaning up the room.

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Lex shook hands with Principal Kwan as the two of them stood at the school exit.

“I'll make sure that all of that money you donated will be used for updating the existing equipment we have.” Kwan replied with a earnest look on his face.

Lex smiled back. “And don't forget a new computer lab. Can't have those students graduate from Smallville while being computer illiterate. What would the rest of the world think?”

Kwan raised one eyebrow slightly at this. “Right.”

Lex left the school then, but his good mood was instantly ruined when he saw some random schmuck leaning on his car in the parking lot. He walked over, and then asked in what was a deadly calm voice: “Excuse me, but that's my car you're sitting on.”

The man looked up, and smirked. “I know.” He then slid off the car, and pulled out a green folder along with a card. He handed Lex the card, which read: “Roger Nixon, Reporter at Metropolis inquisitor.”

Lex put on his best unimpressed expression as he read the card. He glanced up and asked: “So why is some tabloid reporter stalking me? I don't seem to remember having done anything scandalous or noteworthy recently.”
Roger smiled victoriously. “Ah, but I'm here about something you did in the past. Remember a little club called Club Zero?”

He then handed Lex the green folder. Lex couldn't help but be curious, so he took it and opened it up.

Roger went on to brag about how he had broken past some firewalls, and managed to decrypt the encrypted files... thus discovering Lex Luthor's dirty little secret. He then threatened to expose this to the world if Lex didn't pay up.

Lex took a few deep breaths, trying not to lose his temper. He couldn't believe this slimeball...Roger was seriously attempting to blackmail him in front of a entire school, in public? A part of him wanted to laugh at the amateur attempt at blackmail, while another part of him was morally indignant that a tabloid reporter would actually stake out a school full of underage kids just simply because Lex had stopped by there. Both parts, however, agreed that Roger Nixon had to go.

“Very well. Meet me at my mansion tomorrow.” Lex replied, acting as if this didn't bother him at all. He walked around to the side of the car and got in. Roger Nixon smirked victoriously, and stepped aside to let Lex exit the school parking lot. The fool actually thought he had won.... But he had no idea what he was in for at the mansion.

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--Wednesday--

“Huh. That actually happened?” Chloe was sitting in the temporary torch's office in the basement, while Pete told her all about Tina Greer's mysterious assault as a kid.

Pete simply nodded, and pulled out some old newspapers which detailed the random attacks on eight kids across Smallville. “See? And apparently those guys were never caught, so it became a cold case. I thought it was interesting... and kind of creepy. So naturally I thought you'd be interested in hearing about this.”

Chloe simply nodded thoughtfully at this. “You're right. It all sounds very interesting... and it just makes me wonder what those guys were up to, injecting random kids like that with some mysterious chemical.”

Pete grinned. “Knowing you, this cold case could be solved by the end of the week. Maybe?”

Chloe smirked. “It's so nice when my friends think so highly of me.”

There was a knock at the door, and Lana Lang came in. “Hello?”

Pete raised his eyebrows. “Speaking of the devil...” He muttered under his breath to Chloe. And he frantically gestured at the newspaper, while mouthing, “She's one of the kids who were attacked!”

Chloe mouthed back “Oh really?” At Pete and waved at Lana. She called out, “Come in!”

Lana looked at Pete, and then at Chloe. “I'm not interrupting anything, am I?”

Chloe shook her head. “Nah. In fact you seem to have perfect timing... Pete and I were talking about unsolved cases... and this particular one came to our attention. Is it true that you were one of the eight kids that got attacked by a bunch of mysterious men a while back?”

Lana thought back to that day, and then very simply answered, “Yeah.”
Chloe leaned towards eagerly. “Would you be willing to tell me about it?”

Lana had a sudden glint in her eyes. “Yeah. As long as you do something in return for me.”

Roger Nixon swaggered confidently into Lex Luthor's study room, and slapped the files down on the desk. “I'm here for my money, Lex.”

Lex smirked to himself. It was time for the show to start. He had his back to Roger at the time he had came in, so he whirled around with an convincing indignant look on his face. “You must be feeling good right now. You'd think with all the money my father had, that he could make things disappear permanently.”

Roger shrugged. “Maybe he's not as smart as he thinks. I'd just as soon as get my money and get out. Have a nice life.”

Lex simply nodded, as he poured himself a drink. “Of course.”

He paused for dramatic effect before adding, “But the minute you walk out that door, you'll disappear.”

Roger scoffed. “What, you're going to have me killed?”

Lex eyed the man before him calmly. “Of course not. You'll still be alive. But your assets on the other hand... your driver ID, your security number, your passport and your bank account... they all will be erased. With one phone call, I can ensure that there will be no record of you ever having existed.”

Roger narrowed his eyes at Lex. “You're bluffing.”

Lex casually walked over to his pool table. “Call your bank, then. See if your account still exists.”

It took all of his willpower not to laugh out loud right then. For you see, Lex had installed some hardware in this study that blocked everything from the outside world, and also prevented you from calling anybody with your phone. and if you tried to access websites though a phone or a computer it'd put up a fake one that would state that your account at that website did not exist, etc. Lex Luthor didn't exactly have the power to do all of that for real yet, but it was fun to pretend that he had the power of a god. Plus it was a great prank, and he got to teach this creep an lesson he would never soon forget.

Roger's face paled when he tried to access his account though the bank app on his phone, only for it to tell him that his account did not exist. “My god... what did you do?”

Lex smiled at Roger benevolently. “Don't worry, Roger. I'll give you a whole new identity. One that's a less upstanding. Maybe a drug dealer?” He then seemed to think of something that worried him greatly. He put on an mock concerned expression as he pointed out, “Oh... but then you'll lose your current job, your family and your life...”

“T-then we'll be even?” Roger wondered. Lex shook his head.

“Oh no. there's still the matter of your younger brother, who works in juvenile court. He did break the law when you talked him into giving you those records. What did you tell him anyway? Steal the records and you can make some quick cash?”
Roger Nixon's face was ashen white at this point. “Please, leave my brother alone!”

Lex angrily stalked over to Roger. “You came into my life thinking that you could shake me down... because you thought I was just a spoiled little brat who needed his daddy’s protection. Well, you're going to pay very dearly for that little mistake.”

“What do you want?” Roger quietly asked. Lex simply picked up the green folder that Roger had dropped into the table earlier, and tossed it into the fire.

“It's very simple. I just want this to stay buried, and for the past to stay where it belongs. Also, any negative stories about me printed by your newspaper? You will kill them all. And you will print the news I give you... you shall be at my disposal 24/7.”

Roger nodded at this, looking very shaken by how quickly his scheme went south.

Lex smiled at the man sweetly. “Don't look so glum. You know...people often say that compared to my father, I'm a rather benevolent employer. You're lucky you came to me instead of my father. Who knows what he would had done? He can be very cruel compared to the kindness I've shown you tonight.”

Roger mentally boggled at this comment. Lex Luthor considered this to be kind behavior?? And he just said that his father could be worse than this....? Roger got the horrible sinking feeling that he had learned his lesson far too late for his own good. The lesson being-- you did not try to fuck with the Luthors in any shape or form at all. Otherwise you paid for it dearly.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, as you can see, Tina Greer was one of those 8 kids who got attacked by the time-travelers and were stripped of their powers. They targeted Tina because she had a record of negatively affecting Lex's image, as well as negatively affecting Clark. So now in this reality Tina Greer just simply is a normal teenager who has to put up with a overprotective mother and is attracted to popular people without being mental about it.

We've got Lana Lang and Tina Greer on the list. Can you guess who were the rest of the six kids who got attacked too that day? As you can see, they didn't target all of the meteor mutants in town-- they only targeted those who had the ability to ruin Lex and Clark's life.

This wasn't much of a chapter in terms of action, etc... but I had to get all the plot points out of the way. So think of this chapter as the calm before the storm...
Chapter Summary

Basically, this is a chapter where Lex and Clark starts to hang out more, while Chloe looks into the mysterious attacks that started it all.... Not a lot of action, but you do get to see characters interact with each other?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lex Luthor watched with a slight smirk on his face as Roger Nixon tore out of his driveway like he couldn't wait to get away from Lex. Well, that took of the problem. Roger Nixon had learned his lesson, he wouldn't try to play the blackmail game with somebody who were clearly out of his league again. The best part was, Lex had strongly implied that Lionel Luthor would do things to Roger that was so much worse than what Lex had threatened to do... so Roger Nixon wouldn't dare go to Lionel behind Lex's back.

This gave Lex enough time to digitally and physically remove all traces that Club Zero ever happened, so that Roger Nixon wouldn't have any more evidence in case he changed his mind and printed that story anyway. The only way for Roger to get evidence from now on would be to talk to star witnesses like Amanda Rothman. He frowned slightly at this. He would need to contact her, and warn her, just in case.

This way Roger Nixon wouldn't be able to do anything once he realized that he had gotten played by Lex Luthor, and that Lex Luthor really didn't have the power to erase his identity like he claimed to.

Lex had briefly flirted with the idea of having Roger Nixon investigate a certain car crash for him, but he decided that it was a bad idea. After all, this was a scumbag who worked for a tabloid rag, and actually had dared to blackmail him. Who knew what Roger Nixon would do with the information Lex currently had? No, it was too risky to hire somebody like that.

He couldn't help but flashback to the day that he had met Clark Kent.

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Lex woke up, gasping for breath. He saw an angelic-looking man hover over him with a extremely worried expression on his face, and the sun made an literal halo behind him to fully complete the angelic effect.

Lex thought for a few seconds that he might be dead, but the pain in his lungs clearly disproved that theory. You couldn't feel pain at all if you were dead. His throat felt sore too as well, and he managed to croak out, “I thought I hit you.”

The boy glanced at the bridge, and then back at Lex with an completely stricken expression on his face. He answered, “You did.”

‘But how did we survive?’ Lex wondered to himself. The boy seemed to be thinking the same thing, as he said aloud, “I don't know how we survived. It's a miracle, maybe?”
The boy was so shaken up by the whole thing that Lex couldn't help but believe him.

That was a part of why he had decided against having Roger Nixon investigate the crash. Clark Kent had been clearly befuddled as he were over the fact that they survived, and thus wouldn't have the answer he wanted.

Having Nixon look into the crash would mean that the reporter would eventually investigate Clark Kent, which was really unfair to a young man who were in the dark as much as he was. No, the fair thing would be to approach Clark Kent personally and ask him if he would be willing to aid Lex in his quest for the answers. Lex just had to wait for the right time to broach that subject with Clark.

He turned and walked back into his mansion, towards his study. First thing, he had to get in contact with Amanda Rothman and warn her about Nixon. He opened up his contacts list, and flipped though his pages until he found the number he wanted.

He smiled as he started dialing. The two of them hadn't spoken for a long time, so he couldn't help but look forward to chatting with her again. Things had been rather awkward between them last time for good reason, which is probably why she hadn't spoken to him for a while. But he hoped that things had smoothed over between them with time, and that she wouldn't think too badly of him if he called her out of the blue like this.

The line kept on ringing for a while, and Lex was about to give up by the tenth ring when it finally picked up.

“Hello?” A male voice asked. It sounded tired, and rough, like the male had been crying for a while.

Lex cleared his throat. “Is Amanda Rothman there? I need to speak to her.”

The male was silent save for his hitching breath. It sounded like he was on the verge of tears again. He finally spoke. “Haven't you heard?”


The male let out a mirthless chuckle. “Far from it. She's dead.”

Lex felt lightheaded, yet his body itself also felt weighted down by a bunch of heavy bounders at the same time. Was this what shock felt like? Lex started breathing heavily as he whispered into the cellphone, “I see....”

“Hey, who is this anyway?” The male on the other end demanded to know.

Lex was in a state of shock, and he didn't feel like responding to anything right now... so he pressed the “hang up” button on his flip cellphone, which disconnected the call.

He bent over on his desk, his head resting on his arms as his mind raced 160 miles an hour.

Damn it! Fuck, what was all of this for then? Club Zero.... was it all completely pointless after all. Lex thought he had been protecting his friends, but maybe that was far from the truth. His body
stiffened when he realized something. What if Amanda had committed suicide because of what happened then? Then that would mean that Lex was at fault for Amanda's death.

That thought didn't sit too well with him. He sat back in his seat, and glanced over at his bar. God, he needed a drink or two right now.

--Thursday, in Torch's basement office--

Lana sat between Chloe and Pete as she started up the tape, and started listening to the female voice that was speaking on the tape.

"Ladies and gentlemen, graduating seniors: good evening. Those familiar words open every graduation speech at Smallville High, and I use them deliberately because the rest of my speech will not be so reassuring. I never made a difference here, but maybe my children can. When I first came to Smallville High, I was full of hope. Hope that I could make an impact. That it would be different for me. That I could change Smallville instead of letting it change me. Unfortunately, four years later, I stand before you as valedictorian of the graduating class of 1977, and all I can tell you is that you should be ashamed of yourselves. I know these speeches are supposed to be about memories, about shared moments that will last a lifetime. But my best memory of Smallville is the day I realized I could leave this town behind. Though my memories are few, my regrets are many. I regret that I didn’t stand up for James Alexander when he was picked on in the cafeteria. That I didn’t speak up when Sally Adams left town because she was socially excommunicated by a group of girls she called friends. I should have spoken out, should have said something, should have raised my voice in protest. But I didn’t. I sat quietly with my mouth shut, just like the rest of you. I put on my cheerleading uniform and my pom-pom smile, and when the going got rough, I recessed into a book. That’s probably what got me here in front of you today. But I’d happily give it all back if I could. I’d trade in the pom-poms and the straight A’s and the college acceptance for just one thing: the chance to stand up for what was right. So you see, you should be ashamed of yourselves, but no one is more ashamed than I. Good luck with your futures. I hope you leave the cruelty and ignorance behind–I know I will."

Lana blinked back tears as she listened to her mother, Laura Lang, speak in her graduation speech. The tape ended then.

Chloe blinked, and raised one eyebrow. “Well, I know now why they didn’t print that in the school newspaper.”

“Yeah, that entire speech was like one big 'F-you' to the entire graduation class of Smallville.” Pete agreed.

“She lied to me.” Lana said, and they just looked at her in confusion.

“Who lied to you?” Chloe wondered. Lana looked up at both Chloe and Pete.

“Aunt Nell. She created this entire fantasy life that my mother apparently had but never did. She then tried to rear me to be like this fake Laura Lang that she made up. My whole life, she completely lied to me about every aspect of Laura Lang's life... and she often berated me for not being able to live up to Laura Lang's name. I always wondered why I was never able to match up to Laura Lang... but now I know why. It's because Aunt Nell's version of Laura was way too perfect to be human.” Lana explained in what was a very bitter tone of voice.
Chloe and Pete looked at each other and wondered what exactly was the proper response to that. They both didn’t know how to respond to that little bit of information. Lana Lang plastered on her best smile, and decided to change the subject. “So! Since you helped me find Laura Lang’s graduation speech...As agreed, I'll tell you everything about what I can remember regarding that strange incident.”

Chloe perked up at this, and then took out the tape of Laura’s speech out of her recorder, and popped in a new blank tape. She pressed the record button. “Alright, please recall everything you can about what happened that day.”

Lana took a few breaths, as she closed her eyes. It helped her remember things better. “I was playing outside. I was trying to catch some butterflies in a jar... and I remember clearly how nice the sun felt on my skin that day. Then, those masked men dressed all in black just jumped out of the bushes near Nell's house, running towards me. They scared me so badly.... I started running for the house, but they were faster than me. They knocked me down to the ground, and injected me with this gun-like injector thing. I remember it hurting a lot, and I felt weird afterwards. It must had been the chemicals they injected me with.”

“Did they do anything else after that?” Chloe asked.

“Well, after they knocked me down they started talking with each other. But I'm not sure what I heard as a little girl was what they really talked about, because it didn't make sense. I could have heard it wrong... you know how kids are, sometimes they mishear things.” Lana answered.

“What did they talk with each other about? Even if it doesn't make sense, it's still something to go on.” Chloe encouraged her to remember much as she could.

“Well, they said something about taking away my powers so that some person would be safe. They talked about the meteor rocks around Smallville and then they stole the necklace I had, even though I fought hard to stop that from happening. Aunt Nell started screaming my name, and the men ran away before she rushed out of the house to save me. I remember being completely inconsolable for months over that necklace being stolen from me.”

Chloe's ears perked up at the mention of powers, and she couldn't help but excitedly grill Lana some more over that part. “What kind of powers did they think you had? And what did your necklace have to do with that? What kind of necklace was it?”

Lana shook her head. “I didn't have any so-called powers... at least I'm sure sure I didn't have any? As for my necklace... it was special, one of a kind. My Aunt Nell gave it to me the day she officially adopted me. She told me that it was a piece of the meteor rock that killed my parents.”

Chloe raised her eyebrows at this slightly. Wow, that was kind of morbid... giving a little girl something like that? She glanced over at Pete and noticed that he was just as creeped out as she was.

Lana chuckled. “Yes, I'm aware that it sounds morbid. But Aunt Nell tried to make it into this deep, meaningful thing. She wanted to show me that change was both beautiful and painful at the same time, but that it didn't make life any less wonderful. Or something like that... I don't quite remember what she said to me exactly. She thought it would help me cope with what happened to my parents.”

Chloe snorted slightly at this. “No offense...but if my own parents had died under those circumstances I would had thought getting a necklace made out of the same rock that killed your parents would had been the worst thing ever. I mean... who the hell wants a constant reminder that they died by being struck down by rocks from space? I would prefer something that celebrated their life, not their death.”
Lana thought this over... and she shrugged. “I never thought about it that way. So what do you think would have made a better gift, then? One that would celebrate my parents' life and not their death?”

Chloe mulled the question over some before answering. “I would like items that showed evidence that they led a happy life. A photo-book full of their life events like their wedding. Their school rings, the school jackets. Films of family gatherings, that sort of thing. Not only would that help me get to know them, but it would also give me comfort that they led a good life, however brief it was.” Pete nodded at this. “Yeah. My family keeps those journals that was handed down by our recent ancestors. I read them sometimes... and It really helped me get to know my own great-grandfather, since he died before I was born. It's weird how much I was able to relate to him even though he lived in a completely different time period than I did.”

Lana smiled slightly at this. She replied, “Well... I did manage to discover my mother's diary recently. I guess I'll continue to get to know her through it. And I'll dig around, see if I can find more of her things...”

Chloe nodded at this, and then she noticed that her recorder was still going. “Oh! I forgot to turn off my recorder. Did you have any more extra details about the attacks that you'd like to share?” Lana shook her head. “There aren't anything else. That was the entire story.”

Chloe stopped her recorder then, with a slight sheepish smile. “Yeah, I need to save space for the other interviewees.”

Lana took this as her cue to leave, since there wasn't really anything else here for her to do here. She stood up as she spoke, “So, I'll see you guys around.”

Both Pete and Chloe nodded, and they waved at her as she walked out. Chloe turned to face Pete. “So do you think Tina would mind if I interviewed her about this? Or maybe I should leave her as last on the list?” Pete grimaced slightly. “Put her as last. If you interview her so soon after our date, she's going to know I blabbed to you about what happened to her. Not that she asked me to keep it a secret, but still...”

Chloe grinned. “And you want a second date with her, huh? Alright, I'll put her off until the last minute. Who's next on the list, then?” Pete opened up the dusty old newspaper. “Let me see. Hmm, the next person on the list is Allison Sanders.”

Clark walked though the Luthor mansion, whistling a tune to himself. He was here to deliver the groceries, and he thought he'd check on Lex Luthor once again. This time, he wouldn't let a migraine or a freaky new power get in the way. He also hoped that Lionel wasn't hanging around, because it had been kind of awkward last time Lionel was here.

It had felt strange finally meeting the person that his dad hated so much. From the way dad kept on raving and ranting about Lionel, Clark had half-expected Lionel to have sinister-looking red eyes, literal horns and a devil's tail. But in person, Lionel just looked like a normal-looking businessman around Jonathan's age. The kind of man you wouldn't even look at twice if he wasn't a famous billionaire with a huge company.

Clark's smile faded the minute he walked into Lex's office, and saw Lex lying down by the bar. His head was propped up by a pillow, which indicated that lex laid there on purpose. But, there was broken glass all around him too, which led to the assumption that Lex must had suffered some kind of accident. Clark rushed over to Lex's side, and pulled him away from the broken glass. Lex stirred slightly when the light from the windows touched his face.
Lex groaned as the light tried to drag him into the land of wakefulness, and he moved to shield his face from it by putting an arm over his face. He was so out of it that he didn't even realize that somebody was holding him.

“Lex! Are you alright?” Clark cried out as he tried to shake Lex awake gently as possible. Lex opened his bloodshot eyes and stared up at Clark blearily. “Clark? What are you doing in my bedroom?”

Clark stared down at his friend with a concerned look on his face. “You're not in your bed, Lex. This is the study. I found you sleeping on the floor... with broken glass around you..?”

Lex frowned at this, as he glanced around him to verify Clark's words. The memory came back to him, and he groaned. “Shit. That's right...”

“What happened, Lex?” Clark wondered.

“Yesterday, I was reminded of some old friends in my past. There was this good friend of mine called Amanda Rothman. I had this urge to call her and see how she was doing, since we hadn't spoken for a while. But I found out that she committed suicide...her funeral was held weeks ago, and I didn't even know about any of that until I called.” Lex paused and sighed, “The worse part? She's the second friend I've had who also committed suicide. I had this best friend in high school named Duncan... and he killed himself in front of me.”

This shocked Clark into silence, because that hadn't been what he expected to hear at all.

“I had a drink to take the edge off the shock I felt when I first heard about Amanda... but I needed another drink when I remembered Duncan too. Thinking about both Amanda and Duncan all at once... I needed a third drink for that. Things got fuzzy after that...” Lex tried to explain the predicament he had gotten himself into.

Clark frowned slightly. So if he got Lex's story right, Lex had drank so much that he just fell asleep there on the spot. But that would mean...

“Lex, you mean to tell me you were lying on the floor like this all night? And nobody here checked up on you?” Clark nearly yelled as he was too upset at the thought that nobody at the mansion had cared enough to check up on Lex this entire time.

“Well, I kinda gave most of the staff the night off yesterday... I wanted to be alone, you see...” Lex answered.

Well, that did explain why the mansion seemed quieter and more empty than usual today when Clark went to drop off the groceries. In fact he had seen a note that he had to put the groceries into the kitchen's fridge so that the cook could sort through it tomorrow.

“Jesus, Lex. You wanted to be alone, but you went and did something dangerous like this? What if you had died of alcohol poisoning? What if you landed in that broken glass over there and cut yourself badly while you were passed out? You could had bled to death!” Clark was really yelling
Lex winced at Clark's voice. While Lex's hangovers weren't as bad as what other people had usually, it could still get pretty bad...especially if he drank as much as he did last night. He had honestly lost count after the fourth bottle of scotch he emptied. It was probably a good thing that he was pretty much immune to alcohol poisoning.... thanks to a certain “gift” he had.

“Could you please whisper? You're killing me with that loud voice right now.” Lex grumbled slightly.
Clark pinched his nose, as if he had a headache. “You're lucky right now that all you suffer from right now is a hangover. From what I saw, this could had turned out much worse!”

Clark seemed to make up his mind over something just then, and he promptly picked up Lex. He then started carrying Lex bridal style out of the study.
“What.. what are you doing?” Lex sputtered in surprise as he found himself being carried against his well.

“I'm carrying you to your bed.” Clark answered, as he went up the stairs. He narrowed his eyes as he X-rayed though all of the rooms on the second floor. There was an amazingly large number of bedrooms on this floor for some reason. He kicked some doors open, and then looked into each one for any sign that it belonged to Lex. “Which one is yours?”

Lex snorted. Clark clearly had no idea where he was going. So to make it easy on the farmboy, he described what his bedroom was like. “My bedroom's on the third floor. It's the ones with carved wood walls, grayish-blue drapes and a thick maroon comforter on the bed. There's also a flat-screen TV over a white marble fireplace directly across the bed.”

“Oh.” Clark moved towards the stair leading to the third floor. “Why do you have so many bedrooms here anyway?”
Lex closed his eyes for a moment, since all this movement wasn't exactly good for his hangover. He was slowly but steadily starting to feel sick. “Well, besides the fact that it's a historical castle that had more than a dozen servants living in it? It's good for a party, I guess... I mean, the guests could stay here overnight and everything. Not going to host a party anytime soon though.”

“I see...” Clark moved fast as he could without seeming too super-humanly fast, but that just seemed to make Lex look even more ill by the minute. Clark was briefly worried for a few seconds that Lex might throw up on him. He was torn between wanting to slow down so that Lex wouldn't feel too sick from the movement and speeding up towards the bedroom so that Lex wouldn't throw up on him.

In the end Lex didn't throw up, and Clark managed to place Lex on his bed without incident.

Clark pointed a finger at Lex as he said in his best commanding voice, “Stay there. I'll be right back.” and he rushed out of the room.
‘What am I, some kind of dog?’ Lex mentally grumbled to himself, but he stayed where he was
anyway. His prone form relaxed against the mattress, and it seemed as if his entire body was crying out in relief. He could feel parts of himself start to ache from spending an entire night on the floor unconscious.

Lex snorted. And he thought he had left that behind him the minute he became an adult... seems like his partying-hard past wouldn't let go of him so easily. Jesus, that was such a depressing thought.

He flung his arm over his eyes, and closed them. He must had dozed off for a few minutes without realizing it because all of a sudden Clark was already back. Clark came into the room carrying a tray with a pitcher of ice water on it, and a pair of glass cups. He placed it on the side table by Lex and then sat down on the bed.

He started speaking as he poured the water into the glasses, “I cleaned up the mess downstairs, and I spoke to my folks over the phone. I told them what happened, and they said it would be okay for me to stay here and watch you until 11pm. I hope you don't mind.”

Lex frowned, and then he realized that he didn't know what time it was. “Wait a minute. It's Thursday, right? Shouldn't you be in school... or did I sleep on the floor longer than I thought?”

Clark smiled. “There was some kind of conference for the school staff today, so its a half day today... meaning all students get off early. I left school around 12pm. I found you today at 1pm.”

Lex’s head fell back on his pillow at this. “Damn. I was still out for a long time. I wasn't exactly paying attention to the time last night, so I don't know what time I slept. It's a good thing that I don't have to go to work today otherwise I would had really been in trouble...” he chuckled mirthless at the last part.

Clark frowned at Lex. “You've got to take better care of yourself. And I think there's better ways to cope with your grief other than to drink yourself into oblivion. For instance... you could talk to me.”

Lex smirked bitterly at this. “No offense... but, Luthors don't exactly talk about their feelings...” Clark glared at the prone form on the bed. “It's still better than that unhealthy coping mechanism of yours. And I'm not leaving until you talk to me.”

“Even if I wanted to talk to you about this I wouldn't know what to say. I mean... I already told you why I drank myself into unconsciousness, what else is there?” Clark thought about this for a few minutes, and then he answered, “Well, you could tell me about Amanda and Duncan. It might do you some good to talk about how great they are? I hear it's better to cope with grief by recalling all the good times you had.”

Lex groaned slightly at this. He didn't really want to talk about Duncan... it practically had been a whole decade since he was in that damned boarding school, and it still felt too raw thinking about Duncan. Otherwise he wouldn't had so many drinks trying to drown that decades-old pain along with the newfound pain he gained upon hearing about Amanda's death.

“Sorry, I don't feel like opening up to you over something so personal. I really do consider you a
friend, but this isn't something I want or like to talk about.” Lex muttered stubbornly. He was starting to feel better now that his body was rapidly processing the alcohol in his system... and he was starting to regret being honest with Clark over what happened earlier. But at least he could blame that on alcohol.

This was exactly why he liked to drink alone... he never drank with or in front of company if he could help it. Because he had this annoying tendency to open up to others and become too honest for his own good. Alcohol was like a truth serum for him... yet it was so very effective at numbing his feelings, so there was times when he became dependent on it to cope with certain things. It was probably his biggest weakness.

Lex thought that Clark was going to protest some more, and tell Lex that he should be more emotionally open. And Lex was now fully prepared to argue against that for as long as he could.

But to his surprise, Clark simply nodded and said: “Okay. Where’s the TV remote?”

Lex pointed to the remote which was resting on the fireplace mantle, and Clark moved towards it. The teenage boy grabbed it, and then moved around to the other side of the bed. Clark sat there, as he turned on the TV, and channel-surfed until he landed on an channel that showed nothing but movies.

“I can't believe you actually have over 280 channels! We only have 25 at home.” Clark remarked at the TV set up that Lex had, while the Billionaire stared at him quizzically.

“Aren't you going to lecture me some more about how I should find ways to express myself in a more healthy way?” Lex wondered.

Clark glanced back at him. “Not really. I've already said my piece on that, as did you. We all have different ways of coping with things, and frankly I think it's equally unhealthy to try to force you to do something you don't want to do. So instead, I'm going to stay here with you and watch movies. Is that alright?”

Lex silently acquiesced to this, and just laid back to look at the movie that Clark selected on TV.

“What's that movie called?”

“You've never watched the Princess Bride before?” Clark asked with a tone of disbelief in his voice. Lex simply shook his head. “well you're in for a treat...” Clark told him as he continued to enthuse about the movie while the two of them watched it...

“Wow, what a life this poor woman led..” Chloe replied, as she read though the files she had managed to get on Allison Sanders.
“Oh?” Pete looked up from his task of sorting though the old addresses and current addresses of all the 8 kids who were attacked.

“During the meteor shower, she was a 15-year-old teenager who were having sex with her boyfriend for the first time when the meteors hit. Hell of a way to remember your first time... And then when she was 16 years old her boyfriend killed her parents.” Chloe explained Allison's past, “But that's not all. When she was 17 she changed her name to Desiree and married some older guy named Mr. Atkins... nobody objected to it for some reason, despite the large gaps in their age. Probably because the age of consent for girls in Kansas is 15 years of age, and Desiree Atkins were going to be 18 years old soon at the time anyway. But the marriage didn't last very long... as the guy divorced her not too long after she was attacked by the mystery men.”

“Desiree Atkins? Uhh... no offense to her, but that sounds like a porn star's name. I mean, I get why she would want to change her name. if she wanted to get away from her traumatic past and the gossip in town that would be one way to do it. But, she could had picked a better name than that.” Pete replied. At Chloe's dirty look, he shrugged. “What? I'm just saying.”

Chloe hated to admit it, but secretly she thought that Pete was right. It was really a trashy-sounding name...and she couldn't help but wonder what possessed Allison to change her name to that. But she didn't want any biases about Allison aka Desiree before she got the chance to interview her. It was just too bad that Desiree disappeared off the map after her husband left her....otherwise Chloe would had been securing that interview one way or the other.

So the next person on the list was a guy named Kyle Tippet. He used to be a junior salesman at the farm equipment store, back then when he was 17 going on 18. Chloe noted with some interest that Kyle used to be a very terrible salesman, until he was trapped in his car for two days during the meteor shower. After that it was like he could get anybody to buy anything no matter how useless it was. But, he was attacked by the mystery men and then stopped selling farm equipment altogether afterwards.
Kyle went to metropolis for a while, and returned some years later with a new pregnant wife. He currently lived in pleasant meadows, the same neighborhood area in Smallville where Chloe lived, although they weren't exactly neighbors.

Chloe smiled. Perfect, she could go see Kyle on her way home and interview him.

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--a hour later--

Chloe managed to find Kyle's residence without any problems, and it was a nice-looking Victorian house that had been brightly painted yellow and white.

A man who Chloe assumed was Kyle played with his daughter in the front yard... he was swinging her around, while the little girl shrieked with delight. Chloe couldn't help but smile at this cheerful scene, and she hoped that she wasn't going to ruin that mood for him if he agreed to be interviewed by her.
“Um, hello?” Chloe called out to him from behind the white picket fence.

Kyle put his daughter down, and walked over. “Yeah? Can I help you?”

Chloe let out a sheepish chuckle. Interviewing Lana was easy because she was around the same age. But Chloe had never interviewed an adult before... and Lex Luthor didn't really count. Lex had that older teenage vibe, even though he was an adult running an entire factory.

“I know this is sudden... but I was wondering if I could interview you? It has something to do with something you went through as a kid...”

Kyle just looked confused at this. “Huh? What are you talking about?”

So Chloe explained that she had been looking into unsolved cases, like the case of the mystery men who attacked up to 8 kids before disappearing into thin air. It had taken some doing, but Chloe managed to talk Kyle into letting her interview him.

So they all went into his house, and he made tea while Chloe asked his questions.

“I find it interesting that you used to be a lousy salesman until you were trapped in a car for two days during the meteor shower. After that, it was like you were the best salesman that Smallville ever had seen. But you stopped doing that after the mystery men attacked you. Why is that?” Chloe got straight to the point, as this was something she wondered about on her way over to Kyle's house.

Kyle chuckled as he brought the cups of teas over to the table. “Wow, you're very thorough in your research, huh? Ummm... I don't think you'd believe me if I told you the truth though.”

Chloe smirked. “Clearly you don't really read the school newspaper, or notice the strange things that happen in this town. Trust me, I've had my share of strange stuff. So dish it out already.”

Kyle didn't really want to talk about what happened to him years ago, but there was something about Chloe that just made him want to tell her. Plus he supposed it would be nice to talk to somebody about it, as seeing he had never told anybody this before. “Alright. Remember, I warned you that it's hard to believe.”

Chloe simply nodded, and Kyle told his story.

“I had this part-job as a teenager selling farm equipment alongside my best friend Bob Rickman. It was just something I did when I wasn't in school, so that I could save up money for college... because I as sure as hell weren't getting into any college on a scholarship. But Bob and I sucked at it... after all, we were just a pair of 15-year-olds trying too hard to be persuasive hotshots. So naturally nobody took us seriously. But that all changed during the meteor shower...”
Kyle paused to gather his thoughts, as he continued the story. “This was when things became strange and very wrong quickly. Both Bob and I discovered that we had somehow gained the power to make people do anything we wanted. All we had to do was shake their hands, and they would instantly fall under our spell. I was somewhat weirded out by it all, but Bob embraced our new ability and told me that we should enjoy it while it lasted. So over two years we quickly became the top best salesman at the store, despite the fact that many of our victims would often return to the store complaining that they didn’t remember making such a purchase.

I always felt bad for influencing people like that just to make a quick buck, and tried to not abuse it too much. But Bob was the total opposite.... he was always pushing it, seeing how far he could go. He even used this ability with women to... well, you know. Then one day, when we were both 17 going on 18 he told me that he was going to make the owner write his will so that we would own the store after the owner died. I wondered what the point of that was, when the owner clearly weren’t going to die any time soon.... but Bob told me that he planned for the owner to commit suicide in public.”

Kyle stopped at this part, clearly upset at the memory. Chloe was recording all of this on her tape recorder... and she wasn't sure what to think. On one hand, she had seen her share of some truly bizarre stuff, like that giant pig the size of a two-story house. But a part of her didn't want to believe that kind of power truly existed. It sounded like such a creepy power that could only ever be used for evil. Kyle had even implied that Bob basically used his power to legally rape women by mind-controlling them... which Chloe found to be too creepy and appalling. This was one of the reasons why she secretly hoped this story was fake. In fact she was tempted to ask Kyle to prove that he had this power.

Unfortunately, the way Kyle said it made her believe all of it was true.

“What happened next?” Chloe promoted him to continue.

Kyle sighed. “Well, I got into a fight with Bob... it was a real tussle, with us punching the living daylights out of each other. And then out of nowhere, those mystery men appeared and knocked us down both to the ground. As they pinned us to the ground, we were injected with something... and then they disappeared. After that, our powers were gone... just like that.”

Kyle's face brightened as he gave Chloe a genuine smile. “You have no idea how much of a relief it was, having our powers removed. I mean, the longer we had those powers the more I felt that this power was evil. It was the kind of power that was specifically designed to be abused by evil... I literally couldn't think of any uses in which it could be used for good. It boiled down to mind-controlling people against their wills... so even if I did something like attempting to reform criminals using this power they wouldn't have truly repented for their crimes, and after the mind-control wore off they would just be back to their old selves. So all you could use this power for.... well, you know. I explained it all to you.”

Chloe nodded. There was powers out there that could be used for good... but it did make sense that there would also be powers that was clearly designed to be evil, because the only way it could be used was to commit bad deeds.
“But Bob Rickman didn't feel the same way I did. He was like a man addicted to the power that his ability brought... so he became desperate to have it back, after he discovered that he could no longer influence people against their wills. And the more desperate he got, the more obsessed he got with getting it back. He wound up telling everyone about what he could do, or rather used to do. Of course everyone thought he was crazy, and he ended up in Belle Reeve. I think he's still there.” Kyle's face grew solemn the more he thought about his former friend.

Chloe smiled weakly as she replied, “And you were the one who ended up having a happy ending to this story. I mean, from what I see you don't seem to be doing too badly.”

Kyle smiled, as he glanced at a picture on the wall which had his wife and kid in it. “That's true. I suppose if I still had this power, I would had gone into hiding to avoid using it on anybody, even by accident. Because I hated having it, you know. And I would had never met my wonderful wife in metropolis, nor would I be blessed with a child of my own. In many ways I'm truly grateful to the men who took my power away.”

Chloe smiled at this. “So who do you think the men were? Government agents or something?” Kyle shrugged. “At first I did think they were government agents. But if they were then it doesn't make sense. Why wouldn't everyone in town be vaccinated against whatever it was that was giving people harmful powers then? Why attack only eight kids?”

‘good question’ Chloe thought to herself. At this moment Kyle's wife came home, and their daughter rushed towards the front door to greet her mother. “Mommy!”
Kyle looked at the time. “Oh. I have to make dinner now. You can see yourself out, Chloe?”

Chloe simply nodded, and left for the front door. She called out as she left, “Thanks for the interview, Mr. Tippet. You were helpful.”

Once she was outside walking towards her own home, her face grew serious. This story were far more complex than she first thought it was... and she was now fully determined to uncover the rest of this mystery, no matter what it took.

Lex couldn't remember the last time he had laughed so much. As the credits rolled, he replied: “You're right. This is a pretty good movie.”

Clark grinned. “I told you so! It's one of my favorite movies.”

Lex suddenly found himself itchy all over, and he realized it was because he was not only in his clothes from yesterday, but because he was sweaty. He wrinkled his nose in disgust when he realized that he probably looked like total shit. “Ugh.”

“What?” Clark had noticed Lex's reaction, and wondered what was up. Lex got up. “I need a shower and a change of clothes badly. Do you mind going downstairs and wait there for me while I change?”
Clark nodded. “Sure.”

After 30 minutes, Lex felt human again once he stepped out of the shower. And all the alcohol he
drank last night was now fully out of his system thanks to his fast metabolism. He smiled wryly when he recalled all that water that Clark had forced him to drink. Normally that was a very good thing to do if you were a normal human who could die from alcohol poisoning.... but in Lex's case it just meant that he would pee a lot later on. Still, it was nice to have Clark fussing over him... nice and annoying at the same time?

Life was so strange when a person easily could be both annoyed and touched by a friend's overzealous concern for their life, all at the same time. It always rankled him whenever somebody tried to tell him what to do, what was good for him, etc. Lex supposed that came about from decades of having an controlling father. But what Lionel did in order to control him, Clark seemed to want the opposite effect. Clark wanted Lex to get well, so that he would take back control of his own life.

He realized that he probably had left Clark waiting too long, so he quickly dressed and rushed down the stairs.

Clark was sitting on the sofa inside the office room, looking though his school textbooks, and his other school-related things were scattered all over the coffee table. Clark smiled as he looked up. “Hey. You took quite a while in the shower.”

Lex nodded. “Yeah. I needed that shower. I feel completely refreshed now.”

Clark nodded, as he looked over Lex. “Yeah, you look like a million bucks now. Before, you looked..... well....terrible.”
Lex smirked, and couldn't help but tease Clark over his comment. “Only a million? I suppose I should be offended by that, considering I'm worth more than that.”
Clark chuckled. “You not only look much better, but you apparently also feel that way too. I'm glad.”
Lex moved to sit by Clark on the sofa, and asked: “Did I really look so bad that it freaked you out?”

Clark shifted nervously. “It wasn't so much your looks, as it was what you did. I mean, you were sleeping on the floor next to broken glass like it was no big deal. And, when I cleaned up while you were napping upstairs I noticed how many bottles were empty...”

“You've never seen anybody drink in excess before?” Lex wondered.

Clark simply shook his head. “No. But then again, most folks around here know better than to drink a dozen of beer straight out of the can. Usually they're content with just one or two beer cans' worth. And you were drinking stuff that was so much stronger than simple beer... isn't scotch so much stronger than beer? I know you're an adult, Lex, so you can do whatever you want... but... I just feel that maybe you're overdoing it?”

“So you're telling me that I should do things in moderation. I suppose that's good advice as any. But it's not as if I do this all the time...I very rarely drink unless the occasion calls for it. So you don't have to worry about this, Clark.” Lex tried to reassure Clark and make himself look good in front of his teenage friend at the same time.
Clark did seem reassured by this, as he smiled at Lex. He then pulled out some brochures out of his school bag and handed them to Lex.
Lex looked at Clark quizzically as he found himself holding what seemed to be a bunch of pamphlets. “What's this?”
Clark refused to explain, and simply just told him to read those. So Lex looked at them, and couldn't help but make a face of disbelief as he read the titles of the pamphlets out loud.

“What to do if you or a friend have an addiction problem. How to tell if you're in an abusive relationship. How to deal with abusive parents. How to win friends and influence people...?” Lex shook his head at Clark. “Did you just seriously hand me self-help pamphlets? And just exactly why do you have those things in the first place.”

Clark shrugged. “Well, you won't talk to me about your problems. I know you said you don't drink that often, but... I thought you still might need some help just in case? As for your question...you remember Coach Walt and how it turned out that he was an abusive coach? They passed out stuff like this to all the football players so that they could know how to cope with that. I thought it was very informative, so I got some more of them to read at home. I mean, you never know when I need to help somebody out of those situations.... right?”

Lex blinked at this. So if he heard this right, Clark was basically saying that the reason why he kept on collecting those self-help pamphlets for every kind of abuse possible was because he wanted the ability to tell when somebody might be in danger, and save them. How typical of Clark.... who very clearly had some kind of hero complex. Although, that last one he had read out loud didn't seem to fit with the theme... it sounded like Clark had picked that one out to help himself instead of others.

“So... you're saying all of this is so you can help everyone? Even this last one... How to win friends and influence people....” Lex couldn't help but tease Clark over that one. Clark blushed slightly at that.

“Okay, that last one did catch my interest... After all it's not like I'm exactly popular at school.” He admitted.

“I still don't understand how you could be unpopular. I mean... you're very good-looking, so you should be popular with the girls... and maybe some of the boys. You're very charming as a person... so you can easily get along with everyone.” Lex said as he looked down at the pamphlet on winning friends. Lex wouldn't admit it out loud, but the title did interest him a little bit. After all, Lex could do with a few more friends himself.

Clark smiled shyly as Lex complimented him over his looks and his behavior. His smile faded as he knew exactly why he wasn't popular... he couldn't let himself get too close to others, or let himself get too popular that he was constantly in the public eye. That just created a higher chance of being found out as an alien. The only reason why he even took that pamphlet was so that he could learn how to blend in more better.

Clark changed the subject then. “Anyway.... you should read though those things. I know it sounds stupid at first. after all, you always assume that you would know if somebody was being abusive or
whatever. But I've discovered that you can gain some new insights if you just give it a chance. Plus it would make me happy, since you won't talk to me about what's bothering you....”
With that Clark gave Lex his best patented puppy dog look... which was obviously designed to get his parents and other adult figures to say yes to him whenever he wanted something.

Lex smiled. “Alright, I'll read them if it'll make you happy. I still don't see how it could help me though...”
Clark grinned brilliantly, pleased that Lex was willing to do something that he suggested.

Chapter End Notes

This continues next chapter....
This ep is modeled after "Cool", one of my least favorite eps ever. But Lex plays a strong role here, so....

Lex knew it was kind of creepy and weird to be doing a background check on his friend's family, but he couldn't help himself. He just wanted to know more about the life of Clark Kent.

It turned out that the Kents were doing alright for themselves. They had regular customers amongst the citizens of Smallville, but there was some company that kept on ordering food from too. That mysterious laboratory outside of Smallville that Chloe and Clark mentioned once, kept on ordering vegetables from the Kent on a weekly basis as well. Apparently they sent somebody to come pick up the food and they often paid the Kents in large sums of cash. Which perked Lex's interest-- why did they only pay in cash, instead of a check?

Lex made a mental note to himself to check out that laboratory, considering that he was kind of curious about it. After all, what kind of place researched meteor rocks, and were even willing to hire an discredited college professor-slash-meteorologist? Plus, Lex himself wanted to start studying the meteor rocks too, so that place seemed like a good place as any to start.

Lex had thought about doing something to support the Kents, such as becoming an investor in their farm. But he knew Jonathan and Martha well enough to know that they would never take up his offer, especially not when their farm was doing alright. True, their farm wasn't a commercial success story all over the nation, but they did well enough to keep their farm afloat on a regular basis. And it seemed like they had been saving money so that there was enough for Clark to go to college, even without a scholarship.

So Lex's help wasn't needed there. He wasn't sure whenever to be disappointed or relieved that Clark's family was doing so well. Lex supposed that he would just have to find some other way to insert himself into the Kents' lives and win over their hearts.

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---Saturday Night---

It was two days ever since Chloe started looking into the mysterious attacks from years ago. She had discovered that the mystery men might be getting rid of meteor mutants by removing their powers, but her investigation had hit a dead end for now. She had located Bob at Belle Reeve, but he had gotten so overly agitated when Chloe asked him about the day he lost his powers. Nothing Bob said made sense at all... it was just a bunch of incoherent nonsense. And the orderlies weren't happy that she had upset one of their patients, so they had asked her to leave.

And Pete wasn't able to dig up any more information about where the rest of the kids were now. So far, they only managed to find out about five “victims” so far, and they had no idea about the rest of the people. 8 kids all together, their full names listed in the newspaper... and Chloe somehow couldn't find them all right away? It shouldn't be that hard, but somehow it was.

So, that's why she decided they needed a break from it for now. New info would eventually turn up
anyhow... it always did. She was at the yearly bonfire party with Pete and Clark right now.... and regretting it.

“Okay, I thought it'd be fun to hang out at this party... but did it have to be so cold?? I swear it's 2,000 degrees below zero!” Chloe grumbled, as she rubbed her arms for warmth.

Clark frowned, as he looked around. “it doesn't feel that cold to me?”

Chloe scoffed. “Where are you from, an ice planet?? I'm going to sit over there by the fire.”

Pete grinned when he spotted Tina Greener standing around with a group of girls. He rubbed his hands eagerly as he told Clark, “I'm gonna go and see if Tina is willing to warm me up... if you know what I mean. Don't wait up for me.”

Clark found himself standing alone by himself, and he sighed. His mood became even more depressed when he noticed that this bonfire party was basically a party for couples, because everyone seemed to be pairing up right and left for make-out sessions. But his face lightened up slightly when he noticed Lana sitting alone on a log by herself. She looked equally uncomfortable at this party just like he was...

So he went over, and said in an slightly awkward tone of voice: “So.... this party wasn't what I expected. I thought there would be socializing, but not *this* kind of socializing. I feel so out of place here... how about you?”

Lana looked up, and smiled when she recognized Clark. She simply nodded at Clark's words, and then replied: “I know, right? Normally I'm not the partying type. Truthfully, I would rather just curl up in my bed and read my books than be out here.... But Joanna told me that I had to act more social, so that I wouldn't be a outcast at school.”

“Really, where is she? I don't see her here.” Clark wondered.

Lana Lang rolled her eyes.

“She's with Whitney over there.” She gestured towards the direction of the parked trucks... and Clark could see Whitney and Joanna making out heavily on the back of Whitney's truck.

Clark raised his eyebrows. “Okay.... that seems a tad rude, dragging you out here and then abandoning you so that she can make out with her boyfriend?”

Lana seemed to feel the need to defend Joanna, even if she was clearly annoyed with her friend for dragging her to a party she didn't want to be at. “Joanna isn't normally like this. She can be a sweetheart most of the time... she just failed to tell me that the point of this part was to find somebody to make out with. That's all. I should really had asked her what kind of party it was going to be...”

Clark sat down by the dark-haired girl, and he shrugged. “Still...you know?” he tried to find the words to convey how annoyed he would be in her place, but he failed.

Lana nodded. “Yeah, me too. Call me old fashioned but I'd like to wait for the right one. I mean, I probably won't wait until marriage because I'm not THAT old fashioned... but I wouldn't hook up
with anybody unless I felt that he was going to be with me for a long time...”

The conversation was interrupted by a blond jock who tapped Clark on the shoulder. “Hey, Clark. You're friends with Chloe right? I wanted to know if she was flying solo tonight.”

The jock gestured over to Chloe, who were sitting by herself at the fire. Clark scowled slightly when he recognized the guy.

It was Sean Kelvin, highly notorious for being a total man-whore who were willing to sleep with every female in town if he was allowed to do so. Rumor though the school grapevine said that he had been caught cheating on his girlfriend a week ago, so his girlfriend had dumped him.

“Believe me, you're not her type.” Clark sounded bitchy but he didn't care.

Sean just chuckled, wriggled his eyebrows as he replied, “You'd be surprised. See ya.” and with that parting remark he walked towards Chloe.

Lana made a face. “Ugh. It's a shock that he hasn't caught some kind of STD by now.”

“I know, he's such a dog.” Clark agreed.

Lana quirked one eyebrow. “You know, you're different from all the other guys. Normally other guys would just say he was a stud for getting laid so many times, or something.”

Clark frowned at being called different, but he replied smoothly like that remark didn't phrase him at all. “The jocks all might think that way, but the rest of guys in school have a different mindset, I promise. At least I'm pretty sure. Besides... while I technically don't think there's anything wrong with people sleeping around... I dislike if they do that while hurting people. I mean, the dude cheated on his girlfriend! It's been barely a week and he's already trolling for fresh meat, like he just didn't break somebody's heart.”

Lana widened her eyes as she witnessed something happen over where Chloe was sitting. “My god, she just gave out her number to him.”

“What?” Clark's head whipped around to see Sean leave Chloe's side with a smug expression on his face.

Chloe glanced up to see Clark walking over with an upset expression on his face. “What's up?”

“Did you just seriously write down your number on his hand??” Clark demanded to know.

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Don't sound so shocked, Clark. Guys do occasionally find me attractive even if I don't have raven hair and the initials L.L.”

Clark sighed. “That's not what I meant. That guy's a total dog.”

“Relax, Clark. I only gave him my number to get rid of him.” Chloe reassured him, as she got up. “I've had enough of this party.... how about you? Ready to leave too?”

Clark simply nodded.

--Monday--

“So did Sean call?” Clark couldn't help but wonder, as he walked alongside his two best buds
towards the school bus.

“Negative. Not that I was waiting by the phone or anything.” Chloe answered.

Pete tried to reassure Chloe as he replied, “Maybe he got caught up. One time my sister didn't hear
from a guy for a week, and it turned out that his grandmother died.”

Chloe scoffed. “Guys, as much as I enjoy the spotlight on myself I'm totally fine. Okay?”

Clark nodded, and repeated what he had told Chloe last night. “Just as well. Sean's a total dog.”

Pete glanced up at Clark. “Come on, he's not that bad. He's always been cool to me. Besides, just
because you can't get past your Lana crush doesn't mean that you can knock the rest of us for trying
to make a love connection.”

“I don't have a crush on Lana.” Clark automatically said, and both his friends just smirked at this.
They clearly didn't believe him.

“Right... I totally didn't see you chatting her up last night at the party?” Chloe teased.

Pete was still smirking, as he challenged Clark, “So ask out another girl, if you've really gotten over
your crush on Lana.”

Clark scowled slightly. “I'm not asking a random girl out just to prove that I got over my crush.”

Chloe giggled slightly, glad that the spotlight was off her. “Well, Clark couldn't even work up the
courage to ask out the girl of his dreams... there's no way he would even be brave enough to ask out
some random girl. He's too chicken for that...”

“HEY!” Clark protested, and he was seriously starting to feel slightly ticked off.

Pete's face brightened up as he thought of a brilliant idea. “Hey! I know, why don't we make it a bet?
Between the three of us, let's see who can land themselves a hot date. The three of us compare notes
on which ones had the best dates, if they even got dates at all. The losers have to do whatever the
winner wants for a week....”

Chloe grinned evilly. “Oooh, nice idea. I like it.” She glanced over at Clark, and gave him a mock
pitying stare. “Of course.... Clark would obviously be the first to lose, since he can't even ask out a
girl.”

“Oh come on. I'm not too chicken to ask somebody out. I can do it easily if I wanted to.” Clark
protested.

“Yeah? Prove it, and you win the bet.” Pete chuckled.

And just like that, Clark found himself agreeing to a bet that he wanted no part of. What had he
gotten himself into??

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God. This was such a terrible idea... He completely had no desire to date Lana no matter how pretty
and attractive she might be. And what would happen if Lana found out that he asked her out because
of a bet? Clark didn't want to hurt her feelings at all.

Damn it. It was times like this that he wished that his 8-year-old past self had never gone around
telling everyone in sight that he was going to marry Lana Lang. His friends never let him let that
down, and because of this they seemed to think that he had this decade-long crush... as if people weren't allowed to outgrow their crush. Besides, he had been only 8-years-old at the time... what did 8-year-olds know what it was like to love somebody in that way? He had simply seen the way the other boys were so nice to Lana Lang, and he just wanted to fit in at the time. That's all there was to it.

“Is there a reason why you're brooding outside a coffee shop?” Lex's voice snapped Clark out of his thoughts, and he turned around to see Lex looking at him strangely.

“Uhh... I was just...?” Clark gestured helplessly towards the Beanery coffee shop, and Lex looked though the windows to see Lana Lang sitting inside reading a book.

The light bulb went on inside Lex's head, and he smirked. “Ahh, I see. Gazing at the love of your life from afar with silent longing. I've been there myself too.”

Clark groaned internally. Damn, not Lex too. And did Lex have to say it in such a soap opera-ish way?

Lex briefly studied the girl in the coffee shop, and he nodded in approval. “You have good taste, she's very pretty. So why aren't you in there asking her out?”

'Because I don't want to?' Clark thought to himself, as he wondered how he could explain to Lex about the bet without sounding like a total jerk. After all, what kind of selfish asshole used girls to win a bet?

Lex mistook Clark's silence for reluctance, and he decided to give Clark some advice. “I know that asking out the girl that you're in love with is often the hardest thing a man can do. But how can you know for sure if she will go out with you or not unless you ask her?”

Clark shook his head. “Even if I asked her out, I have no idea where to take her... all I know about her is that she's quite the bookworm, but the library hardly seems like the romantic place to take her to even if she likes books.”

Lex smirked, clearly having thought of something to fix that problem. “I bet you that if you ask Lana to go with you to a radio head concert, she'll say yes.”

Clark narrowed his eyes at Lex quizzically. Lex was clearly up to something, but what. “And if she says yes?”

Lex whipped out a pair of tickets that he just happened to have. “I'll give you those tickets.”

Clark stared at the tickets, and then at Lex. “Why are you doing this? And you just happened to have tickets lying around?”

Lex shrugged. “As a person of interest, I tend to get free things sent to me by companies for publicity. For some reason they thought I was a radiohead fan, and that the band would get free publicity if I showed up. But I've actually been looking for somebody to give those tickets to since I have no intention of going. Quite frankly, you'd be doing me a favor? I would hate to see those tickets wasted, after all.”

It was the truth, people did have the tendency to send him free items all the time, in the hopes that the paparazzi would see him using those free items and they'd get publicity. Sometimes it was nice to get things for free, but most of the time it was just annoying especially when it came to things that you had no intention of using or never asked for. But he did lie a little bit....
Lex had actually brought those tickets himself, because he had been somewhat worried that Clark was starting to have a bad view of Lex after his embarrassing display of drunkenness a few days ago. Clark hadn't stopped by to see him ever since then... so Lex figured that a gift like that might go a long way in restoring Clark's goodwill towards him. But this was actually a good chance to give Clark the tickets without being too obvious that he was trying to buy Clark's goodwill back.

Clark pondered over this. Lana might forgive him for using her to win a bet if she had the best time of her life... and he honestly had never been to a rock concert before, so he might actually end up having a good time too. Lex saw that Clark was now considering asking Lana out, and decided to add in some extra incentive. “I'll add on to the bet. If you ask her out in the next 60 seconds I'll not only throw in the tickets, but a two-round trip limousine ride.”

That clinched it for Clark. His first concert and his first ride in a limousine, how could he pass that up? He grabbed the tickets straight out of Lex's hand, and rushed inside. Lex made a show of looking at his watch as he counted down.

He saw Lana react to Clark favorably inside the coffee shop, and he could suddenly understand why some old ladies might take such pleasure in playing matchmaker. He felt a buzz of pleasure as his match-making plot went off without a single hitch. He smiled smugly to himself, and muttered under his breath, “Score one for Lex Luthor on the match-making front.”

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--The next day--

“So let me get this straight. You walked in to get some coffee, and ended up having a date with Lana Lang?” Chloe wondered how the hell that was possible. Still, she was impressed. “Even with the 'just friends' rider, I have to say I'm impressed.”

Pete narrowed his eyes at Clark. “How did you score the tickets?”

Chloe grinned at Clark teasingly as she answered Pete, “I'm guessing Clark's new folically challenged friend is behind the tickets. Right, Clark?”

Clark simply nodded. He added, “But of course Chloe had a part in it too. You were right, Chloe. I just had to get it out...”

Chloe then looked at Pete. “Well, Clark already came out front of us on the bet... have you found yourself a date yet?”

Pete couldn't help but look slightly crestfallen. “I was dating Tina Greener for a while, so I thought I had this thing in the bag. But... turns out that she's a popularity hound. She only dates people who are popular and well-loved. Soon as my popularity from winning that football game wore off, she dropped me like a bag of rocks. She's now with some popular jock....”

Clark looked at his male best friend sympathetically. “I'm sorry about that, Pete. You'll find somebody better.”

Pete nodded, and smiled. “You know it. I'm not going to let that setback keep me down. I promise you, by the end of this week I'm going to find myself another hot date!”

Chloe then noticed Sean Kelvin coming her way. She smirked, and told the boys: “Don't look now, but Sean's coming my way. Who knows, I might be the one to win the bet instead?”

Chloe normally wouldn't go out with a creep like Sean Kelvin. That horndog was so beneath her,
Despite the fact that a part of her felt flattered by his attention, but... hey, there was a bet going on. And as cruel it might sound, but she had no qualms about using an asshole like Sean to win a bet at all costs.

She couldn't help but visualize having Clark bring Martha Kent's cookies for her everyday of the week. That was what she wanted the most if she won this bet. Martha Kent's cookies were worth dating a scumbag for, or at least that was Chloe's opinion.

So she stood there and tried her best to look hot while Sean approached her. Pete and Clark stood back, doing their best to seem inconspicuous while they eavesdropped on the conversation.

But the conversation was short-lived, as Sean only made a weak attempt at acting interested in what Chloe was saying... he seemed completely distant, as he constantly fidgeted and looked around instead of focusing on Chloe. Chloe didn't even get to finish what she was saying when Sean glimpsed his ex-girlfriend and rushed after her instead of staying to chat with Chloe.

Chloe turned around with a strong look of disbelief etched into her face. She stared at her two male best friends as she said, “Did you see that? What the hell was his problem... I was barely playing hard to get.”

Pete shook his head. “Yeah, that was insane. I guess because Clark Kent was lucky enough to get a date with Lana Lang, there's no more luck left for the rest of us.”

Chloe scoffed. “Yeah right. Well, it's his loss.” she replied, referring to Sean. With that Pete put an comforting arm around Chloe as they walked into the school. Clark walked slowly behind them, as he glared at the blond jock who were still trying to chat up his ex-girlfriend.

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--Later, after school--

Jenna, the ex-girlfriend, was walking up the path to her home when Sean caught up to her. She rolled her eyes. Jeez, when was this creep going to give up?

The only reason why Jenna dated Sean Kelvin? He was good in bed... extremely so. It had made her more willing to ignore his personal flaws for a while, but good sex couldn't make up for the fact that Sean Kelvin didn't know the meaning of commitment and treated women like notches on his bedpost. Jenna might enjoy sex too much to be considered a proper lady by Smallville standards, but that didn't mean that she never had any self-respect.

On the contrary, she had plenty of self-respect to realize that staying with the likes of Sean while he cheated on her would only make a complete fool out of her. Plus, it wasn't like she had low self-esteem to settle for a cheating scumbag. She knew that she could easily find another skilled lover, one that wouldn't cheat on her behind her back.

“Can't you take a hint? GET LOST!!” Jenna snapped at her ex-boyfriend as she rushed up the steps to get away from Sean.

But Sean chased after her, and managed to grab one of her arms.

Sean sighed with relief as he felt the heat being absorbed though the contact he had with Jenna's arm. Jenna on the other hand, was recoiling in terror from seeing Sean's new power in action.

“What are you doing? Let me go!” Jenna screamed, as she struggled to free her arm. Her arm felt cold and numb, and it was quickly turning blue.
Thankfully her parents were still home because they rushed outside when they heard her scream. And it was equally lucky for Jenna that her parents happened to be avid members of the local gun club, because they promptly pulled out their guns when they saw who were hurting their daughter.

Jenna's parents had never been a big fan of Sean for several reasons, and had been relieved when their daughter finally broke up with him. So because of this they had no hesitation at all when they aimed their handguns directly at Sean's head.

Sean Kelvin would have promptly frozen the entire family had they came out unarmed... but the presence of guns did worry him, so he decided to shove Jenna to the ground and make a run for it.

Jenna's frozen arm snapped off when she hit the ground, and she stared at her frozen limb in shock. “My arm!” She screamed.

Her parents shot after Sean's retreating form, but unfortunately their shots missed.

--At Nell's horse farm--

Lana was starting to regret ever agreeing to go to that concert with Clark, and the “not-a-date” hadn't even started yet. Aunt Nell, Whitney and Joanna was making it a bigger deal than Lana was comfortable with.

Aunt Nell kept on lecturing her about the dangers that Lana had to watch out for at a concert, like roofied drinks. The way she went on and on, you would think that there was constant danger lurking around every corner at a concert. It made her wonder why Aunt Nell was even letting her go in the first place.

Whitney was acting like a typical overprotective big brother. He kept on telling Lana to come to him if Clark ever did anything inappropriate, so that he could kick Clark's ass.

But the worst came from Joanna herself. Joanna had been insufferably smug, because she was completely convinced that this “date” came about because she had forced Lana into going to the bonfire party.

“See, Lana? If you went out once in a while instead of staying holed up at home reading those stupid books of yours, then you get dates with hot guys!” Joanna had gloated, and then she proceeded to congratulate Lana on catching herself a hot guy.

Joanna then had proceeded to embarrass Lana by asking her if she wanted to bring some protection along. Lana wondered what she meant by protection, and Joanna had actually whipped out condoms in public where anybody could see them.

Lana’s face had gone red like a beet, and she frantically shoved the condoms back into Joanna's purse. “Joanna! What do you think you're doing?” she quietly hissed, embarrassed at the thought that somebody might have seen her handling condoms.

Joanna just smirked at Lana as if she was a child. “Come on, Lana. You may plan to limit things to only making out with this guy... but that’s the thing. Our hormones have a thing of making us do things that we didn’t plan for. If the heavy make-out session was so good, and you wanted more? That’s where this protection comes in. You have to be safe when having sex.”

“I don't plan to make out with this guy... we're only going to the concert as friends!” Lana whispered, as she continued to blush furiously at Joanna's words.

Joanna just smirked at Lana. “Sure. That's what they all always say.”
With that the blonde cheerleader walked away, leaving Lana feeling more anxious than ever over this “Not-a-date” thing.

Lana could appreciate how handsome Clark was on an aesthetic level. In fact she wouldn’t mind asking him to pose for one of her paintings, but for some reason she felt nothing when she looked at him. She supposed it was because they grew up next to each other as neighbors, and she could still remember all the times they played together as little kids.

She remembered a toddler-aged Clark walking over to her completely covered in mud, and carrying this very large toad. He had been so proud of catching such a large amphibian and had walked over to show it off. He had looked so hurt and confused when she let out a loud shriek and ran away from him. She didn't want such a huge toad near her, because at the time she had believed the myth about girls getting warts if they touched a toad. And in her rush to get away, she had tripped over a rock, and ended up in a mud puddle. The mud had gotten all over her, and she started crying because she didn't want mud all over herself.
This had freaked out Clark for some reason, because he started crying too. What a sight they must had made, two toddler-aged children covered in mud and crying for no real reason.

Lana chuckled at the memory. Maybe on some subconscious level she saw Clark as something like a distant brother? They weren't close like she was with Whitney Fordman, but...

But maybe Clark didn't feel the same way? She couldn't help but worry that Joanna was right... that Clark was sexually attracted to her and only had used the “friends” rider as a pretext to going out on a date with her? That maybe Clark actually wanted more from her than she was willing to give?

The only reason why she even agreed to go out with him was so that Joanna would stop bugging her about having a life outside of school and home. Lana was what one might call a pretty nerd.... She loved being in the theater club working on costumes and backstage props for future plays, and she preferred reading books at home instead of going to parties. Of course, that didn't exactly lead to being friends with a lot of people and she ended up being on the out-liner of school groups. She wasn't popular like Joanna.

Lana Lang didn't consider that to be such a bad thing at all.. she was content with her lot in life. But Joanna Varnes felt differently, and thought it was completely terrible that Lana Lang wasn't going out to parties and didn't have that many friends. Joanna had tried every trick under the sky to mold Lana into a clone of herself, with Aunt Nell's blessing.

Lana sighed. She would go out to a concert just this once with Clark, and maybe that would be enough to get Joanna (and Nell) off her back. She would just have to find a way to let Clark down easy if it turned out that he did have feelings for her.

--Kent farm--

“Your online horoscope suggests that you try not to flaunt your excitement.” Chloe replied as she was looking up random stuff on her laptop, while Clark was going though his shirts.... all of which was mostly plaid.

Chloe chuckled at the horoscope as she closed her laptop. “Of course that'll be hard for you, Clark. You've been waiting for this date ever since your first growth spurt.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “It's not a date. I'm just going to a concert with a new friend.”

Chloe still didn't seem to believe him, and just kept on chuckling at Clark’s naivety. “Alright, alright. If you say so. But you should watch out for what Lana's wearing. If a girl wears a new outfit, she
thinks it's a date.”

Clark sighed. “And here I thought you came over to give me fashion advice, not to tease me about Lana.”

Chloe glanced at the shirt that Clark was holding, and it was ugly as sin. It was brown, with grey and bright red stripes creating a plaid pattern. She couldn't help but make a look of abject disgust at the shirt as she replied, “You want my advice? Burn that shirt.”

Clark shook his head. “Those are the best shirts I have. I guess I'll check the laundry basket.”

With that, he tossed the shirt aside and went to the hallway where the laundry basket was sitting. Chloe couldn't help but shoot off one snarky parting reply: “What is it with you and plaid shirts, Clark? Do we have to do an intervention for your plaid addiction?”

Clark scoffed, as he rummaged through the laundry basket. “Okay, okay. I get it already. No plaid shirt for the non-date....”

Chloe's cellphone rang then, and she picked it up. “Hello?”

Sean's shaky voice spoke on the other end, and Chloe couldn't help but look annoyed. “Hey, Chloe. I'm sorry for the other day, I wasn't feeling very well...” Sean said. Sean had to be a very good actor, or else he actually was sick, from the way he sounded on the phone. His voice was quivering and there was the occasional moment of chattering teeth, as if he was cold.

Chloe raised her eyebrows. “Well, it's nice of you to apologize, I guess. So why did you call me?”

Sean replied in that same quivering voice, “W-well, I thought we could do something tonight?”

Chloe's eyebrows couldn't go any more higher than it was already, so she just scoffed in disbelief. “Seriously?? While it was nice for you to apologize for blowing me off, I have to say you already lost your one chance when you chased after your ex-girlfriend instead of sticking around to chat to me. I have other important things to attend to, like putting the school newspaper to bed tonight.”

Sean groaned. “Come on, Chloe. Don't be like that... all I want to do is make up to you for what I did earlier today.”

Chloe shook her head, even though Sean couldn't see it on the other end. “Dude, just give up already. Besides, you're sounding really sick.... shouldn't you be at home eating hot chicken soup and lying under the blankets?”

“I wish it was that easy to warm up.” Sean muttered. “Hey, I gonna go. Bye.” Chloe abruptly hung up before Sean could even say a word. She knew it was rude, but considering the kind of guy Sean was she didn't really care too much. Plus, he deserved to have a taste of his own rude behavior... right?

Chloe got up from the coach and went looking for Clark. She called out, “Hey, guess who called me?”

She found Clark in the dining room section rummaging though the basket.

Clark looked up. “Let me guess, it was Sean?”

Chloe smirked. “Bingo. He called me to apologize for blowing me off.”

Clark narrowed his eyes. “Please tell me that he didn't attempt to hook up with you. Please.”
Chloe chuckled. “Oh he did. But don't worry, I told him that I had better things to do than hang out with him. Like working on my newspaper tonight. I know we have a bet going on... but I'm not desperate enough to go out with a loser like that just to win some bet.”

Clark smiled, and nodded. He then pulled out a blue short-sleeved shirt. “Right. Now what do you think of THIS shirt??”

Chloe made an approving noise at the shirt. “Yeah, blue's a good color on you.”

--later that night--

Lana and Clark sat in awkward silence as they rode in the limousine, each one afraid over the fact that the other one thought this was an real date.

Clark had taken one look at Lana's outfit, which looked brand-new and he remembered what Chloe had told him. “If a girl thinks it's a real date, then her outfit is going to be brand-new.” Chloe's teasing voice echoed in his head. He didn't know that Joanna had forced Lana to wear that outfit.

Lana had taken one look at the Limo and a voice inside Lana's head said, “Look at him going all out to impress you. Are you still sure he just wants to be friends? Heh, heh...” That mental voice sounded awfully a lot like Joanna's voice.... which annoyed her.

Clark broke the awkward silence by commenting on the Limousine. “I have to say, this is my first time riding in an Limo. How about you?”

Lana shrugged. “I rode in one before, actually. Of course it wasn't as nice as this one was... and it was a long time ago. When I was just a little kid.”

Silence reigned once again, as they struggled to figure a way to continue the conversation.

Finally, Lana decided she would just lay her cards out on the table. “This is weird, huh? I actually had to explain tonight to Nell and others. I basically spent the entire day explaining to people that this wasn't a date.”

Clark smiled at this. “I had a similar experience today too... Chloe kept on telling me that I should dress more nicer for our date, even though I repeatedly told her that it wasn't a date. And then Lex told me that I had to be more bold in my approach towards you if I wanted to win your heart. He was actually the one who loaned me this limousine. I thought about telling him that it wasn't a date... but, hey a free limousine ride! Who could turn that down? So I decided that I'd tell him after this was over.”

Lana chuckled slightly at this, feeling a little more at ease now. “I was wondering where you got the money to hire a limo. I know your family's doing well, but I didn't think that they were making enough sales for this kind of thing. The fact that Lex lent it to you... well it explains a lot.”

Clark started chuckling too. “God, Dad would blow a gasket if I spent money on an expensive limo ride for the night. I mean, I love dad and all, but he's kind of a cheapskate. I can already hear his lectures about saving money for something more important...”

With that, both teenagers started laughing. The tension between them was gone.

Clark spotted the built-in TV, and pointed it out. “Oh, cool... Lex's limo has a TV too! I swear, it has everything you'd ever want for a long trip.”
Lana grinned, and picked up the remote to turn on the TV. Clark's good mood was instantly gone when he heard what the news on TV had to say. “And in Smallville tonight, Police are seeking 17-year-old Sean Kelivn for the attempted murder of Jenna Barham. Jenna is currently at the hospital for a major injury...”

“My god.” Lana didn't know what else to say to this. She knew that Sean was a total man-whore, but for him to turn to murder? Did he get angry at Jenna for dumping him or...?

Clark suddenly got an horrible feeling, and he hoped his hunch was wrong. “Sean might be at the school with Chloe right now... she told him that she would be working at the school tonight. I hope I'm wrong but... can I really take that chance? I should check on her just to make sure.” He said it out loud, and Lana looked at him with a shocked expression on her face.

“Stop the car!” Lana called out, and then she started shouting instructions for the driver to turn the limo around and drive them to the school.

Clark opened the side door, and Lana looked back at Clark. “What are you doing, Clark?”

“Look, it'll be faster for me to go check on Chloe alone. You can go ahead and enjoy the concert by yourself, okay?” Clark replied, and just like that he left.

Lana sat back in her seat as the Limo started turning around on the road. She muttered under her breath, “What? You just told me that your friend might be in danger, and you expect me to enjoy the concert with that hanging over my head? What kind of weird logic is that.”

Clark managed to arrive in time to save Chloe. Sean had chased her all the way to the pool room, where he had shoved Chloe into the water and attempted to suck up her body heat though the water. But Clark got there in time to pull Chloe out of the water, and the two of them ran like crazy towards the school exits...

Thankfully the police had stopped by thanks to Lana calling them and telling them where Sean might be. So Chloe and Clark stood outside while the police swarmed the building, but Sean was nowhere to be found. And then it turned out that they had to go down to the police's building to give their statements, since they were now witnesses to Sean's latest rampage.

They were sitting in the hallway outside a police interrogation room, and Chloe was violently shivering in the blanket that they had given her. “I can't believe that Sean turned out that way. I mean, I didn't like him at all and I thought he was scummy for cheating on his girlfriend.... but I never thought he would become a killer.” Chloe said though chattering teeth.

“Yeah.” Clark agreed. “Goes to show you that you just don't know people as well as you think you do.”

“I have to say, I didn't mean to ruin your date like this. I bet Lana's so pissed off at you by this point...” Chloe sighed, as she rubbed her hands for warmth.

Clark winched slightly, as he had forgotten about Lana completely. “Erm... well, I told Lana that you might be in danger and that I had to check on you just to make sure. We both saw that news alert about Sean... so I'm sure she understands why I had to ditch her....”

as if on cue, Lana Lang rushed though the door, and she was looking all over with a worried expression on her face. Her face cleared up when she saw them, and she walked over.

“Hey. I heard what happened from the police.... are you two alright?” She wondered.
Both Clark and Chloe nodded, and Lana let out a breath of relief. She sat by Chloe as she said: “I’m so glad you’re alright, Chloe. I can’t believe that Sean could do something like this. I mean, I know he’s always had a repulsive mentality when it came to girls... but for him to go this far...?”

“Not that I want to defend a scumbag like Sean, but I don’t think he was doing this out of his free will... he acted and looked like he was sick. He was completely blue in the face, and before he attacked me he muttered something about how he needed to do that to survive...to keep warm.” Chloe remarked thoughtfully. “I wonder how he got that way...? Did It start at the bonfire party or after it?”

“Probably the same way Greg Atkins and Coach Walt got their powers...” Clark replied.

“What are you two talking about?” Lana wondered. So Chloe started telling Lana about the theory she had, that the meteor rocks gave people unusual abilities....

Sean shivered as he headed for the town’s power generators. Fire and girls like Jenna had only given him temporary relief... but maybe electricity could warm him up? He knew this meant that he might be electrocuted to death, but he was too desperate to care.

He grabbed the lock on the gate, and simply squeezed. Between his power of extreme cold and his pressure on the lock, it was reduced to brittle metal fragments. He then walked though the gate towards the power generators...

Lana blinked at Chloe’s theory. “I don’t know... that seems so far-fetched. I mean, rocks from space altering the cellar makeup of humans and animals? That sounds like something out of a bad scifi film. Isn’t it more likely that the Luthorcorp’s chemicals are mutating people? I mean, we have evidence that radioactive and harmful chemicals can cause frogs to grow extra limbs...”

Chloe smiled smugly. “Ah, but there’s the rub. The meteor rocks ARE radioactive! The government told us that the radioactivity of the rocks were at a low level, so they were harmless... or so they claim anyway. But the radioactivity is still there. So who’s to say that the rocks couldn’t turn normal frogs into ones with extra limbs? Wouldn’t you be nervous to be around anything that was radioactive, even if it was apparently at a low level enough to be safe?”

Lana slowly nodded at this. “Well, you do have a point there. Still, I find it hard to believe that it’s only the meteor rocks doing this. What if it’s both Luthorcorp and the meteor rocks? Imagine this: the Luthorcorp chemicals were supposed to be harmless, but then the meteor rocks' radioactivity did something weird to the chemicals, thus turning it into something dangerous that altered everyone.”

Chloe looked thoughtful at this. “A third theory that combines both the first and second theories into one. I like it. What do you think, Clark?”

Clark just shrugged noncommittally. He was uncomfortable discussing that kind of theory with anyone, now that he knew that he was connected to it all.

the power went out suddenly, causing people in the building to jump.

Clark extended his hearing to the rest of the building, and overheard one of the police say that the blackout was affecting the entire town too. And Clark once had one of his hunches again.... he got the feeling that Sean had to be behind this.

“Sean.” He muttered out loud, got up and rushed out the door.
The lights came back on, and Lana looked puzzled at Clark's behavior. “What was that all about?”

Chloe just shrugged, already used to Clark's weirdness. “Oh, he typically does that now and then. Don't worry about it.”

Although she did have a strong suspicion over what Clark got up to whenever he disappeared like that....

Lana just looked even more mystified by this.

Joanna was riding in the passenger seat of the moving truck, mentally rolling her eyes while her boyfriend Whitney kept on ranting about Clark.

“I still can't believe you basically told Lana to go out and get laid with some hick farmboy. What the hell were you thinking? What if he knocks her up and then they have a shotgun wedding or something? I could easily see the Kents doing something so old fashioned. Then Lana's life would be ruined!” Whitney ranted while he was driving his truck, and he was barely paying attention to the road at all.

Joanna just shook her head.

“Watch the road, please. And I have to say you've got to let go of her eventually. This whole overprotective older brother act was cute at first, but you can't stop Lana from growing up. She isn't always going to be that pink fairy princess who needs your protection forever. Besides, people are starting to talk....”

Whitney frowned. “What do you mean?”

Joanna explained what she meant by that. “Well, Lana is growing up into a very lovely young lady. The kind of woman that teenagers rank very highly on their list of people that they'd fuck. Whitney, you may act like her brother but you two aren't related. The two of you don't even live in the same house even if the two of you grew up together. See where I'm going with this? Rumors at school say that you've been secretly sleeping with her on the side but dating me to keep up an respectable front. That the only reason why you're even dating me is because we're both the same age, and so that you wouldn't get into trouble for sleeping with a 14-year-old girl once you turned 18 in a few more months.”

“What the....? People seriously think that about me at school?!” Whitney couldn't help but exclaim in disgust...

“Only a few select people. They're morons who thinks that a girl and a guy can't be simple friends without something else going on there. You know how stupid people can be, when they think that platonic friendship between a woman and a man is impossible. So they invent things to make things fit into their narrow viewpoint.” Joanna replied in a soothing tone of voice, “But now do you see why I told Lana that she should get out more often? If she's seen dating Clark around town, then those stupid rumors about you would die down. I did it to protect your rep.”

Whitney managed to calm down a little at this, but he still looked distressed. “Oh, jeez. Still, Lana shouldn't be forced to start bumping uglies with some random guy just to protect my rep. You know how she is...she's such a loner, she likes to keep to herself. She isn't the partying type.”

Joanna smirked. “Don't worry. I doubt Clark is the partying type neither. I actually got the loner geek vibe from him... he's got that cute but socially awkward thing going on. I doubt he would even try anything with Lana. It was one of the reasons why I approved of him.”

“I hope you're rig--” Whitney was muttering mid-way his sentence when he saw somebody suddenly
appear on the road out of nowhere. He swerved out of the way to avoid hitting the guy, but his truck fell into a ditch. His wheels spun, but it was stuck there for good.

He glanced at Joanna worriedly. “Are you alright, JoJo?”

Joanna checked all of herself, but winced slightly when she moved her feet. “I think I twisted my ankle. Who was that on the road?”

Whitney looked back, but the person had disappeared. “It looked like it was Sean, but he looked strange somehow...”

Both teenagers got out of the truck, and Whitney acted as Joanna's crutch as they hobbled out of the ditch. Joanna looked around. “Where did he go?” She wondered.

“I don't know, but I need to take you somewhere safe...” Whitney murmured, as he shifted to support Joanna's weight some more. That was when he spotted lights in the distance. “The lights down the road... that's the Luthor's mansion. I think we can get help there.”

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Lex glanced up at the lights coming back on, and nodded to himself. The backup generators were working as they should.

He was all alone in the study in front of the fireplace, mainly because he had failed at convincing the Kents that they needed an investor who would support their farm. They had been doing very well, so Martha and Jonathan had politely yet firmly turned him down. Again, he was both frustrated yet satisfied.

He was frustrated at how he wanted to find a way to become a integral part of the Kents' lives, so that he would always have an ally like Clark at his side. Yet, he kept on failing at that. Yet a part of him was also satisfied to know that the Kents were doing so well that they didn't really need him, for that meant that Clark would have a decent future waiting for him. Really, that was all he wanted for his friend.

He would just have to find another way to become a permanent part of Clark's life. He smirked slightly when he wondered how Clark was doing with his date now. At the very least, Clark had accepted his tickets and that limo ride.... that boy was surely having the time of his life right now.

His train of thought was derailed when the study doors opened to reveal his butler letting in Whitney and his girlfriend. He was partially carrying his girlfriend, who appeared to be injured.

Lex turned to face the teenagers, and he asked, “What happened?”

“Erm, we got into an accident. Can I use your phone?” Whitney answered.

Lex simply nodded at this, but then the power went out again. Lex sighed, as he glanced at the butler in the darkness. “Seems like there's something wrong with the power generators. I think maybe I should check it... see if I can fix it.”

The butler looked slightly concerned. “Are you sure? I can call for somebody to come and fix it for you...”

Lex raised one eyebrow. “You don't think I can fix something simple as a generator? You can attend to our guests here while I go check it out. If it does turn out that I can't fix it by myself, then you can call for somebody to come and fix it.”
The butler remained skeptical, but he nodded. “Yes sir.”

Lex gestured to the phone before leaving. “The phone's over there, Whitney.”

Whitney simply nodded. He settled Joanna down on a ottoman near the fire, and then walked over to the phone.

Lex walked down the sides of his mansion towards the generator. It was a dark autumn night, so he was holding a flashlight and wearing a heavy jacket.

He frowned when he finally reached the generators, only to find that all of it was completely iced over. He found it very strange, considering that the weather wasn't even cold enough for this to happen yet.

A branch snapped behind him, and he reflexly spun around to face any possible threat.

Lex Luthor hadn't been watching the news today, so he didn't recognize the young man in front of him. “Who are you?”

The teenage boy smirked slightly as he walked towards the bald billionaire slowly. “The name's Sean.”

Lex’s wary expression turned into that of puzzlement and worry once he noticed the condition that Sean was in. He was completely blue all over, and icicles were growing on his skin. The boy looked like he had been left in a large freezer overnight. “You don't look so good... are you alright?”

“I'm alright... all I need to do is get warm. Of course, I would had preferred the touch of a pretty girl, but I guess you'll do...” Sean chuckled, and Lex felt a chill go down his spine. There was something off about this boy, and his instincts told him to not let Sean touch him no matter what.

“Stay away from him!” Clark cried out as he suddenly reappeared at Lex’s side.

“Clark? What are you doing here?” Lex asked, but he was ignored completely in favor of facing the new threat.

Sean chuckled. “Wow, Clark. I thought I had already drained you of all your body heat....but I guess you had some left, huh? I'm kind of surprised to see that you're already up and running around.”

“Sean... you're sick. You need to go to a hospital for your own good.” Clark tried reasoning with his fellow schoolmate.

Sean scoffed at this and shook his head. “What are they going to do... put me under a electric blanket? No. I need heat.... and I can only seem to get it though physical contact. Every person's just another fix for me.... and I'm guessing there's a lot of people in that castle tonight.”

Clark scowled upon hearing this. “You're not getting into that place if I can help it.”

With that he rushed at Sean.

“Clark!” Lex called out, trying to get Clark to stop but the struggle between the two teenage boys had already broken out.

They rolled around on the floor, trying to pin the other one into a wrestler's hold. Sean took in a deep breath, actually managing to suck in Clark's body heat without touching his skin. Sean's color returned to a normal color while Clark collapsed to the ground.
Sean chuckled. “I don’t know what it is about you Clark... but I haven’t felt this good in two days. I guess I’ll take my time with you... and once I’m done with you, there’s your friend Lex. Then your family...”

“Won’t... let... you...” Clark tried to sound strong, but he was so weak at this point that all he could do was lie on the ground while Sean drained his body heat like a heat vampire.

Lex came out of now-where with an steel pipe he had found lying around, and he swung the pipe down hard upon Sean's head. Sean stumbled to the side from the impact, but somehow he wasn’t knocked unconscious like Lex had hoped. But it did get Sean off Clark, and Lex seized this chance to grab Clark.

Lex dragged Clark away from Sean, and then leaned over to look at Clark's face. “Clark! Are you alright??”

“Lex... stay away....Sean's....dangerous...” Clark murmured, as he struggled to get up.

Sean recovered from the attack, and now he looked pissed as hell walking their way. “You're going to pay for that, Lex. Hope you're just as warm as Clark is.”

Lex started brandishing his pipe weapon like it was his sword. “Stay back!”
Sean just chuckled at this, and caught the pipe with one hand on the downward swing when Lex started to attack him. Unsurprisingly, the weapon started freezing over to the point that it burned Lex's hands.

Lex let go of the weapon when the freezing cold burned him, and gaped when Sean snapped the weapon into a million metal fragments.

“You really should had listened to your friend, Lex. Now you're going to--!!” Sean was gloating midway his sentence when Clark suddenly rushed towards and punched him hard as he could. Sean went flying towards the pond near Lex's castle, and a splash could be heard.

Clark collapsed to his knees, because he had used up what little energy he had. Lex noticed that Sean wasn't coming up out of the pond, and walked over to check what happened to the blond assailant. To Lex’s surprise, the lake was now completely frozen over... and he could see Sean's eyes staring up at him from inside the ice. But he wasn't moving.

“What the hell is going on?” Lex wondered out loud, and he turned to look at Clark questioningly.

But Clark had passed out, causing Lex to briefly forget about Sean as he rushed over. “Clark!” Clark instantly felt cold to the touch, which caused the man to panic. Lex frantically dragged Clark towards the mansion fast as he could, without harming the young man. Soon as he was close to his home, he started screaming for help in the hopes that the staff would hear him.

19 minutes later Clark was awake again and shivering in front of the fireplace. He was explaining to Whitney and Joanna about what happened to Sean, while Lex stood to the side barking orders at his school staff to take care of everything.

“So you see, I had to leave Lana in town while I went to check on Chloe... just to be on the safe side. My hunch turned out to be correct and he was there, so I helped Cho-ha-” Clark cut off in the middle of the story as he let out an loud sneeze, which he covered with his hands. He sniffled before continuing the part where he helped Chloe escape from Sean.

Lex was listening to the story too, even though he seemed focused on what his security was telling
him about the power generator.

“The generator's completely shot. The phones are still up, so that's a good thing I guess. But I think that's what you get for having the generator at such a exposed and unprotected spot. I think if you get a new generator, you should put it in a place where it's protected from the elements.” His security guard was saying, as he reported his findings to Lex.

“I see. And that boy in the pond..?” Lex hesitated to broach a sensitive subject in front of his young guests.... but he couldn't have the police swarming around his backyard treating it like a murder scene. That body had to be legally and safely stored away somewhere else.... and Lex also had to ensure that Clark's involvement in this business were.... minimal. Lex would take all the responsibility for what happened here tonight, and he would make sure that the police knew what Clark did was self-defense, if they ever found out.

The guard nodded. He then whispered, “We have a van coming soon and we'll haul him out, ice and all.”

Lex nodded back. “Good.”

At that moment Martha and Jonathan burst into the room with frantic expressions on their faces. Lex glanced at them with a slightly puzzled expression. he had asked one of his servants to call the Kents and tell them that Clark was sick... but from the way they were acting the servant must had made it sound like Clark was at death's door.

“Mom, dad! What are you two doing here?” Clark wondered, as his parents rushed to his side.

“I had my butler call your parents. I couldn't stand the thought of you going home alone by yourself, given your...state of being.” Lex explained.

“You didn't have to do that, Lex... I'm perfectly fine...” Clark started to protest, but he started sneezing again... and his sickly complexion gave him away.

Lex just gave Clark a scathing look. “Clark, You fainted twice tonight. I don't think that qualifies as being perfectly fine. So yeah, you definitely needed your parents to take you home tonight.”

Martha and Jonathan both listened to this exchange, and they couldn't help but feel more worried by the minute.

“Clark...why are you here? I thought you were supposed to be at the concert with Lana. And now you're sick? What is going on here.” Martha demanded to know.

Clark sighed. “I'll explain on the way home, okay? It's kind of a long story...”

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All the “guests” were now gone, and now Lex could focus on extracting Sean from the inexplicably frozen pond.

The van designed to hold large chunks of ice had came as promised, and now they were moving towards the pond.... But it seemed as if somebody else had beaten Lex and his group there.

There was a group of alien-looking beings standing around the frozen pond, their eyes glowing brightly. Amazingly enough one of them were doing something to make the iceberg in the pond hover upwards into the air.... and Sean could be seen clearly in the middle of that ice.
The men who were with Lex gaped at the scene before them... but Lex choose to call out. “Hey! What the hell are you all doing here? This is private property.”

The “aliens” whirled around and stared at the group of men with their flashlight-like eyes, causing the men behind Lex to jump slightly. The brightness of the light emitting from their “eyes” blinded both Lex and the men briefly, so they didn't see one of the “aliens” raise his hand. There was a circle on his hand, and it glowed green.

Both Lex and his men blinked, and all of a sudden it was daytime. Instead of a bright moon shining overhead, the warm sun was beaming down at them.

“What the hell??” Lex exclaimed in disbelief as he looked at his watch. It was supposed to be near midnight, not the middle of the day! But his watch hadn't changed at all, it still said it was almost midnight, 11:50pm....and apparently it stopped working.

His mind simply refused to process what really happened... There was just no way that they just experienced some kind of alien encounter even though this incident did seem to exhibit all the classic elements of one.

“The aliens disappeared... and they took that boy with them.” One of the men couldn't help but point out the obvious, as he gestured towards the pond. The pond was not only missing a teenage boy... the entire pond itself was also missing. All that remained was a large hole in the ground, with a few dead fish lying around at the bottom of it.

The guy who owned the van started to hyperventilate, as he realized that he had most likely been abducted by aliens. He started to babble like a madman. “Oh god...this exact thing happened to my grandpa back in the day. My da said grandpa was just a crazy senile old man and that I wasn't to listen to his tall tales... but it wasn't tall tales, is it? My freakin' god!”

Lex couldn't help but repeat himself. “What the hell??” That was the one single thought that kept on running though his head as he tried to process what just happened.
Visions of Fire and Death

Chapter Summary

Basically the episode "Hourglass", but shown through Chloe and Lex's points of view. A lot of Ominous warning signs that points to a terrible future for some of our characters here.

I know this chapter might seem fragmented a little bit, but I didn't have it in me to rewrite the entire episode... I only wanted to write the parts that did change for this ep. But hopefully it's still enjoyable reading this chapter. =\n
“What the hell, Tom?” one of the guys muttered, as they stood in the shadowy room waiting for the bosses to show up. “Now we have to stand before them explaining why we used the time-stop... when we were supposed to only use it in emergencies! Fuck, all the paperwork I have to fill out now....”

The one called Tom sighed. “I'm sorry, I panicked, okay? I didn't expected to be confronted by Lex Luthor and his men while we were moving Sean! I mean... he's LEX LUTHOR! The dude wasn't afraid to take on Superman AND Darkseid.”

The girl next to him snickered. “On the bright side, that's definitely going to push Lex into investigating aliens earlier than expected. I mean, who wouldn't want investigate aliens after experiencing an 'alien abduction' event? So that helps our mission I guess.”

“Still... the paperwork! I hate paperwork.” the first guy couldn't help but whine slightly.

Tom and the others just rolled their eyes.

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Lex Luthor was frowning greatly as he went over the security tapes for the backyard again. He typically had security cameras set up everywhere on the Luthor property... although his backyard was rather large, so the one security camera he had for his backyard had been set up on one of the castle turrets so that the camera could overlook the entire yard. The security camera even had a good view of the pond itself.

While having an camera overlook the entire yard was great, it also had its own drawbacks. For instance it was a regular security camera and not one of those top-tech ones that could zoom in a single area. It couldn't record things in high definition, so the footage was kind of grainy and if you tried to zoom in for details it would just be a bunch of pixels.

He did have evidence that something weird happened, at least. The “Aliens” around the pond showed up on film, although they looked ten times more eerie on grainy film than they did in person. They showed up as dark shadowy blobs with glowing white eyes on the footage, while Lex and his men showed up as indistinct human shapes. The only way to tell Lex from the other pixelly shapes were the fact that he was the only one in the film who were clearly bald.

On the film, the shadow beings were shown to be levitating Sean out of the icy pond... or to be more accurate, they were levitating the entire frozen pond up into the air. Then Lex arrived with his men. His men had frozen at the sight of the creatures, but Lex had stepped towards them... and... There
was a flash of green light, and all of them had disappeared. Even the frozen pond had disappeared, only leaving behind a hole where the pond used to be.

He fast-forwarded to 13 hours later on the footage, and there was a flash of green light again. All the men had reappeared, but the aliens were missing... and so were the pond.

Lex was glad to have evidence that he wasn't losing his mind, but this footage only left him with more questions than answers.

-- Meanwhile, at school--

The torch crew were walking though the hallways to the next class together, and Pete shook his head as Chloe finished her tale about Sean. “I can't believe you two went though that, and I was the one who ended up with the limo. Heh, my date was so impressed, you know.”

“How did you end up with the limo, anyway?” Clark wondered.

“Oh, I came across Lana when she was using the Beanery's phone to call the cops and tell them Sean's location. She told me that she could use the limo, since the two of you didn't need it anymore.” Pete explained.

“I guess that means you win the bet, Pete. So what are you going to have us do?” Chloe said.

Pete slowly put on his best evil grin, as he thought of what he wanted. “Let's see... I want Clark to bring me his mother's cookies for the whole week. And you, Chloe... you have to let me copy your history homework this week.”

Chloe pouted. “No fair stealing my idea. I was the one who were supposed to get Martha's cookies.”

Pete started a mock evil laugh at Chloe's reaction. “Too bad, I won the bet so fair's fair.”

Chloe sighed. “Still, I can't believe how close I came to ending up like Jenna. Losing the cookies to you doesn't seem so bad in retrospect.”

Pete sobered at this slightly. “How is Jenna?”

“Last time I heard, she was in surgery to have her arm reattached today. It took the doctors a while to thaw the frozen arm before it became damaged. But, she's going to need physical therapy to get that arm working again. It probably won't be the same anymore...” Clark answered with a very somber expression on his face. “Still, she could had ended up dead so I guess nearly losing her arm is the best-case scenario here...?”

Chloe nodded. “Maybe I should get her a get-well card. One that says, 'sorry about your psycho ex-boyfriend, hope you get better soon'?”

Pete snorted at Chloe's comment, because it was morbidly funny in a way.

The conversation was cut off when they got into the classroom and the teacher told everyone to take their seats.

Later that day, Chloe was busy typing up the article on Sean for her torch newspaper. She was alone, even though Pete and Clark was supposed to help her with the newspaper today.
Pete had football practice, and Clark got away with saying that he had to help his folks at the farm. Chloe had a sneaking suspicion that he only said that to get out of helping her with the Torch newspaper, but she couldn't prove it.

Chloe was in the process of typing up the interview she had with Jenna about Sean, when Lex Luthor came into the office.

“Very nice. This place cleaned up nicely since the last time I saw it. And I see you're putting the new computers I donated to good use.” Lex commented as he walked into the center of the room, where Chloe could see him.

Chloe looked up with a puzzled expression from her desk. She slowly got up. “Lex? What are you doing here?”

“What, I can't come here to see how my donations are being applied at the school? I do have the right to make sure that my money isn't being...abused.” Lex answered in what was almost too casual manner, which made Chloe suspicious.

“Sure. But what are you really here for? I doubt you're here to see Clark, considering that he went home soon as school let out.” Chloe stated rather bluntly.

Lex smiled, and he couldn't help but be slightly impressed by how this teenage girl was able to see through his bullshit so easily. But then again, maybe he was still rattled by the strange experience he had... so he couldn't act perfectly casual like he wanted to.

He nodded. “Alright, I'll get to the point. But it has to be between the two of us... you can't speak of this to anybody else.”

“Okay?” Chloe was starting to feel slightly worried, because she wasn't sure what she was agreeing to. But a part of her was now curious to see what Lex was up to.

“Last night... as you probably know, Sean ended up falling into the pond in my backyard and got trapped there. So I had some men come over to take him out... but something really strange happened. I want you to watch this security tape of my backyard and tell me what you see.” Lex replied, as he held out what appeared to be a VHS tape.

“What happened?” Chloe asked as she walked over to the TV and turned it on before connecting a vhs player to it.

Lex slightly shook his head. “I don't want to cloud your head with any pre-judgments. I want you to decide for yourself what really happened on that tape. Who knows, you'll probably come to a different conclusion than I do... and hopefully have a reasonable explanation for what's on that tape.”

Okay, Chloe was really curious now. So she popped in the tape, and fast-forwarded to the part that Lex Luthor told her to. Her eyes slowly widened as she watched the events unfold on the tape. When Lex told her to forward to the time when he and the men reappeared 13 hours later?

“What the hell?” Chloe exclaimed out loud as she watched Lex's group reappear in a flash of green light on the tape.

Lex smirked. “You know, that was my exact words when it happened. So what are your thoughts on this?”

“Umm... well, I see a bunch of weird shadow people apparently levitating the entire pond, which looks frozen. You and your men came onto the scene... and one of the shadow people there to the
left raised his hand, and all of you disappeared...” Chloe answered.

“When did this person do that?” Lex had honestly missed the bit where one of them apparently raised their hand. Chloe rewinded the tape, and then paused it. She pointed to the left side of the pond, and told him: “Right there, see? He has a glowing circle on his hand...and he did this seconds just before the first green flash.”

Lex was honestly glad that he had gotten Chloe to look at the tape, because he had missed this the first time around. Leave it up to Chloe to notice the small details even on a blurry, grainy tape.

“Hmm. If I copied this tape into a digital format, I could attempt to clean this up and covert it into high definition. Maybe we would be able to see more details this way.” Chloe suggested.

Lex nodded, but he said, “I can accept you doing this.... but again, nobody must know about this.”

“Why?” Chloe couldn't help but look mystified by the fact that Lex was being so secretive about this whole thing.

Lex sighed. “Can you honestly imagine if word got out that Lex Luthor was apparently abducted by aliens? And not only that, but that I seem to believe that it happened? It would be one thing if a known crackpot ran around telling everyone that... but if they knew that I was seriously considering that as an real possibility... well, my credibility would be shot. They would just see me as the weirdo who believed that he had been kidnapped by aliens for a short time.”

Chloe slowly nodded at this. It did make sense in a way. But something was bothering her. “But why did you come to me about this? If you wanted to keep this thing a secret, you could had this thing buried deep and nobody would even know.”

“I wanted to find some kind of rational explanation for what I went though. I'm not so quick to jump on the alien abduction bandwagon when something else could be going on behind the scenes. And I want to know why this happened to me. Well.... you seem to be the expert on all the strange happenings of Smallville. I wanted to know if you had heard of something like this happening before.” Lex explained.

Chloe couldn't help but felt slightly flattered that Lex took her supernatural-hunting hobby so seriously when nobody else seemed to. If Lex was sweet-talking her into keeping things quiet, he was succeeding.

“I haven't heard of something like this happening, but I could do some digging. Maybe this happened to others and they're just keeping quiet about it.” Chloe replied.

Lex nodded. “I want every piece of information you collect on this, no matter how irrelevant it may seem.”

He then pulled out his wallet, and took out a couple of one-hundred bills. He handed the money over to Chloe, who looked surprised by the money.

“Uhh... you gave me 200 dollars?” Chloe's eyebrows went up as she realized just how much Lex had given her.

Lex shrugged. “I'm hiring you as a investigator. So it's only right that I give you the money up front for your job. I'll give you more later on if you come up with any results.”

With that Lex moved to leave the room.
Chloe watched the bald billionaire leave, and then stared at the money in her hand. She started chuckling loudly....

She would had done this for free, but hey.... 200 dollars weren't nothing to sneeze at. It looked like there was going to be a shopping spree in her future.

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Lex hoped he was doing the right thing by hiring Chloe. She was after all, a teenage girl and she might be prone to gossiping. But, he hoped that the money would shut her up for a while at least.

He needed to collect information.... because there was something very strange with all of Smallville itself.

The giant pig the size of a house that flattened his last car was one thing.... it seemed to have a decent explanation behind it. Even if it might seem far fetched that some simple pig farmer would have a successful formula that super sized his pigs?

He would had been happy to treat that as just random one-off incident, but it seemed as if there was a series of strange things going on in town. Worse, none of the adults living here seemed to want to acknowledge it at all. The younger citizens, such as Chloe herself, seemed to be the only ones that noticed the strangeness of the town.

And that so-called “alien abduction” event he experienced was the final straw that broke the camel's back. No matter what happened next, Lex Luthor would get to the bottom of everything, and get all the answers he wanted.

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--Weeks later--

The next following weeks at School was mostly annoying for all of the students at school, because everyone was supposed to do 30 hours of community service otherwise they would get a poor grade.

And what's more, the students had to be personally assigned by the teachers for community service. Apparently last time the teachers had let the students pick what they would do for community service, the students had picked only the easiest jobs, which led to an imbalance of volunteers working at the beanery and the movie theater. So the students were no longer allowed to pick the kind of community service they would do.

Lana Lang and Clark was assigned to read to the elderly at the retirement center.
Chloe was assigned to help people with yard work.
Pete was assigned as a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the local YMCA's indoor pool.

Pete had been the most ecstatic one out of the group about his assignment, until he realized that teenage girls his own age didn't really go to the pool in the fall. Instead it was mainly hyper 7-year-old kids and the elderly who came around during this season. So he was stuck teaching little kids how to swim.

“Oh man. And I thought I was going to teach a hot chick how to do the breast stroke...” Pete grumbled one day.

Chloe shot him a dirty look. “At least you and Clark got the easy assignments. I'd just like to know which genius thought I would do great at yard work? I mean, normally I don't care about things like broken nails... after all I'm not the girly-girl type. That is, until I painfully broke nearly all of my nails doing heavy yard work... Look at those!”
With that she held up her hands, which showed a series of jagged and broken fingernails.

Both Clark and Pete made sympathetic faces at this. “Yeah, you're in serious need of a medicure after this assignment is over. Clark should had gotten that assignment instead of you. He's far more suited to it than you are.” Pete agreed.

“Maybe I could ask the teacher to switch us around. I can do yard work without any problems...” Clark offered.

Chloe smirked even though she liked that idea very much. “What, and give up your precious time with Lana Lang? I hear the two of you were assigned together.”

Clark rolled his eyes. Not that again. “It's not as romantic as you think. We don't actually sit together in the same room reading to others... in fact it's more like we sit in separate rooms tending to each elderly person. Besides, those old people tend to have this weird smell that I can't seem to figure out...?”

Clark then thought of something and then grinned. “Besides I heard of a possible meteor mutant living at the retirement center, which I'm sure is up your alley Chloe.”

Predictably, that did grab Chloe's attention. “Oh, really? And how did you come by that information?”

“This is just a rumor I heard from Lana, mind you. Apparently there's this old lady called Cassandra Carver, and it's said she can look into the future. All of her predictions have been strangely accurate down to the thinnest detail.” Clark told her.

Pete scoffed. “She probably just does it to spook the nurses or does it for attention. You know how old people are, they always demand attention all the time.”

Despite the fact that Pete made the logical argument, Chloe was already hooked.

“Have you gone to see her yet, Clark?” Chloe asked, and Clark simply shook his head. She grinned. “Then in that case, let me tag along when you do see her. I want to see what she's really like.”

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The next day Clark was leading Chloe towards Cassandra's room. “They told me that she lives down this hall...”

They stopped outside her room, and Clark whispered: “I don't know about this. Now that I think of it, just seems rude to just straight out ask her like this...?”

Chloe smirked. “So find a book then. This way we can say we're here to read to her... it won't seem too weird then.”

Clark nodded. “Right. I'll be right back then.” With that he ran off to find a book.

But it seemed that Cassandra had noticed Chloe standing outside the door, and called out: “Who's there? Well don't stand outside like that... come in!”

Not one to ignore an invitation like that, Chloe walked into the room even though she was supposed to wait for Clark. She could always tell Clark what occurred later on anyway.

Despite what Clark said about it being rude, she asked rather bluntly: “So, is it true that you're some kind of psychic?”

The elderly woman chuckled. “Been listening to the gossip around here, eh? But you shouldn't
believe everything you hear so easily...”

Cassandra seemed to drop her book by accident, and put on her best innocent face. “Oh dear me. Will you pick that up for me please?”

Chloe raised one eyebrow slightly as she realized that the woman was blind, and were putting on an innocent act for some reason. She obliged the old woman though, and went to pick up the book.

As Chloe handed the book back, Cassandra’s bony hand grazed over her hand. And the old woman’s unseeing eyes blinked as if she was seeing something....

Cassandra frowned slightly as she watched the vision unfold before her. She saw Chloe chasing after some alien-like shadowy beings with glowing eyes, and then all of a sudden she was standing by a bald man in some underground room surrounded by the alien-like beings. It seemed as if those creatures meant the pair no harm at all... But the real problem was the man looming over both the bald man and the blonde like a giant. Cassandra gleaned that his name was Lionel...

Giant Lionel was leering down at the pair, and the setting around the three changed. All three of them were now standing in a field of sunflowers, and Chloe was cowering behind Lex. Lionel smirked evilly as he formed a fist with one of his hands, and brought it down hard upon the pair. He lifted his hand to reveal both Chloe and Lex dead, crushed like they were a pair of flies. The sky started raining blood as the sunflowers wilted. Lionel laughed and laughed...

Cassandra snapped out of it with a loud gasp. She turned her head to Chloe, and told her this: “Be careful when going into the lion's den, my dear. The bald cub you play with is harmless, but his father the lion is another matter entirely. He is a proud yet cruel creature who cannot stand being surpassed by his own son. He'll do anything to bring down his son...and that means using you. The son seeks to expose his father's misdeeds, but it may mean his death. It means your death too if you choose to join the cub in exposing the lion's deeds to the world.”

Chloe stared at the old lady with a mixture of bafflement and shock. She only had barely started to associate with Lex Luthor, and she hadn't told anybody that she was kind of working for him yet. So how did Cassandra....?

And why did Cassandra have to word it in such a stereotypical way, using metaphors that could easily be misunderstood or interpreted in different ways? Still, some of it sounded very specific. Basically, she was told to stay away from Lionel Luthor at all costs even though associating with his son was somehow okay.

“Uh, thanks for the warning?” Chloe said as she got up and slowly backed away from the psychic woman. She typically loved it when things like this happened, but right now she was so weirded out by the warning about her own death that she just wanted to leave.

So she walked out of there just as Clark came back with a book. Clark called out after her, but Chloe didn't respond as she quickly walked down the hall.

Clark frowned slightly as Chloe just walked past him with a strange expression on her face. She actually looked slightly freaked out, and she just came out of Cassandra's room which meant that the old lady must had said something to her. Clark walked into the room, demanding to know what the heck Cassandra said to his friend.

It turned out to be the week where everyone was freaked out over something for their own reasons.

Lana Lang somehow lost a whole person while at the nursing home for her school assignment. You see, the senior guy Lana was watching were called Harry Boltson, and he mysteriously disappeared at a pond just outside the nursing home.
“It's bad enough that I failed completely at being a waitress. Now I find out that I'm horrible at taking care of old people too? Great, there goes my self-esteem...” Lana had griped over that, and for a while there Lana seemed slightly obsessed with trying to find out where Harry went to.

Pete wound up having to deal with creepy cougar-like mothers at the local YMCA pool. In fact, they were there because they brought their kids for the swimming lessons, and decided to stick around to swim themselves. They kept on going on about how the young man teaching their kids to swim was so cute. That wouldn't had been so bad in itself, but they also occasionally made the inappropriate black dicks joke in front of their own children. That had been the final straw for Pete, who quit there on the spot. He didn't care if he would receive a poor grade in school.

“It was one thing when I had to deal with bratty children. But this? This is just... ugh! Cringe-worthy. You know what I mean, right? What kind of women flirts in front of their own children with young men half their ages? Or make jokes about my penis within earshot of young children? Plus, older women aren't just my thing... I prefer girls my own age.” Pete commented as he recounted what happened during his assignment.

Clark.... he was acting weird. and he wouldn't tell Chloe or Pete what was wrong. Not even Lana knew what was up with him, and she had been the one who spent the most time with him all week due to their assignment. But then again Lana was kind of obsessed with finding the lost Harry Bolston, so she most likely didn't notice how strangely Clark was acting.

Personally, Chloe was leaning towards the theory that Harry had been abducted by those weird shadow-aliens. After all, they did have a tendency to hang out around ponds... far as she knew.

Speaking of which, Chloe had used what little free time she had this week to go interview Lex's men. In the end they weren't much help there... especially not the guy who owned the freezer van. The poor guy just kept on rambling about how his grandfather had made contact with aliens and had been institutionalized because nobody believed him. That was actually kind of interesting, but had nothing to do with the current “abduction” case far as she was aware.

So she had been forced to go digging though old newspaper articles in the hopes that she could interview people who had personal UFO sightings or made contact with aliens. but sadly that was completely fruitless. Smallville was the land of the weird when it came to meteor-related stuff, but it wasn't anything like Roswell. Roswell continued to be the town who had an monopoly on alien and UFO sightings....

With no results in sight she simply fell back on the other investigation she was doing...the investigation on the mystery men who attacked random kids all those years ago. She interviewed Tina Greener, and managed to find out where Desiree Aktins were at now. It turned out that Desiree hadn't gone far very far... she was now living in Granville as a waitress at some seedy cowboy-themed bar. But sadly that meant that Chloe wouldn't be able to interview Desiree for a while until she found some good excuse to go to Granville.

Chloe didn't learn much from Tina during the interview much to her dismay. Tina's mother had thought that the attacks were sexually motivated, and that those men had gotten off on injecting children with the white stuff. She even thought it might be semen or something, and had Tina tested for things like HIV for years after the incident. But thankfully Tina didn't have any strange diseases at all... if anything she seemed to be steadily getting better and healthier.

Chloe could understand why Mrs.Greener jumped to that conclusion. Typically when a parent saw a bunch of strange men attacking their prepubescent daughter they would think that their worst nightmares were coming true. But Chloe's hunch told her that Mrs.Greener was completely wrong on that front.
But the whole thing just made her feel even more frustrated. It felt as if she was coming up completely short on everything. She felt that she should have at least found something useful in terms of information by now... but it felt like she kept on coming up against a brick wall over and over.

She also couldn't stop thinking about that stupid prediction by Cassandra. Were Lionel really that dangerous? And would he actually threaten and kill his own son? Chloe had heard plenty of horrible things from the Anti-Luthor crowd, but she couldn't imagine that a father could harm his own child without a second thought. Parents weren't just supposed to do that at all, no matter how evil they might be. She just didn't want to believe that sort of thing could happen... even though she knew that abuse happened in families across the country all the time.

Chloe was escorted into Lex's office by the butler, and nodded politely when he told her that Lex would be in shortly.

Chloe took a good look around the room as the butler left, since it was her second time inside the castle. The first time she had been there to interview Lex because Clark saved his life. And well, she didn't exactly have time to really take in the finer details of the room that time.

Chloe didn't know Lex Luthor all that well yet, but she could see almost nothing of Lex in this room. Everything seemed so old-fashioned and stuffy, which Lex certainly was not. At least, not far as she knew. The only modern touches seemed to be the desk that Lex used, and the seating which was made out of black leather.

She turned to face Lex as he walked into the room. She smiled slightly as she pulled out a disc out of her bag.

“I digitized the video and made it high-definition as much as I could. Sadly, it's difficult to clean up low-quality video, so it's not exactly high-definition completely... but at least this way you can see some more extra details I guess. I have to say, you really need to upgrade your security videos... society already phased out VHS tapes, and I hear that they're finally starting to make security tapes that records on DVDs. And with your money I'm guessing you could go ahead and upgrade to the top of the line. Just a suggestion.” Chloe rambled as she handed Lex the disc, and then also pulled out the VHS tape that Lex had lent her.

“Oh, and I'm guessing you want this VHS tape back?”

Lex simply nodded, and took the vhs tape too. He then asked: “So did anybody else in town have similar experiences to mine or...?”

Chloe cringed at this slightly. “No, sorry. Smallville might be the land of the weird and the unusual, but it's no Roswell. Plenty of things were caused by the meteors here, but nothing here was caused by aliens from outer space. At least far as I know...”

Lex scoffed. “Yeah, I was afraid of that. I'm still not so sure that those creatures... that I saw, were actually aliens. They seemed to have a human quality... if that makes sense.”

Chloe looked thoughtful. “It's possible that they could had been just humans dressed up in weird suits. Maybe a group of meteor mutants working together for some reason?”

Lex smiled. “Maybe.”

Chloe fidgeted slightly. She wanted to warn Lex about Cassandra's vision, but had no idea how to go about it. After all, the whole thing sounded nutty even to her, and she had seen Cassandra’s abilities firsthand. Besides, even though Chloe didn't particularly trust him that much... she still didn't
want Lex to die.

Lex seemed to notice, and asked: “Something on your mind, Miss Sullivan? You look like you want to tell me something…”

Chloe sighed. She might as well as tell him... who cared if he laughed at her or something? He couldn't say that she didn't warn him.

“The thing is... this is going to sound crazy. This is saying a lot coming from somebody who collects information on the supernatural for a hobby. But um…” Chloe paused, before finally telling Lex the whole thing. “I met this old lady called Cassandra, and she said that you were going to die uncovering your father's biggest secret that he wanted to keep hidden. And that I would die too if I got involved with that.”

Strangely enough, Lex Luthor slowly started to look pissed as hell the more Chloe told him the details. He scoffed angrily, as he turned to walk towards the bar for a cup of scotch. “You know, this is the second time that I've heard warnings from this Cassandra person second-hand.” He told Chloe, while his back was turned to her.

“Oh... is that so?” Chloe couldn't help but be surprised.

“Yep.” Lex started pouring himself a drink. “Clark stopped by days ago, and told me to be careful. Apparently Cassandra told him that somebody close to him was going to die.”

Chloe paled slightly at this. This could very mean that she was going to die? But it did explain why Clark had been acting so weird the past few days, the way he was so overly cautious about everything and kept on telling her and Pete to be careful too. He also kept on going home a lot, maybe to double-check that his parents hadn't kicked the bucket.

She tried to calm herself down. It probably didn't mean anything. And hey, maybe Cassandra was really just a mean old lady who got kicks out of predicting everyone's deaths and watching their reaction.

She chuckled weakly. “Well that explains Clark's weird behavior this week. He wouldn't tell me what was up with him. Which is unusual because he usually tells me everything.”

Lex turned around to face Chloe, and downed his shot glass of scotch before speaking. “I wouldn't put too much stock into Cassandra’s words. To this day there's never been real proof that psychics actually exist. But it looks like I'm going to have words with her about scaring my friends with false visions. That won't do at all....”

Chloe smiled. “Right. I thought you might appreciate the warning even if you don't believe in that sort of thing. As for me... no offense, but I think I'm going to take her advice and stay the hell from anything that has to do with your father. You know, just in case.”

Lex smirked. “Well, psychic or not, that's actually very sound advice. As much as I hold my own father in high esteem, he can be a such a mean bastard sometimes. You really wouldn't want to get on his bad side at all... and it's probably safer if you stay out of his sight.”

Chloe's smile faded slightly at this, and her eyebrows furrowed at the “mean bastard” comment. Okay, looks like maybe Lex's rich lifestyle wasn't as cracked up as it seemed on the surface. After all, Lex exactly didn't oppose the idea that his own father would kill him to protect some kind of secret, and even said that his father could be cruel. Maybe Lionel was abusive to Lex in secret? But, Lex didn't look or act like the stereotypical person who had been abused by their parents.
Maybe it was a non-physical kind of abuse, like mental and verbal abuse. That kind of abuse didn't leave scars or wounds on the outside, but could easily hurt the bond between parent and child. And besides, just what kind of father would be willing to kill his own child? Certainly not a good one.

That wasn't exactly encouraging to Chloe at all... it looked more and more like Lex was probably going to die in the future.

Chloe chuckled uneasily. “Right. Anyway I shouldn't be taking up more of your time with this nonsense. I'll be going now.”

Lex simply nodded. “Right. Eugene will show you the way out.”

Chloe nodded and left. Lex sat down at his desk, and he felt angry for a wide variety of reasons. Damn that old woman, just what was she up to? What did she gain to make everyone scared that somebody they knew were going to die? Lex just didn't know what to think... he had evidence that the supernatural existed, but was psychics even a real thing? Lex believed that what was called supernatural was only called that until it could be explained by science... in which case it would become natural and explainable.

Lex fully intended to investigate everything strange about this town from all angles... until he had a reasonable explanation for everything that happened up to this point. But this old woman? He just wanted to straight-up call her nothing but a fraud. And who did she think she was, to tell an acquaintance of his that his own father would kill him over some kind of secret? Lex had an difficult relationship with his father but even he doubted that Lionel would go that far.

Lex had met Cassandra before, and he didn't think too highly of her at the time. Yet despite that he had briefly considered going back for a reading anyway... he figured that it'd be fun at least. But now, this made him think that maybe his initial impression of her was completely correct after all... and that the only reason why he should go back? To tell her off for scaring his friends with this “somebody is going to die” bullshit, and that he was going to file some kind of charge against her if she didn't stop doing what she did.

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Clark was completely exhausted, and now he understood the expression “Bone-tired” that the farmers used on a regular basis around here. He felt so tired of life in general that he just kind of lost his strength to deal with anything right now. Even his bones felt heavy....

After all, it had been a very extremely draining week. The following things had happened:
1. Lana Lang couldn't let go of the idea that the disappearance of Harry had been somehow her fault, and had roped not just him, but Chloe and Pete into helping her investigate the disappearance.

2. Which led to the discovery that Harry the senior was actually a serial killer who found a way to make himself young again. And not only this, But Harry was completely obsessed with killing the families of the people who had put him behind bars in the first place.

3. So Clark had to run all over town saving people from Harry. And each time Harry managed to get away. His mother had almost became one of Harry's victims, which kind of shook Clark to his very core.

4. It turned out that Cassandra might had predicted her own death without knowing it, because she passed away. For some reason Lex had been there to witness it, and he seemed shaken by it. He told Clark that he had been there to tell Cassandra to stop scaring kids with her phony visions, when Cassandra just....died. Clark could understand why Lex was so shaken by the experience... after all it wasn't everyday that you got to see a person die in front of you... and it wasn't pleasant.
“I wonder if I could convince my parents into letting me have a few days off from school? I feel like I need to recuperate.” Clark couldn’t help but complain out loud as he shoved his school books into his locker.

“Yeah. No offense, but you look like you need to catch up on your beauty sleep....” Chloe tactfully agreed with her best friend, while thinking to herself that Clark looked like total shit right now. Still, there seemed to be some sort of weight lifted off Clark’s shoulders for some reason. “But, you do seem more relaxed than you were the past week?”

Clark smiled slightly at this. “I guess I am. I was speaking to Cassandra, and I kept on worrying that my future couldn't be changed at all... But if anything this past week taught me that the future can be easily changed at any time. Just because some future vision shows that somebody's going to die, doesn't mean it can’t be prevented. You know what I mean?”

Weirdly enough Chloe felt better after hearing that. She smiled. “Yeah. After all, the future's not set in stone at all. Heck, Cassandra could had changed things completely by warning people about their deaths... so that nobody dies at all in the future.”

Both teenagers closed their lockers and walked down the hallway.

Clark glanced at Chloe curiously. “You know... I just realized that you must have gotten a reading from Cassandra, since you looked upset when you rushed out of her room that one time. I was wondering what she told you.”

Chloe chuckled nervously. “Ermm.. well it was kind of similar to your reading. I was told that if I wasn't careful when investigating stuff, then I was going to get somebody killed... and possibly die myself too as an result. So I've been in the same boat you were... I had to double-check to make sure that anything I was investigating wasn't dangerous to anybody.”

“Chloe...!” Clark couldn’t help but look horribly distressed at this.

Chloe sighed. “Look, it probably won't happen now that I've been warned of what might happen. I've taken precautions, so the future is already changed. Alright?”

Clark wasn’t so sure about that, but he choose to let go of the topic anyway. He simply nodded, and murmured, “Alright. I trust you, Chloe.”

The blonde girl smiled up at him reassuringly.

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– Lex’s bedroom--

Lex downed another scotch, and plopped the glass on the side table before he laid down on his bed. He stared up at the ceiling, trying to make sense of things.

What the hell happened with Cassandra? It had been the strangest thing. He had gone over there to chew her out for scaring his friends.... and he had been pulled into some kind of vision.

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--Flashback--

*Lex stormed into Cassandra's room and glowered at the old woman, even though she couldn't see him doing that. It made him feel better however to hold on to his righteous indignation this way, so he kept on doing it.*
“What are you up to, scaring kids like this? It was one thing when you scared Clark into thinking that somebody close to him was going to die, but I just heard from Chloe. Do you get some kind of twisted pleasure from scaring kids into thinking that they're going to see somebody die??” Lex demanded to know.

“I can't control what I see... and I'm not going to lie to them about what I saw, not if it would save somebody's life.” Cassandra had the nerve to justify what she did, which only infuriated Lex to the point that he wanted to rage at her.

“How is scaring kids with death threats saving their lives, you fraud--” Lex grabbed the elderly woman's arm in a fit of rage, but he was cut off as he suddenly found himself in a different setting.

All of metropolis was burning, and the landscape now looked like it belonged on an hellish alien planet. If it wasn't for the familiar buildings that Lex recognized, he would had thought he was on another planet entirely. He looked up to a blood-red sky, and the clouds started raining blood.

He looked down, to discover that he was outfitted in some kind of armor. It was painted green and purple, with dashes of the original silver metal showing though the paint. In his hands were a extremely large gun that looked as if it could launch mini-nukes. Maybe it could.

“Am I going to war?” Lex wondered as he looked at himself, but he was distracted by movement on the horizon. The ground started to rumble as some large stone-like creature stomped over towards him. The creature was outfitted in a blue metallic armor that was somehow flexible as cloth.

Lex found himself firing his weapon on the creature, but it had no effect. “Damn you, Darkseid!” He screamed at the monster, and the creature actually smirked back. That was when his father Lionel stepped out from behind Darkseid.

“Lionel. I should have known... so you were behind the information leak, huh? That's how this monster and his army was able to ambush us. So how does it feel, dad? How does it feel being an traitor to the entire human race?!” Lex spoke.

Lionel shook his head. “Always so dramatic. Can't you see that I'm doing my best to secure the future of the human race... or what's left of it anyway. There's no way that we can fight Darkseid... so I'm doing the prudent thing by joining his forces. You know what they say—if you can't beat them, join them.”

Darkseid's red eyes glowed brightly as he spoke. “All who oppose me... must die.” With that twin red beams shot out of his eyes and hit Lex directly in the chest.

Lex could feel his heart seize up, like he was having a heart attack...

He blinked, and he found himself back in the real world staring down at Cassandra. His hand was still around Cassandra's arm, and Cassandra was gasping loudly, clutching at her chest as if she was having a heart attack. She let out one last gasp, and her body went motionless.

“C.Cassandra?” Lex stammered slightly as he let go out of the woman's arm, but she was completely unresponsive. It was pretty clear by now that she was dead. Maybe from a heart attack.

“Somebody please come in here! We need help here!” Lex yelled for the nurses, as he stumbled out of the room.

Lex just knew that Cassandra's death had to be his fault somehow. But he didn't know what to think anymore. Was that an vision of the future or what? Chloe had said that Cassandra had seen a vision...
where Lionel would kill him to protect some kind of secret... but this vision wasn't anything like that. Or was Darkseid the secret that Lionel wanted to protect?

Lex sighed, and poured himself another drink. For all he knew this vision was just some kind of weird hallucination that his mind came up with or something like that. Maybe it wouldn't even come true.

At least, he hoped so... it had all seemed so real.
Chapter Summary

Not much happens in this chapter but a lot of plot points are being set up for next chapter. *shrugs*

Chapter Notes

Author notes: I really hated how they handled Jodi in this “craving” ep, so I'm changing things up big time. Namely, there will be no fat-sucking vampire here. Instead we get Lex scenes!
This is also the chapter where I basically bash Aunt Nell a lot. Why?
Well think about it-- The few scenes she did have, she was shown to be pretty questionable with her parenting skills. And thanks to her, Lana turned out the way she did in the TV show. She was the one who gave Lana the meteor necklace, and were shown to be pretty self-absorbed. She basically raised Lana to be equally as self-absorbed too, etc. And it's canon that Aunt Nell completely disregards what Lana Lang wants to do when it comes to birthday parties, choosing to go big and fancy instead of something simple.
Also, She managed to date Lionel Luthor and then separate on good terms. What kind of person is Aunt Nell that she still thinks highly of somebody like Lionel?? Asking the real questions here. So therefore it's some of Nell Potter's fault that Lana Lang turned out the way she did on the TV show.

Lana's birthday was coming up in a few weeks, and Lana couldn't be more upset about it if she tried.

In fact, she was kind of sulking alone at in the school cafeteria during lunchtime right now.

Aunt Nell had a tendency to ruin every birthday she ever had, without even meaning to. Aunt Nell tended to be a little self-absorbed and never really asked Lana for her input when it came to her birthday parties. As a result the parties would often be the total opposite of what Lana wanted.

As much as she loved Aunt Nell, the more Lana grew older the more she realized that Aunt Nell wasn't really fit to raise a child. Nell simply did not have the knack for it, and a lot of her well-meaning attempts only served to screw things up even more. And it could even get worse too, when Nell had her selfish moments.

For instance, Lana was never into horseback riding competitions as a little girl even though she enjoyed riding the horses. But Nell would put her into those competitions anyway, just so that Nell could brag to people about how her niece was a prodigy at that sort of thing. But when Lana was only able to win third place prizes instead of first place like Nell wanted, she stopped making Lana go to those competitions.

That wasn't the end of it. Nell made her do all sort of things, from ballet to pageantry... in the hopes that Lana would become good at something that she could brag to her friends about. In short, Aunt
Nell was like a stage mom who was obsessed with appearances and putting on a good front for others.

That was part of the reason why Nell had pushed her so hard to try cheer-leadering, even though that wasn't what Lana was into... and why Nell was so disappointed when Lana lacked the charisma and agility to pull it off. Nell had been so appalled when Lana told her that she joined the drama and theater club, not as one of its' stars... but as a backstage hand. She couldn't understand that Lana Lang was perfectly content to be in the background instead of standing there in the spotlight. Which brings us back to the birthday issue...

To aunt Nell, every birthday was an opportunity to show off instead of it being something that you celebrated with the child in question. So Nell would often invite people that she considered to be “popular”, disregarding the fact that Lana didn't know them. So Lana would wind up having a lot of strangers and their kids who had been bribed to come to her birthday parties, and that could get awkward fast.

Whitney and Joanna had often acted as a buffer between her and the strangers, so that part hadn't been too bad. But now Whitney was going to some football tryout thing in Metropolis to win a college scholarship, and Joanna were going with him to cheer him on. So this year they weren't going to be there for her at all... and the real kicker was that she wished she could go with them to Metropolis too for her birthday.

Sometimes having friends who were much older than you were, suckat big time. Mainly because they had more responsibilities, and often had other things to do that you couldn't be a part of just simply because you were too young.

It was times like that she wished she was turning 17, not turning 15. Then maybe she could had gone with them.

Her sulking was interrupted by loud laughter, and she glanced over at the next table. It turned out to be occupied by Chloe, Pete and Clark. They were all laughing about something, she didn't know what.

But that did give her an idea... and she couldn't help but smirk mischievously as a plan formed quickly in her head.

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“So then the bartender says, why the long face?” Pete was telling the punchline to a joke, and both of his friends chuckled.

It was a pretty old joke, but Pete was able to put a fresh spin with the way he told it.

It was then that Lana Lang walked over to their table. “Hi. I hope I'm not interrupting anything?”

“Nah, you're not interrupting anything. Pete was just telling us his take on some classic jokes. Want to hear one?” Clark answered.

Lana smiled. “Great. I just wanted to invite you three to my birthday party. Any chance that the three of you could come?”

Clark actually looked surprised. “Really? Huh, you know this is the first time that you've actually invited me to one of your parties..”

Chloe raised one eyebrow slightly. “Yeah. From what I hear, your birthdays tend to be a pretty swanky affair with only Smallville's elite and the popular kids coming. Are you sure you want to
invite a bunch of lowly peasants to your party?"

Lana silently thought that was exactly the point. After all, Aunt Nell could be such a snob to the point that she could be ridiculous about it. Plus, Lana knew that Nell often went out of her way to make sure that the Kents never came to any of the parties that she hosted. For some reason Aunt Nell seemed to have some kind of silent grudge against the family for reasons that she refused to explain.

So what was the best way to annoy Aunt Nell and make a point at the same time? You invite one of the Kents and his friends to the party. Besides, with Whitney and Joanna going away for the week she needed a few familiar faces at the party to act as her buffer.

She laughed. “Oh come on, you're just over-exaggerating. It's not that bad, I promise you. Besides, Whitney and Joanna isn't coming to my party this year. I wanted a few familiar faces at my party, instead of people I barely know at all. You'd be actually doing me a favor by coming to my party. At this this way I would actually have somebody to talk to.”

Pete looked thoughtful. “Is it a black-tie party? I hope my tuxedo from last year still fits me..”

Lana smiled. “It's halfway formal, halfway casual. Meaning that you can dress up but you don't have to come in a tuxedo or a prom dress. Just a casual suit will do.”

Clark smiled. “Alright, I'm in.”

Chloe shrugged. “I guess I'm going too.”

Lana beamed. “Great!”

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Lex Luthor drove down the road to the mysterious Laboratory that both Chloe and Clark had mentioned a while back.

Chloe and Clark had been correct when they said this place was fishy as hell. There was virtually no paperwork to indicate that this was even a legal building owned by any company at all. This lab was freelance, with no company sponsorship at all. There was nothing indicate what they might be working on in there. The existing paperwork that did exist simply said that they were set up to study meteor rocks. That was it, there was nothing to say what they were actually doing with the rocks themselves. It was like this building didn't exist at all far as the town and the government was concerned.

Still, Lex's gut instinct told him that this Lab building was a vital part of the mystery that he was exploring, and that he just might get answers here. Who knows, maybe he could sponsor this lab to research the meteor rocks for him anyway if it didn't pan out. That is, if they were really researching meteor rocks.

With Lex's luck it might be some kind of front for some drug trafficking ring. With the shady setup he wouldn't be surprised if it was.

His sliver Porsche slowed and he parked directly in front of the building. He stepped out of his car and gave the building a once-over.

On the outside it looked like a generic three-story brick building. The only unusual thing was the sign over the entrance. It read, “Cadmus Labs” which was done up in a futuristic looking font.

Lex recalled that the name came from a greek hero in myth, and he couldn't help but smile. This was just the kind of name he would had picked if he ever started up an laboratory dedicated to research.
He decided to take that as a good sign, and feeling encouraged he walked into the building.

“I don't believe it! What the hell is he doing here??” One of the supervisors hissed to the employee who brought him the news that Lex Luthor was here to tour the building.

“He told the reception desk that he was here as a possible investor. I didn't know what to do... I mean, according to the original time-line he started up Cadmus Labs, right? So if he's here to invest in us and we turn him away then Cadmus Labs might not exist anymore, because he decided to invest in other ventures instead? After all, the only reason we even exist as a group in the first place is because of Lex Luthor from the future. Man, this whole thing is so confusing to me.” the male employee whined.

The supervisor froze up. He was right... they couldn't do anything that might accidentally erase Cadmus Labs out of existence. What had they been thinking, reusing that name from the future anyway? Even if they really were Cadmus Labs, from the future.

They had been partly responsible for the creation of the time machine....they had provided the materials needed for it, while Lex Luthor worked on it. It was how they came to be in possession of the time machine after Lex died fighting Darkseid. And then what was left of the military had somehow found out about the time machine, and came to them with a plan...

But they couldn't just let this younger version of Lex Luthor see everything they were working on here. And what would happen if Lex found out about the secret underground tunnel to their base? And the meteor mutants that they captured and kept there?

He calmed down when he realized that they had done drills for something like this. “Everyone, you know to do. Alert everyone in the base here, and employ code 780. Remember to use your fake names and cover. I'll be acting as Lex Luthor's tour guide, and I will be using my own fake name as well... remember to address me accordingly. Just act natural, everyone.”

Lex waited 20 minutes before somebody finally came out to greet him.

It was a balding man in glasses, and his ID showed him to be some kind of supervisor. He greeted Lex, and smiled apologetically. “Sorry for the long wait. But you have to admit that you caught us off guard. We weren't expecting any visitors today, much less a billionaire who were looking to invest in us. So we had to go though the proper clearance channels before we could clear you for the tour.”

Lex put on his best charming smile. “That's no problem at all. First let me apologize for putting you on the spot like this all of a sudden. It was simply a random impulse I had, you know... I heard about what you guys were doing here, and I thought it was all very terribly interesting. But you guys are so difficult to get a hold of, otherwise I would had called ahead for an appointment. You didn't have a public number listed, and you didn't even have a website or email that I knew of.”

The guy chuckled nervously. “Well, we're a non-profit organization dedicated to the study of meteor rocks. If anybody choose to fund our research, they would be losing money because they wouldn't get much in return unless they were equally enthusiastic about analyzing the properties of rocks from space.”

“And that is a real shame that so many ignorant people seem to think that way. I mean, the amount of data about outer space that we could learn from meteor rocks alone... those rocks most likely traveled across the galaxy and picked up plenty of stellar residue from clouds of stardust, or other
astronomical objects. It's a great way to learn about our universe. I don't see how that could be useless.” Lex replied smoothly.... actually sounding very sincere as he said it. So on some level he probably meant that.

The supervisor chuckled. “That's a very romantic way of looking at it, sir. We've already learned so much here... never in our wildest imagination did we ever imagine that this town would yield so many different types of meteor rocks. We've had to come up with new classifications for them all. Which I'm sure you'll learn about on our tour.”

That actually seemed to pique Lex's interest. “Do lead the way, Mr...?”

“The name's Marty Munn, Sir. You can call me Marty if you want to.”

10 minutes later, Marty was already telling Lex about all the different types of meteor rocks that they found, especially the color variations. He had to fight the natural impulse to call the stones Kryptonite, because he knew that the rocks hadn't been given that name yet.

They were standing before a display wall that showed different types of the Kryptonite that they collected over time.

“you can imagine our surprise when we opened up the rocks to find those crystal-like things inside. What's even more fascinating, they all seem to have different effects and generates different types of energy depending on the color. The green one is the most common one of them all, and it emits a low-level radiation. The radiation itself is mostly harmless to living beings on earth, but it seems to contain a unusual type of energy. The red ones contain negatively charged radiation, which alters the type of energy considerably.” Marty was explaining the different properties of the rocks when Lex interrupted to ask a question.

“What do you mean by energy exactly?” Lex wondered.

“Well... you know how most things can be burned or harnessed for energy? There's electricity, solar power, hydro power... and of course, nuclear power. Even coal itself has traces of energy that can be harnessed though burning it. We had machines to test energy levels as well as radiation... and you can imagine our surprise when it turned out that those crystals seemed to store energy of some kind. We're still trying to classify what kind of energy it is, and whenever it could be harnessed for mankind.” Marty explained.

Lex's eyes lit up at this. “So, those crystals that you found in the meteor rocks basically act as batteries that absorb energy and also release it at will? That does sound very useful. But, the low level radiation and this new type of energy could have side effects.... do you know anything about that?”

Marty nodded. “Yes, unfortunately there does seem to be some downsides. We discovered that the green stone's radiation seemed to affect the cognitive processes of human beings and animals, causing them to be homicidal and irrational. And in some unlucky cases, it even sped up the growth of cancer in our animals. The red one doesn't have that same effect, so it's far more safer for our personnel to handle. This white one on the other hand...” Marty pointed to a bright white crystal rock in the display before continuing, “This one is completely toxic to plant life. The soil that had the white stones in them became barren, and any plants that grew there instantly wilted and turned black. It's harmless to human beings and animals though, and completely negates the effects of the green stones.”

Lex was completely fascinated. “So all the different colors have different effects on lifeforms..."
depending on their properties?"

Marty nodded. “That's correct, sir.”

“What about this stone that's a golden color?” Lex pointed to the one that Marty knew as Gold Kryptonite. He recalled that it could be used to permanently remove superpowers of any Kryptonian, forever. So it was prudent to be very careful with it unless you were dealing with guys like General Zod.

“Well, it doesn't seem to have any side effects towards humans, animals or plant life. It can store a great deal of energy, but somehow it manages to be very extremely unstable. Any attempts to use it as a type of battery only causes it to explode. Basically, it's very explosive... so in it's way it's still dangerous.” Marty said very neutrally. There, that should dissuade Lex from using it in the first place.

“I see. That orange one?” Lex pointed to the orange stone.

“It seems to genetically enhance animals, giving them strength superior to normal animals somehow. I'll have to show you the lab animals, you won't believe me until you see for yourself.”

The deep purple Kryptonite caught Lex's eye, as it sparkled beautifully in the light like it was a large chunk of amethyst. “And this one?”

Marty shook his head. “Actually we have no idea what that one does at all... say, instead of standing here looking at all the stones that we collected why don't we go to the labs? This way we can show you the evidence of our hard work, and you can see how the meteor rocks affected the animals and plants that I spoke of...”

Lex simply nodded. “Lead the way then.”

Marty mentally sighed. Thank god. It was getting harder to explain the more weirder forms of Kryptonite. he didn't know what bullshit explanation he would had to come up with had Lex focused on the Black or Sliver ones. Or the pink one.... Marty had heard an absurd rumor that the pink apparently made Superman gay, but he had dismissed that out of hand. After all, the pink one seemed to be a blending of the red Kryptonite and the white Kryptonite. The red one seemed to make Superman lose all inhibitions so at worst all the pink one would do is make Superman feel a slight buzz, and make him more relaxed? Maybe, Marty didn't really know for sure.

It was a total mystery what the purple one did though? None of them had been able to figure that one out, and all of them were from the future where they had seen every effect that all the colors of Kryptonite had on Superman.

--20 minutes in--

Lex felt like throwing up as he stared at the massive cancerous tumors growing on the rats. The rats were completely covered in tumors, and looked like something straight out of a horror movie.

“Ugh. You said the green stones sped up the growth of cancer?” Lex was speaking to the scientist who studied the effects that the green stones had on cancer. The woman simply nodded.

She then replied, “Normally, it takes years for cancer to grow and develop into something truly deadly. I discovered that the low-level radiation from the green stones actually managed to speed up the cancer's growth so that a person could easily develop cancer and then die from it in a year. At least that's my estimate. I've tested this on rats, but it might be different for humans. It may take
Lex took a deep breath upon hearing this. Jesus, the green rocks were all over Smallville! What would happen to the citizens with those things just lying around? “But the government came in and tested the rocks themselves... they said the rocks were totally harmless. How could they not notice that it promoted cancerous growth?”

The woman scoffed. “They were most likely just there to test the radiation and didn’t bother to test everything else. They didn’t exactly stick around to see the effects it had on the town’s population. Normally, they would be totally correct in that low-level radiation is totally harmless. After all, things like corn when grown normally have a radiation count of 1.0, which is very low. Everything on earth from food and clothing has minuscule amounts radiation in them... it's only when the radiation count becomes high in numbers that it gets dangerous. But, evidence points to that there is in fact different types of radiation and energy. There's nuclear radiation created by man-made materials, natural radiation which the earth produces, and then there's cosmic radiation. Those guys were most likely only familiar with then nuclear type and failed to account for more unusual types. Basically, there's still so much out there that we still don’t know about. So we only recently discovered this.”

Lex nodded. This did make sense to a certain degree. So the government didn't maliciously lie about the safety of the meteor rocks, they were just simply ignorant as to what it could do to humans.

It did make him feel that the meteor rocks should all be collected and stored safely away from the general public, though.

30 minutes into the tour, Lex met Steve Hamilton.

He watched from an observation window as the black man was tending to some flowers while wearing an protective suit and mask. An hazmat suit, to be exact.

“Why is he dressed this way? You would think he was working with deadly diseases instead of flowers.” Lex wondered.

“I know, but there’s more to those flowers than they appear. Have you ever heard about the Nicodemus flowers?” Marty said.

Lex shook his head, and Marty launched into an history lesson. “Apparently, those flowers used to be naive around the Smallville area back in the 1800's to 1900's until they went extinct, when the locals decided that every one of them had to be destroyed.”

“So how come it’s here in a laboratory? It seems to be perfectly fine for a flower that apparently was wiped out of existence.”

Marty chuckled. “That’s a good question. You see, Dr. Hamilton here actually managed to resurrect the dead flowers using the green meteor rocks without the use of cloning technology or any other machines. Naturally, we all were excited at the prospect that the green stones could revitalize dead
cells like that, so we hired him to study this rebirth process using the green stones.”

Lex smirked. “So you were willing to hire an disgraced ex-professor because he managed to do something amazing with those rocks. I see, that makes sense. I had wondered...”

Marty looked startled at this. “Sorry, what?”

Lex turned to fact the supervisor. “You see, I did some digging around before I came here. There a couple of people in Smallville who thought this place was ‘sketchy as hell’ because they were willing to hire somebody like Steve Hamilton. I looked into Steve's past.. and I have to say, he's got quite the colorful history. Had a lot of forbidden affairs with his students while he was a professor at Metropolis University.... until he overstepped and slept with an underage student instead of the girls who were legal according to law. So he was fired, and the entire scientific world stunned him completely so he couldn't get a lab job anywhere. Worse, he was now labeled as an sex offender so he couldn't get any type of job at all in Kansas because nobody were willing to hire him. Thus, he was forced to sell plastic meteor trinkets to tourists on the side of road while he vigilantly tried to continue his old job as a meteorologist. That is, until you people hired him...”

Marty blinked. “I see. Erm, you really did your homework...”

Lex shook his head. “I would had a lot more homework to do, if it wasn't for the fact that he was literally the only one on public record. For some reason, the other people working here...? It's like they don't exist at all.” With that he gave Marty his piercing, questioning stare.

Beads of sweat appeared on Marty's forehead. “Errmm... I see....”

Lex stared the other man down for a few more seconds, making the middle-aged man squirm. Finally, Lex smiled. “So, anyway. Let's move on with the rest of the tour?”

Marty couldn't help but feel relived. “Yes! Let's move on.”

50 minutes in, Lex was feeling slightly creeped out. He was in the room where they scanned and studied the properties of meteor rocks and digitalized the information into their computers.

But there was something off about the people here who did that task. Namely, the fact that they were all staring at Lex Luthor like he was the second coming of Jesus.

Lex was used to awed stares from people as seeing he was something of a local celebrity in Metropolis for being the son of the richest man alive. But this? This felt different somehow.

For instance one of the women working here stared at him with hope written over her features, like he was there to personally rescue her from something. Yet, nothing about her even indicated that she was being held here against her will, nor was she some kind of indentured servant working for the scientists. What's more, there was similar expressions across the other people's faces here too as well.

It was like they had just personally witnessed Jesus himself in the flesh. Maybe that was exactly what made it so weird for Lex. Normally, people often viewed him as being the son of the devil, if not the devil himself... nobody ever thought of him as a Jesus-like figure, much less a normal human man. After all, Lionel Luthor was something of a magnificent bastard himself.... so most people just naturally assumed that Lex wouldn't fall too far from the apple tree himself.

Anyway, Lex wasn't simply used to that kind of attention.... and it was making his skin crawl. So he made an hasty exit, saying that he had to cut the tour short because he had other appointments to keep.
That was something of a lie, but Lex felt that he had seen enough here anyway. He had already decided he was going to invest in this place, in the hopes that they would give him their research in exchange. But he couldn't stay around those creepy people any longer.

--At school, during study hour--

“Shit, I just realized something.” Clark said out loud.

“Ohh, it must be serious if you're cursing. I thought that you actually didn't know how to curse.” Chloe teased slightly as she looked up at the boy to see what he was going to tell her.

Clark rolled his eyes at the blonde girl. “Ha, ha. Seriously though. I don't have a present for Lana. I mean, you go to birthday parties you're supposed to get a gift for the person, right?”

Chloe shrugged. “Just get her a card. That's what I'm doing.”

Clark pondered this, and then he shook his head. “Nah, that seems kind of rude. I mean, She went out of her way to invite us? So maybe she would like something other than a card.”

“Hmm, if you say so.” Chloe shrugged again, as her attention went back to the homework that she was working on.

“Chloe, you're a girl. So you probably have a better idea of what Lana would like better than I do. Any suggestions?” Clark was pretty desperate for ideas at this point.

Chloe snorted as she solved an math problem. Man, Clark had it bad when it came to Lana. “It might be a bad idea to get birthday gift ideas from me. I mean, I'm not exactly your average girl. My idea of what makes a great gift is things like spy gear, tasers, etc. In fact I went on a shopping spree for things like that last month when I discovered that I had 200 dollars to spend. That's why I have a shiny, new shock baton sitting in my purse right now.”

Clark groaned at this, and he dropped his head into the desk. His forehead made a loud thudding noise as it impacted with the desk.

Chloe decided to take pity on her friend. “She seems to have a love for books and theater, right? So you should pick a gift based on that.”

Clark's head lifted up at this. Right, how could Clark have forgotten about that...? now he just needed to think about the perfect gift centered around those two things.

Pete walked in with a sickly expression on his face, and he looked unusually pale... the dark skin on his face took on something of a grey hue. Clark looked up at pete, and instantly became concerned. “You alright, Pete? You don't look so good.”

Pete groaned as he sat down by Chloe. “You'll never believe what really happened. It's so horrible...”

Chloe glanced at Clark and then back at Pete. “What happened?”

Clark pulled out a bottle of water he had and handed it over to Pete. “Here, drink this. You look like you need it.”

Pete downed the bottle of water before he told them his story. “Well, I decided that I would ask Jodi
to be my date for Lana's party. You all know Jodi Melville right? She helped us with some of our schoolwork once.”

Both Clark and Chloe nodded. Pete continued, “I was talking to her about Lana's party, and before I got to ask her out Dustin came by and started mocking her weight. He was teasing Jodi for trying to stay healthy on some smoothie diet, saying that a fatty like her was going to be ugly no matter what. So I got into a fight with Dustin, but in the fight the two of us accidentally spilled Jodi's lunch all over everything... especially on Jodi's clothes. Dustin left and I was there trying to clean up the mess with Jodi... I was apologizing my ass off for what happened. It was then that Jodi looked really sick, and she started vomiting blood before passing out.”

“Wait a minute, you said she started vomiting blood??” Clark asked.

Pete nodded miserably. “Turns out that somebody put meteor rocks in her smoothies... and when she swallowed those rocks they tore up her insides. That was why she was vomiting blood... She's in the nurse office while they get an ambulance over here to take her to the hospital. I wanted to stay with her, but they said I couldn't do anything for her at that point.”

“Somebody actually did that?? I mean, I know people can be horribly cruel to others who are overweight... but that's going too far!” Chloe tried to wrap her head around the fact that the bullying could had advanced to something far more dangerous than name-calling.

Pete nodded. “I know.”

Chloe tried to think of something to cheer up her friend. “Hey, why don't we go visit her after school in the hospital? I'm sure she'll feel fine by then?”

Pete nodded again. “Yeah, that would be nice.”

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Lana walked into the house after school, and she glanced around. It was like some party explosion had gone off into the house, as it was filled with streamers and the like still boxed up.

Aunt Nell was on the phone. “So I thought it would be great if you and your son let me use the Luthor castle for Lana's birthday party. Just the ballroom will do. After all, it's not everyday that my darling niece turns 15. Really? Oh! That's so great... you're so sweet for agreeing to this. Mwah.”

With that, She hung up. She noticed Lana standing there in the doorway, and she smiled. “Oh, Lana. Great news! I just got off the phone with Mr. Luthor... and he agreed to let us use their ballroom for the party. Isn't that great?”

That just meant that this party was going to be outrageously expensive and gaudy as hell for Lana's tastes. Ugh.

Lana put on a forced smile on her face. “Great. Oh, I decided that since Whitney and Joanna had other things to attend to this year, that I would invite a few friends I know from school to take their place. I hope that's alright.”

Aunt Nell nodded. “Oh that's alright, sweetie. So what are their names so that I can put them on the guest list?”

“Clark Kent, Chloe Sullivan and Pete Ross.” Lana answered. She couldn't help but smile smugly as her answer had the desired effect.

Nell blanched slightly at mention of Clark Kent's name.
“Errmm... we only have two spots left. Chloe and Pete could fit on the list. I'm sorry, but I don't think we have a spot open for Clark.”

Lana rolled her eyes, for she could see the feeble lie for what it was. “Aunt Nell, don't you think this passive-aggressive enmity against the Kents have gone on long enough? And why do you even hate them in the first place... what did they do to earn this kind of behavior from you?”

Aunt Nell squirmed uncomfortably, as she looked away from her niece. “I don't know what you mean. I've been perfectly cordial to them...”

Lana scoffed. “Please, everyone and their grandmother knows that you don't like them at all. Sure, you act all sweet but you also talk about them behind their back... and make all those snide remarks about Mrs. Kent's taste in flowers every time she comes to buy tulips from you. Now, please be honest with me... why do you hate them?”

Nell shook her head and ran a hand though her dyed auburn hair. “You wouldn't understand.”

“Yeah? Try me.”

Nell sighed. “Fine. You see... Mr. Kent and I used to date a lot throughout high school. We were the most popular couple at school... in fact, we were even elected King and Queen at the prom dance.”

She smiled slightly at the memory before continuing the story. “Everyone believed that since we dated for so long and were basically the dream couple that everyone aspired to be... that we would get married after high school. Jonathan Kent and I believed that would happen for us as well... but we both agreed that we needed to go to college first before we could even talk about marriage. And I also thought that we needed to explore all our options first while we were both at college... so I dated Lionel Luthor for a while until the end of my college years. I wasn't upset when Lionel Luthor ended things, for I knew that I would always have Jonathan Kent. But when I got back home.... I discovered that Jonathan had slept with some city girl and were set to marry her instead.”

Lana raised her eyebrows. “That's it? That's why you're so angry with them.”

Nell smiled at Lana in an indulgent manner. “I knew you wouldn't understand. After all, you're so young...”

Lana shook her head. “No. I understand perfectly. You honestly thought you could have your cake and eat it too. You wanted to try dating other people, but wanted Jonathan to be there as your 'backup' in case it didn't work out. You're angry at Jonathan because he had the audacity to do the exact same thing you did... and not only that, but he found somebody better than you. Sorry, but that's basically the definition of a hypocrite.”

Nell started to look upset at this. “Now, you better stop--”

Lana cut her off. “No, you better actually listen to me for once. You will get over this petty grievance against the Kents, and Clark Kent will come to my party. After all, it's been over 15 years since Jonathan choose Martha over you, and you need to get over it.”

With that, Lana stormed away from Nell and stomped upstairs to her room. She also made sure to slam her door hard, just to annoy Nell.
Lana knew she was acting really petty and childish right now, but she honestly didn't care. After all, she was a teenage girl...wasn't she allowed to have a few petty moments?

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--At the Beanery--
Chloe followed Pete into the building. “I'm sorry, Pete. I honestly thought they would let us see her.”

They had just gotten back from the hospital, where the doctors and Jodi’s father had told them the terrible news. The doctors had to do invasive surgery to stop all of the internal bleeding.... so Jodi wasn't ready to receive visitors just yet.

And Jodi's father looked like he had been dragged though hell, the poor guy. Mr. Melville's eyes were completely bloodshot from crying as the policemen talked to him about what happened at school.

Pete had been questioned too as well, as seeing he had been there at the scene when it happened. Mr. Melville acted so upset when Pete mentioned that Jodi had been bullied a lot by some guy named Dustin and his buddies because of her weight.

“So you're saying they deliberately harmed my daughter by putting the meteor rocks in her drinks?” Mr. Melville looked pissed as hell, like he wanted to go out and kick some ass.

Pete shrugged, feeling equally angry himself. “I don't know if they were actually the ones who did it, but I wouldn't put it past them. The idiots would think was a harmless, fun prank to play on their targets.”

The policemen had to calm the two of them down. They promised that they would look into it and that anybody involved with tampering Jodi's drink would be promptly arrested.

There was nothing else they could do at the hospital, since they wouldn't let the teenagers into the room to see Jodi. And so now they were here at Smallville's coffee hangout.

Pete turned around to face Chloe. “It couldn't be helped. I just hope that the police nail whoever did that to her. I mean... she could had died!”

Chloe nodded, and her eye caught sight of Lex Luthor who were sitting in the back of the Beanery. She froze up slightly.

She hadn't been avoiding Lex, not exactly. Although, she did feel awkward around him now thanks to that whole prophecy of doom hanging over his head. Well, she was still unsure if it would even happen now that everyone else's predicted futures seemed to change...
But it did feel weird hanging out with a man knowing that his father could kill both of them. Or something like that.

Pete followed Chloe's eye direction to find out what she was staring at, and he groaned. “Great. As if my day wasn't terrible already, we run into Lex Luthor?”

“Heh. Well we don't have to talk to him... it's not like Clark is here with us, so he won't have any reasons to come over to chat. So we can just get a table out of Lex's sight. He looks busy working anyway.” Chloe suggested.

Pete relaxed slightly at this. “Yeah, that's true. Well, come on then.”

With that, they walked to a side table that was out of sight and isolated.

30 minutes in, Clark came into the beanery and sat by his friends. “Sorry I'm late, guys. Had to do some chores at home before I could come hang out with you guys. You know how it is.”

Both Chloe and Pete simply nodded at this. Clark then asked, “So you visited Jodi today at the hospital right? How is she.”
Pete looked down at his drink glumly. Clark instantly looked sympathetic. “That bad, huh? She's not
dying, is she?”

Chloe shook her head. “Thankfully, the doctors were able to stop all the internal bleeding before it
got too bad. So she's going to live though it. But her health is in really bad condition right now. We
couldn't even get in to visit her at all because of it.”

Clark looked dismayed at this. He glanced over at Pete. “I'm so sorry... I know you really liked her.”

Pete shrugged. “Yeah. I guess this means that I'm going stag to Lana's party. It doesn't seem right to
ask anybody else out now...”

There was an uncomfortable silence at the table for a while there, until Clark decided to change the
subject.

Clark sighed. “I still haven't figured out what to get Lana. I thought about getting her a book, I don't
know what books she already has and what she doesn't...”

Chloe shook her head at this. “I still say you should just get her a card. I don't think she was really
expecting an gift from you anyway.”

Pete nodded. “She seemed really happy to hear that we were all coming.. that might be the only
birthday gift she wanted from us.”

Clark shrugged. “I know.... but still, it doesn't seem right to just show up with nothing but a card.
You know what I mean?”

Pete and Chloe glanced at each other, and smirked.

Clark narrowed his eyes. “What?”

Pete just raised one eyebrow. “Oh nothing. That's just you seem awfully eager to get into Lana
Lang's good graces...Not that I blame you of course. After all, your crush finally acknowledged that
you exist... and I'm sure you want to keep it that way.” He teased slightly.

Clark rolled his eyes at this. It was no use. No matter how much he protested, and told them that he
wasn't in love with Lana... that only seemed to make them even more convinced that he was in love
with Lana. God, the one time his 6-year-old self went around telling everyone that he was going to
marry Lana Lang one day.... and nobody ever let him forget that. It was so embarrassing and
annoying at the same time. It was as if people weren't allowed to grow out of prepubescent crushes
that they had??

Clark supposed that it didn't help at all that he hadn't really found somebody else to crush on. So
everyone just kind of assumed that he was still crushing on Lana. Because a teenage boy who didn't
have crushes or sexual feelings for anybody at all were apparently too abnormal to think of.

Whatever, he was tired of protesting. He gave up... he would just let people think whatever they
wanted to think about him and Lana. Even if it wasn't true.

Clark finally spotted Lex working on his paperwork in the back. “Hey, Lex's here. Why didn't you
guys tell me?”

Pete sighed. He then said very sarcastically, “Really? I haven't noticed.”

Clark was oblivious to the tone in Pete's voice, as he said, “I'm gonna say hi to him. Be back in a
second.”

As he left, Pete turned his head to give Chloe a pained look. “Seriously, what does he see in Lex?”

Chloe smirked slightly, and just shrugged her shoulders. She sipped her coffee.

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Lex was frowning thoughtfully at his papers when Clark walked over.

“Hey, Lex.” Clark greeted the man, and Lex’s face brightened when he looked up at Clark.

Lex smiled. “Hello. I’m just going though the list of Smallville’s possible business ventures I could invest in.” He said, explaining the papers he had with him.

Clark sat down by him, and actually seemed to look interested in what Lex was doing. “Oh?”

Lex nodded. “I know that I already have the factory, but I thought it would be nice to invest in local businesses around here to make sure that they flourish too. So I went on a tour of Smallville’s places, so to speak... I even toured Camdus Labs. You remember, the one you said were sketchy because they hired some sleazy ex-professor?”

Clark raised his eyebrows. “You actually got in?? Man, don’t let Chloe know. She’s been trying to get into that place for ages, but she never could. If she knew you got a tour of the place, she’d be demanding to know every little detail about what you saw in that place. I mean... Nobody in town really knows what they do in there, other than the fact that they apparently study meteor rocks. So of course Chloe would want to know everything about the place.”

Lex nodded. “I do confess that I find the place strange too. They seemed to be awfully secretive for a harmless lab that only studied rocks from space. There was an absence of paperwork, public records, etc when I tried to learn everything about them beforehand... but then when I arrived and asked for a tour of the place... they were awfully accommodating.”

Clark frowned slightly. “Yeah, that does seem sorta weird.”

Lex told him, “When I toured the place, everything seemed to be perfectly normal.... for a lab anyway. Did you know that there’s different colored meteor rocks? They showed me this whole collection they had.. it was like a rainbow display. I thought that most rocks were green, but I guess other varieties exist.”

Clark blanched slightly at this. He had been on the watch out for green rocks for most of his life. Now there was other colors out there that he had to watch out for? Great. Hopefully the other colors were harmless....

Lex didn’t notice the strange look on Clark’s face because he had turned to pick up his coffee mug. He then drank it, and grimaced slightly. He mumbled to Clark, “You know what? Maybe instead of investing in an existing business I should just open up a new coffee shop. The coffee here sucks.... I might be doing everyone a service by having a place that actually serves good coffee.”

Clark blinked at the change of topic, but he nodded. “That’s actually a very good idea. There’s a few closed buildings in town that could do very well as a new cafe. Plus the few hangouts in town that teenagers can legally be in tends to be very old fashioned. They don’t even have to-go plastic mugs for when people just want to grab a cup of coffee and go. Might be good for busy adults too, since not all of them can exactly sit down and drink a cup of coffee before they go. I could see you turning a profit on that.”
Lex paused thoughtfully at this. He had been joking when he made the comment about a new coffeehouse, but the way Clark said that...

Yeah, it was certainly a good idea, wasn't it? Plus, as an owner of a coffeehouse he could control the quality of coffee and no longer be forced to drink this kind of crap. He got the feeling that many of the Smallville citizens probably felt the same way about Beanery's coffee but were too polite to say it outright. Like Clark said, he could easily turn a profit. “Yeah.”

Clark noticed Pete shooting him an annoyed glance, and realized that maybe he had sat there too long talking to Lex. “Hey, I gonna go. My friends are expecting me back at their table. Good luck with your side business thing.”

With that, he left.

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--A few days later--

Lana's birthday party, which took place in the ballroom of the Luthor mansion, wasn't that great. That was according to Chloe's opinion of the whole thing.

Both Pete and Chloe agreed that the decor, the music, etc all seemed kind of stuffy.... it was like the party had been designed for a middle-aged woman instead of a young teenage girl who was turning 15.

“Yeah... it's like... Nell choose what appealed to herself, without asking her niece what she wanted for her birthday. Jeez, I hope that's not the case because that would be just sad.” Pete commented. He was wearing a white casual suit.

Chloe nodded. She was wearing a modest red dress which enhanced the shape of her body without it being tasteless.

“Look at the other party-goers. They look like they were all bribed into coming here...”

“That's actually not too far from the truth.” Lana's voice said from behind them, and they jumped.

Pete tried to cover for themselves. “Uh, we weren't trash-talking your party behind your back.... we were just commenting on how this party didn't seem like something you would come up with..?”

Lana smirked. “At least you two know me well enough for that. Unfortunately, after all those years of living with my aunt she's still highly oblivious to what I really want in a party. And Chloe's somewhat right. Most of the people here are basically here for the party favors.... every year my aunt brings out those bags full of goodies.. this year she's giving away cd players to the people who come to my party. That's the only reason why those people show up. I don't even know who half of those people are.”

“That... well, kind of sucks.” Pete replied, and then he went quiet because he didn't know what else he could say to that.

“Haven't you talked to your aunt about that? I mean, I would be raising hell if my birthday wishes were ignored every year.” Chloe asked.

Lana shook her head. “Tried that, it's no use. Aunt Nell always thinks everything she does is good for me. It just never occurs to her that not everyone loves big parties. Put it simply, she's the type who thinks that EVERYONE would love to have a corvette, and then acts outraged when it turns out that the person was more of a Chevy Impala fan. She doesn't understand that not everyone goes
for big and flashy.”

Lana then smiled impishly. “Besides, I found a way to get under her skin. You see... there was a reason why I invited you guys.”

She then looked around. “Speaking of which, where's Clark?”

Chloe pointed to the other end of the room, where Clark was chatting quietly with Lex. Pete scoffed. “Lately, every time he sees Lex around he has to go out of his way to chat with the guy.”

Chloe then moved to Lana's side. “So you were telling us about the real reason you invited us...?”

“Well, did you know that Aunt Nell has this grudge against the Kents and actually had them blacklisted from all of her parties?” Lana told her the rest, “I found out the reason behind it, and I thought it was the most stupidest thing ever. Jonathan and Nell used to date...”

As Lana rambled on to Chloe and Pete, Clark was listening in rapt fascination to one of Lex's childhood stories.

“Come on. I can't picture you ever hiding in a closet to get away from a overcrowded party. I mean... you're so confident and self-assured....” Clark replied.

Lex smirked. “Well, I was a very different person as a little kid. Sometimes it feels like this kid and I weren't even the same person at all... that I just somehow got the childhood memories of somebody else instead of my own. If that makes sense?”

Clark nodded. “Yeah, I understand a little bit about that. It's amazing how much our tastes and personalities can change so much over the years, though.”

Lex subconsciously moved closer. “Well, I hope you don't change too much over the years. You're already wonderful the way you are right now... I would hate to see that change.”

Predictably enough Clark started acting shy and shuffled his feet at this unexpected compliment. Lex smiled at his behavior.

Meanwhile, Chloe was staring at Lana with a hint of disbelief. “Oh wow. I can't believe your Aunt would be that petty.”

Pete shook his head. “Yeah. I mean... Nell wanted to date others while the two of them were in college. But Jonathan apparently wasn't allowed to do the same thing she was doing? Man, talk about double standards.”

Chloe started chuckling. “You know the funny thing? I don't think the older Kents even noticed that they were being snubbed... if anything they were probably grateful that Aunt Nell never asked them to her parties. Nell thought she was punishing them by doing something like that but she most likely just did them a favor instead.”

Pete smiled. “Yeah. That does sound like Mr. and Mrs. Kent.... they've never really liked going to large social gatherings for some reason. Maybe that's the reason why Jonathan and Nell would had never worked out. Not that Nell would see it that way, I guess.”

The party went on until 8pm.
Chapter Summary

Skipping ahead a few episodes.
In this chapter we have Clark find out about a few certain things. The fact that Lionel might be willing to kill his son to protect a secret, and about the strange people in Alien costumes going around stealing random things.

Oh yeah, and we also get to learn more about our time travellers.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about not updating sooner. I got caught up in playing Fallout 4 and its' DLCs.
*sweatdrop*

A Month passed, with there being a few notable events that occurred in Smallville.

For instance, There had been the hostage situation at the fertilizer plant, which had been resolved nicely by both Lex and Clark. Weeks later, a corrupt policeman by the name Phlean showed up, only to be done in by his own ego.

There had been a few unusual meteor-related events, like that Eric boy temporarily stealing the powers of one Clark Kent.

but nothing that the secret time-traveling society could deal with. According to the rules, people like Eric weren’t really a meteor mutant at all... he was just a human being who figured out how to temporarily steal the powers that Clark Kent had. Guys like Eric would had been useful, if he actually had the ability to steal powers from other people besides Clark Kent. But the scientists discovered that Eric were just a normal human being who had figured out how to steal Clark's powers by pure luck.

The only mutant they had collected in weeks was this weird green rose. Apparently, a pair of siblings had been using this mutated rose to produce some kind of invisibility serum. They had been using it to terrorize Lex's new love interest by the name Victoria. Apparently, the sister had a huge crush on Lex, and her brother seemed to be strongly invested in giving his sister what she wanted.

The group of time-travelers had no interest in the latest drama, but the properties of the green roses did catch their interest. An invisibility serum could be very useful in the war against Darkseid, so they had collected all the mutated roses from under Jeff Palmer's nose. But by doing so they had caused the Palmer siblings to expose themselves earlier than expected.

But now it was back to the grind where they did nothing but wait and watch....

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Tom, one of the time-travelers, was completely bored out of his skull. He actually was resorting to reading old case files to pass the time.

The girl, who had captured the bug-boy mutant a while back, walked into the room. “Hey, Tom. What's happening?”

Tom pushed up his glasses and just shook his head. “Hey, Macy. Nothing much. I'm just bored, so I'm reading old case files. You?”

The girl, now known as Macy, sighed. “I was out spying on Clark and the others, but there's only so much teenage drama I can take before I become bored of it all. I tell ya, when I first signed up for time-travel and saving the world..... I never thought it would be so boring! All we literally do is sit around waiting for something to happen. And spying on teenagers to make sure they don't into trouble.... but those people do anything but get into trouble! Is it bad if I'm hoping that they DO get into some trouble??”

“What's going on with Clark anyway? I keep on hearing those rumors that he hooked up with Lana Lang, but from what I've seen in town he hardly seems interested in her....” Tom wondered.

“Oh, that would be Joanna's work. You know her as Whitney's girlfriend probably. Apparently, there was a few nasty rumors going on around that said that Whitney was two-timing both Lana Lang and Joanna. Or that all three of them were in an polygamous relationship. Or that Whitney was a pervert who liked underage girls but were using Joanna as a front while he dated Lana. You know how teenagers are, they like to spread malicious rumors like that. He's going to turn 18 very soon, so that kind of thing could easily get him in trouble. So his girlfriend Joanna came up with this plan to counter the rumors with one of her own. That Lana and Clark was dating, and were an official couple. This way people wouldn't think that Whitney had done anything with Lana Lang at all.” Macy explained as she sat down by Tom.

Tom raised one eyebrow. “Sounds like an complicated situation. Is anybody buying into the rumor she spread?”

Macy chuckled. “Yeah. It helped that Lex was willing to set up Clark with Lana because he thought it would make Clark happy. Remember the time they went to the museum together in Metropolis? Turns out that Lana, her aunt Nell and Joanna happened to be there too.... and so Joanna took this opportunity to snap pictures on her flip cellphone of the two together so that it looked like Clark and Lana were on a date together there. She then spread the pictures all over school, by gushing to her other friends how she was so happy that Lana was coming out of her shell and dating such a cute boy.”

Tom raised his eyebrows. “It makes me wonder though. I mean, in the original time-line the only reason Clark was even in love with Lana was because Lana had empathic abilities, which allowed her to manipulate feelings. But now it seems like fate is trying to push Lana and Clark together despite this fact. Is the time-line trying to correct itself?”

Macy looked interested. “Is that what she really had? I mean, I knew she used to be a mutant, and that we fixed her before she became dangerous. But nobody was really clear on what her abilities really were when I asked about her.”

Tom shrugged, and held up one of the old case files he had been reading. And it happened to have a photo of Lana in it. “Well, She was a empath. Being a powerful empath comes with both strengths and weaknesses. For instance Lana’s weakness as an meteor mutant was that she wasn't able to be her own person.”
Macy looked puzzled. “What do you mean, she couldn't be her own person?”

Tom then explained, “Well, you see... being an empath means that you kind of feel what others are feeling, right? And you can also control what they're feeling too. Well it turns out that being around certain people also caused her to absorb not only their feelings, but some aspects of their personality too. So being around Clark, who seems to have the tendency to brood a lot, Lana became angsty and whiny. Around Chloe, Lana became upbeat and slightly sarcastic. Around the Luthors she became this scheming, dark person. An empath who absorbed Lionel Luthor's personality actually ended up being a danger to the world. Picture a person who were Lionel and Lex combined, with the power to manipulate people like that.... and you get the idea of how dangerous Lana truly were at that point.”

Macy looked thoughtful at this. “So she was like a mirror that reflected the nature of the person she was around at the time. Interesting. Still, in a way I kind of feel sorry for that old version of Lana. I mean...it sounds like she was never in full control of her ability, and it would certainly explain her failed relationships too. And why she had a tendency to attract all those weirdos even though she didn't want their attention.”

Tom nodded. “Lana won't be able to get her way anymore, but at least hopefully she'll grow up to be her own person, instead of absorbing the personalities of other people.”

--At the Beanery--

“They're what?? But they can't do that, the Talon building is a historical building!” Lana practically shrieked as Joanna told her the news.

Apparently, the movie theater, aka the Talon building, was being torn down to make room for a parking lot. Lana Lang was something of an architecture nerd, and so she loved the way the classical old buildings in Smallville looked. So the fact that such a beautiful building was being torn down to make room for a ugly parking lot.... well, it was just plain offensive to her. How could anybody look at an amazing piece of architecture and think, “Yeah, there needs to be a parking lot there?”

Joanna just rolled her eyes. She knew Lana was such a nerd when it came to the history of buildings and art. So she had expected this reaction when she decided to tell Lana about what she had overheard while she was at the bank with her parents.

Joanna did have some fond memories thanks to The Talon building, though. She and Whitney went to watch the movies there on many occasions, and also had many steamy make out sessions in the dark. Joanna sighed. “Well, there goes one more teenager hangout... At this rate there won't be any more places left for us to hang out at.” She teared up slightly before adding, “Not that Whitney ever wants to hang out anymore with me.... he's been so distant lately.”

Lana raised her eyebrows at this. “I find that hard to believe. Every time I see you two, you're always joined at the hips.”

Joanna shook her head. “Not the few past days. There's something bothering him big time, but he won't tell me what it is....”

“Well, maybe he needs time by himself? You know, to tackle whatever it is that's bugging him before he tells anybody about it?” Lana suggested.

Joanna nodded at this. But she said, “He better not be cheating on me though.... It would be the ultimate irony that I went to all the trouble of countering the rumors that he was cheating on me with rumors of my own, only to find out that he was in fact cheating on me. I mean, how unfair would
“No way, Whitney wouldn’t cheat on you... he loves you too much to do that. Why would you think that?” Lana instantly jumped to Whitney's defense. But then the rest of Joanna’s statement registered in her mind. “wait... what rumors?”

At Joanna's sheepish expression, Lana finally put the pieces together. “Don't tell me that you were the one behind those stupid rumors about Clark and me dating??”

Joanna was quick to defend herself before Lana could get mad. “I had to do something to protect Whitney. There's been all those nasty rumors about you and him. He's practically an adult already, while you're like, massively underage! so he could get in trouble. As his girlfriend, I have to protect him.”

Lana wasn't really that mad, despite what Joanna thought. Mostly she was just baffled. “You mean, the rumors that Greg started up half an year ago is still floating around? I never thought that anybody would buy into what he said...especially after he went berserk and attacked you. And then mysteriously disappeared somewhere....”

Joanna let out an involuntary shiver at the mention of Bug-Boy. She vividly recalled the way Greg's jaw had unhinged to let loose some kind of webbing that covered her body.... and the way the bugs in the tree-house crawled all over her, helping Greg cover her in the webbing... She blacked out then, so she had no idea what Greg wanted to do to her then. She wasn't sure she ever wanted to know what Greg had been planning to do.

Thank god for her dreamy boyfriend who came to her rescue like a knight in shining armor.

Lana noticed a brief haunted expression grace her best friend's face for a few seconds there, and she couldn't help but feel bad for bringing up what was obviously a bad memory. “I'm sorry, I shouldn't had mentioned that creep...”

Joanna shook her head. “No, it's fine. I'm already over it... mostly. I'm just thankful that Whitney found me in time before Greg could do... well, whatever it was that he wanted to do to me. I just hate bugs even more now, that's all...”

Lana decided to change the subject. “Anyhow, I'm pretty sure Whitney is not cheating on you. He's so hopelessly devoted to you....”

Joanna smiled, feeling better at hearing this. “Thanks, Lana.”

--At the Luthor Mansion--

“And you're sure that Lionel never gave you a hint about level 3.1 before the incident occurred?” Chloe was interrogating Lex in his study, while Clark was recording the interview.

It had been a month ever since the hostage situation at the factory, and Chloe had been chomping at the bit to get the real story behind it all.... and it had taken this long before Lex finally agreed to an interview about that.

Clark sighed as he stood behind the camera. “Chloe, I wish you wouldn't treat him like a criminal. If anything Lex was downright heroic that day....”

Lex couldn't help but smile at how Clark was attempting to defend him from Chloe's verbal onslaught. “It's alright, Clark. Critics are our friends, they show us our faults.”
Chloe smiled wryly when she recognized who Lex was quoting. “Ben franklin.”

Lex nodded. “To answer your question, Chloe. Lionel flat-out lied to me and told me that there was no level 3.1. Quite frankly, I was just as surprised as anybody else to discover that there was all this empty space down there that I never even knew about. And that my own father managed to keep it hidden from me for so long. And just think, He let me walk into there thinking that the gunman was nothing more than a lunatic. Of course... the fact that there was a empty place down there doesn’t mean that level 3.1 really existed, so I don’t know if that was actual evidence of any wrong-doing on my father’s part.”

Chloe’s smile faded at this, as she briefly wondered if that was what Cassandra meant. That had to count as Lionel being willing to kill his own son to keep a secret, right? She was then cheered up by her next thought. Maybe it meant that Lex had beaten the fate that Cassandra foresaw for him, and survived to tell the tale. That would mean that Lex, and by extension Chloe, was no longer in danger of being killed off by Lionel.

After all, fate was constantly being changed by the choices that people made. At least, Chloe hoped she was right about that...

Chloe shook her head, and were about to ask her next question when one of Lex’s security men came into the room.

“Sir, your father is on the phone demanding to talk to you.” The dark-skinned man said.

Lex sighed, and shot his teenage-aged friends an pained look. “Be back in a moment.”

With that, he left the room.

Chloe groaned. “Damnit. My next question was really good, too.”

Clark grinned as he stopped the camera. “I think you have enough material for your next article, though.”

Chloe nodded at that, but smiled cheekily as she said, “Well, it never hurt to have extra information for a follow-up article....”

At this, the two teenagers smiled at each other. They waited a bit, but was starting to get bored waiting for Lex.

Chloe got up and started to wander around the room looking though things, with Clark following behind. “What are you doing, Chloe? You just can't snoop around somebody else's house like this!”

“Why not? I mean it's clear that he ditched us--” Chloe's words were cut off midway as a group of masked men suddenly appeared out of now where and grabbed the two of them.

Clark couldn't get what happened next out of his head for the next following weeks. He felt weak all of a sudden, and couldn't fight those guys off at all. He noted that many of them had glowing green tattoos, but who the heck would intentionally inject themselves with meteor rocks? Chloe was thrown out of a two-story window before he could save her.

The masked men left, and Clark was left leaning out the window screaming Chloe's name. Chloe was completely unresponsive to his screams, so for the longest time Clark thought she was dead.

So you can imagine how much of a relief it was to find out that Chloe was still alive. But there was still a problem-- she was in the hospital in a coma-like state.
“Is she going to be okay?” Clark asked, as he stared at her prone form worriedly.

“She has a concussion and a broken arm. If she wakes up in the next 24 hours then she'll be in the clear.” Lex replied.

“This is my fault.” Clark mumbled to himself. Lex overheard this and rolled his eyes. By now he was already familiar with Clark Kent's penchant for taking responsibility for everything that went on in town... even though he never caused any of the events to start with.

“Actually, I should be the one saying that. I got so caught up in my phone call with my father that I forgot that you two was still there. If I had told you two to go home instead of making you two wait... well, Chloe wouldn't be in this situation now.” Lex replied.

Clark almost smiled at Lex's attempt to make him feel better, but his guilt still wouldn't go away. “But I was right there, and it happened in front of me. I should had been able to stop them from tossing Chloe out the window.”

“I know that you're a strong guy, Clark. But I doubt that you would had been able to take on six men and win. You need to accept that sometimes things just happen beyond your control. You are, after all, only human.” Lex pointed out.

Clark sighed softly, and though to himself: “Only human, eh? Boy, only if he knew that on a good day I could easily take on those guys and win. But that's not something I can just tell Lex...”

He shook his head to clear his thoughts and turned to face Lex. “The more important thing is, those guys need to be caught. Did you talk to the police yet?”

Lex shifted a little bit at this. “Well... actually, I haven't gone to the police about this yet. In fact I intend to handle those men personally myself instead of going to the police.”

“What! Why?” Clark stared at his friend in disbelief.

Lex looked vaguely guilty. “The thing is, those thieves took more than just fancy watches and jewelry. They took something that was supposed to be a secret...something that would hurt my relationship with my father if it ever got out.”

Let me get this straight. You're saying this thing of yours is far more important than catching the guys who did this to Chloe?” Clark asked, because he couldn't believe his ears.

“That's not it... look, I don't know if Chloe ever told you this. But a while back, long before the hostage situation even happened... well, Chloe came across some information that suggested that my father was doing something illegal, something that would be a danger to not only myself, but possibly to the town as well. She came to me with this information, since she didn't know what to do with it. So she left this information with me, and it was up to me from now on to investigate my own father... to see if this was even true. I'm being serious when I mean this could easily ruin the relationship between myself and my father, regardless of the fact that he might be innocent or guilty of the crime.” Lex tried to explain.

Clark clearly didn't expect to hear about this at all, as he seemed vaguely surprised by what Lex was telling him. But he was still a very stubborn boy, and responded: “That's very interesting and all, but I fail to see how this stops you from going to the police. Chloe's life is still on the line here, and those boys need to be held accountable.”

Lex sighed loudly at this. “And they will be. I just need to collect the important documents that they stole from me first before turning them over to the police. It can't get back to my father that I've been
investigating him, otherwise he's just going to cover his tracks before I can even find them. And our working relationship will be ruined. Alright?"

Clark didn't know what to say to this, so he just shook his head disapprovingly and walked out.

Well, if Lex wasn't going to bring the police into this, then it looked like it was up to Clark to solve this.

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--a day later--

Everyone was being summoned to the main meeting center for another briefing on the latest Smallville incident.

“That just figures, doesn't it? I keep an eye on the Torch crew all this time, but the minute I turn my back Chloe takes a swan dive out a window. The interesting stuff never happens when I'm around...” Macy grumbled slightly under her breath, as she walked towards the meeting room.

“Weren't you there when that hostage situation at the factory happened?” Tom wondered.

Macy shook her head. “That wasn't my shift. Remember, we do have to take turns watching them. So yeah, I missed out on that excitement then too....”

The two of them reached the doors of the meeting room, and so they rushed into the dark room and then stood alongside the black walls.

A black guy stood in the center of a bright spotlight while the rest of the crowd were seated in the dark. He was reporting on what had really happened at the Luthor mansion that night, due to the fact he was their inside man at the Luthor mansion as one of the security guards.

“I personally didn't witness the phenomena myself, but the video footage does show them walking though the walls.” The man dutifully reported.

A quiet murmur went though the room at this, as everyone wondered how that could happen.

It was strange that a group of Kryptonite-fuelled mutants would all have the same exact power, such a thing was completely unheard of. There was always different variations amongst mutants who had similar-looking powers. So two mutants who had freezing powers, for example, could end up using completely different methods to unleash that power. One could freeze others by leeching heat off them like Sean Kelvin did, while the other one froze things by using the atmospheric molecules in the air. Even if the power seemed the same on a surface level, it was two completely different abilities that just happened to create similar results. So each Krypto-Mutant was unique in that respect, and their powers were like a fingerprint.

So the only other reasonable explanation was that those thieves were clearly using some kind of technique to walk though walls.

“I'm guessing this is like the green roses that Jeff Palmer used to become invisible? This group must have came across something similar that could let them walk though walls.” One of the shadow-bosses in charge thought out loud, as they pondered this turn of events.

“That could be be the very thing that we need to turn the tides in the war. Imagine if our soldiers were not only invisible, but could walk though walls too? We probably wouldn't even need our collection of Krypto-Mutants, we could assassinate Darkseid himself before he even knew what hit him.” one of the other shadowy guys sitting at the desk pointed out.
There was a loud murmur of excitement at this, as everyone discussed this amongst themselves.

“No way I'm getting left out of this one...” Macy thought to herself, as she eagerly volunteered to be part of the mission to claim whatever it was that made the thieves walk through walls.

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Clark was in a pissy mood due to the fact that nobody seemed to be on his side today. Even his parents told him to take it easy and let the police and Lex handle it.

They all seemed to understand that Clark felt responsible for what happened to Chloe, but somehow they weren't understanding enough to let Clark investigate this. Even Pete was saying that there was nothing they could do, and Pete was the one who normally went along with Clark or Chloe when investigating the unexplained phenomena of Smallville!

So Clark ended up going to the bank alone, trying out his x-ray vision on everything in sight there in the hopes that something could turn up. He did find something weird there... he found an human arm stuck in the thick metal part of the bank's steel door. But he had no idea how to tell somebody about that, because that meant he would have to reveal how he knew about that arm being there. Which meant he couldn't use that clue to find the perpetrators..... just great.

Feeling defeated, he decided to go back to the hospital to see how Chloe was doing. That turned out to be the best decision that he made today, because it turned out that Chloe was awake and doing fine.

Clark's face brightened up considerably when he walked into Chloe's hospital room and saw her talking to her father.

“Really, I'm fine. You don't have to hover over me all day...” Chloe said, her expression a mixture of affection and annoyance as she looked up at her father.

“I can't help it, Cho-Bear. I'm your father.” Gabe Sullivan said as he held her hand.

Chloe chuckled at that. “You haven't called me that in a while. I think I was 8 years old when you called me that last time...”

“Cho-bear?” Clark wondered at the cutesy nickname, it just didn't seem to fit Chloe.

Both Chloe and Gabe startled at his sudden appearance, because they obviously hadn't noticed him walk in.

Chloe chuckled nervously, wondering how long Clark had been there. She and her father had talked about some potentially embarrassing things, after all. “Hi. How long were you here?”

“I came in just now... I'm so happy to see that you're awake though! I was worried that you were going to.... well, you know.” Clark answered, as he moved over to the other side of Chloe's bed opposite Gabe Sullivan.

“Come on, you should know by now that nothing can keep me down. Even if I did go flying out of a four-story window.” Chloe grinned.

Clark smiled briefly at this, but his smile faded as he looked at the ugly swollen bruise over Chloe's right eye. It was so swollen and purple that Chloe could hardly see out of it. He looked down with a glum expression on his face.

“This was my fault though... I could had saved you from going out that window.” Clark mumbled.
Chloe rolled her eyes, because she was all too familiar with this side of Clark for her taste. “Nice to see that martyr complex of yours again. Maybe you would like the fall of Rome to be your fault too? How about the Salem witch trails?”

Clark looked up at Chloe. “Come on... you should see where I'm coming from. I mean, I haul around large hay bales everyday. Those things weight as much as a human body does. So you think I'd be able to at least punch one guy out or something! I couldn't even take one of those guys out... I was useless.”

Gabe raised his eyebrows as he glanced at his daughter. “Is he always like this?”

Chloe nodded with a wry expression on her face as she looked up at her father.

Gabe then turned to face Clark. “Clark, there was six of them. I don't think you could had done anything against them. I know how you feel... I like to think that I would had been able to do something against them myself had I been there. But realistically, most likely I would be just as helpless as you were at the time. It's a good thing to be confident in our own strength as men.... but we also have to be aware of our own human limitations. Let's just be thankful that Chloe didn't die. Okay?”

Clark sighed. Both of them didn't understand at all.... but how could they? They didn't know what it was like to have super-strength most of the time and then suddenly have it fail you one day when you needed it most. But it was pointless to try to explain that to them, so he simply nodded.

Chloe knew there was something up with Clark though, so she smiled innocently at her father as she said: “Could you go and get us some soda from the vending machine? I'm feeling thirsty, and water's not cutting it at all.”

Gabe's eyebrows slightly rose as he glanced between the two of them. So the kids wanted to talk without the paternal figure in the room making things awkward. And he knew that Chloe had some feelings for Clark, no matter how much she denied it. So Gabe couldn't help but wonder if Chloe was using this moment to make her move. Although now that he thought of it, it was more likely that she just wanted to verbally smack some sense into Clark for acting like everything was his fault. And the choice words Chloe had for her best friend was probably not the kind of words she wanted to say around her father.

“Alright, sweetie. Any brand you want?” Gabe turned towards the door. He could play the cool dad once in a while, after all.

“Can you get me a Fanta grape soda?” Chloe requested.

Gabe nodded and left the room. Chloe turned her head towards Clark.

“All right. I know something else is bugging you, so don't even bother to hide it. Confess up.” Chloe said, as she did her best to pin Clark down with her stare.

“It's just something that Lex told me. He said he wasn't bringing the police in until he recovered what the thieves stole from him. Apparently he had some files on his father, and he also said you knew what were in them... that you came to him with information about his father a while ago?” Clark wondered. He couldn't understand what was so important about those files that nobody else could know about it.

Something in Chloe's eyes flickered, as she seemed to recognize what Clark was talking about. “Have you told anybody else about this?”
Clark shook his head. “No....”
Chloe nodded. “Good. Nobody else must know about that, Clark. If Lionel ever found out that his 
son was digging up all of his dirty secrets.... well it could end very badly for him. Lionel’s willing to 
kill everyone who comes too close to his secrets....even his own son. So for everyone’s safety just let 
Lex do his thing. Pretend that you don’t know anything about that, okay?”

That seem to shock Clark so badly that he just stared down at Chloe without saying a word for a 
long moment there. Finally he asked: “You seriously think that Lionel would really kill his own son? 
Fathers don’t do that....”

Chloe scoffed. “Have you seriously seen the way they act towards each other? Lionel treats his son 
more of an adversary instead of a real son. I don’t think that Lionel has a single parental bone in his 
body.”

“But they’re related by blood... surely that should count for something...” Clark tried to dismiss 
Chloe’s concerns, but she cut him off.

“You should know better than anybody that biological ties doesn’t matter when it comes to family. 
Your father isn’t even related to you biologically, but he's still your father... isn't he? And meanwhile 
there’s hundreds of deadbeat fathers out there who doesn’t even care about their biological children. 
Sometimes the kind of people who shouldn’t be having children in the first place end up having 
children anyway. While Lionel is far from being a deadbeat father, he also isn't a positive father 
figure for Lex Luthor at all.” Chloe laid it all out so that Clark could understand why she was so 
concerned for Lex’s safety.

Clark mulled this over, and he couldn't help but remember Lex's words about how this kind of thing 
could ruin any relationship the two of them had forever. Lex had actually seemed afraid over how his 
father would react if he found out.

Gabe peered into the room while holding a grape soda can, and he saw Clark looking down at the 
floor like he was properly chastened. Ah, so Chloe had verbally smacked some sense into Clark's 
head after all. He walked into the room, and put the grape soda on the side table next to Chloe.

Clark blurted out: “But the guys still need to be caught.”

Chloe smiled. “Let Lex and the police handle it for now. But maybe you could help him catch those 
guys, if Lex let you do it...? Speaking of which, I noticed that the robbers had glowing green tattoos. 
Maybe you could tell Lex about that? It could be useful in tracking the guys down... I mean, how 
many guys in Smallville have green tattoos to start with?”

Clark nodded. “I guess I'll go see Lex about that.”

With that, he left.

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Clark arrived just in time to overhear something going on in Lex's office. Instead of going right in 
like he usually did, he hid in the hallway as he used both his super-hearing and his x-ray vision to 
find out what was going on in there.

Lex Luthor was completely surrounded by the robbers from before, and they appeared to be 
blackmailing Lex into giving them money.

“I have to say, I was very surprised when I went though the contents of this disc. I had no idea that 
your father was such a shady guy... doing everything illegal imaginable. Honestly, he makes a guy
like me look like a total saint!” The leader of the robbers spoke.

The other guys chuckled at this, as they kept their weapons pointed at Lex.

The leader kept on speaking: “Obviously, he's made you the keeper of all his dirty little secrets... so imagine how cross he'll be with you if he found out that you weren't so good at keeping his secrets. Now, I don't mind keeping quiet about what I saw on that disc, Bro. As long as you give me 10 million, that is. In unmarked cash only.”

Lex looked unsettled at this, but he managed to keep himself together. “What makes you think I'll give in to your demands?” He managed to sound dismissive of the whole thing, as if he had nothing to do with that.

The Leader just chuckled softly. “Well... you refused to go to the police, much less report what went missing. That indicates that you might get in big, big trouble with daddy dearest if you ever told anybody about the contents of the disc. And I imagine that you would rather avoid that kind of trouble. So what will it be, bro?”

Lex looked highly defeated as he replied. “Alright, you win.”

The robbers looked smug at this, even with their masks covering their entire face somehow. They then told Lex the time and place where they expected him to show up with a briefcase full of cash. Which was a week from now. With that, they told Lex to turn around... and then they all ran through the wall soon as Lex looked away.

Clark stood there for a while as he tried to figure out what he should be doing.

Okay, the robbers thought that Lex had been safeguarding his father's secrets, not digging them up. He supposed that was an reasonable assumption to make. To be honest Clark himself would had probably made the same assumption too if Chloe hadn't told him what was really going on with Lex and his father.

Still, Clark found it hard to wrap his mind around the fact that Lionel could possibly kill his own son? Fathers didn't do that sort of thing at all. Even if Chloe made an convincing argument about how biological ties didn't matter when it came to family.

Okay, Clark would pretend he just came here and didn't see the robbers. Lex needed to know about the green tattoos, after all.

Clark walked into the room just as Lex was looking around with a puzzled expression on his face.

“Hey Lex.” Clark tried to sound casual as he walked into the room.

Lex looked up at him, and greeted him. “Hey. What are you doing here... shouldn't you be at home at this hour?”

Clark looked at a nearby clock, which said 7:20pm.

“Oh, I didn't realize it was that late already. I was at the hospital speaking with Chloe.” Clark answered.

Lex's face brightened slightly. “Oh, Chloe's awake? That's great.”

Clark nodded and smiled before telling Lex the reason for his visit here. “Yeah. I wanted to let you know that Chloe's doing fine. Also... she told me something about the robbers that she thought you should know about. Apparently, one of the robbers had bright green tattoos. Chloe noticed it when
she was struggling and his sleeve got exposed. I don't think there's that many guys in Smallville who have green tattoos... so it should be easy to track them down.”

Lex looked speculative at this. “You're right, that's a pretty unusual thing to have. Thank you for telling me.”

Clark looked slightly hopeful as he said, “Well, I was hoping that you would let me work with you, track down those guys together?”

Lex smiled. “Clark.... I know how much you want to catch those guys for what they did to Chloe. But, I don't think it's safe. Besides I'm pretty sure your parents would hold me accountable if I ever let you go anywhere near those criminals.... and I have to say I would agree with them. After all if anything were to happen to you.... well I don't know what I'd do.”

Clark groaned. “Come on! What is it with everyone today telling me that I can't handle this by myself? First my parents, then Pete, and then even Chloe. Now you too??”

Lex smirked at Clark's annoyed outburst. “Well... you have to admit that you're not being objective about this. You're taking this awfully personally, especially because one of your closest friends got hurt. You could end up making an awful mistake just because of that. They don't even let police officers work on certain cases if they feel that the police officer is personally tied to one of the victims. So why should anybody let a teenage boy track down the guys who hurt his friend?”

Clark made a face at that. “Did you have to sound so reasonable?? I just want those guys caught, damn it.”

Lex chuckled as he put an hand on Clark's shoulder, and started leading the teenage boy to the door. “Those robbers will be caught and convicted for their crimes. I promise you. Now, you should be at home with your folks.”

Clark could take the hint. Lex didn't want him here, and he didn't want Clark's help at all. Fine, Clark could do this by himself anyway.

Clark nodded at Lex, and left.

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As the days passed by, Clark found out a few things while he was moonlighting as an solo investigator.

Namely, the green tattoos enabled the robbers to pass though objects but it had a temporary effect and tended to wear off. If the robbers weren't careful, they could get stuck in objects that they were trying to pass though. Which explained the mysterious human arm that was still stuck in the thick steel door of the bank vault. That meant one of the robbers were missing an arm...

Clark then found a bunch of men in town who had the green tattoos, and one of them were missing an arm. The leader's name was Wade Mahaney, and it just so happened that he used to go to Smallville High. The rest of the guys he didn't know the names of.

At that point he knew he had found the suspects. He would've called Lex and told him about those guys, if it wasn't for the fact that he saw Whitney hang out with those guys at an party while he was following the suspects around to see what they would do.

Normally, Clark wouldn't had cared at all if Whitney got into trouble... he was the sort who thought that an bully like Whitney deserved payback for what he did in the past. But Clark couldn't help but get the feeling that Whitney was actually innocent this time, and that he wasn't part of the robbers'
gang. At least not yet... if the way Wade Mahaney was acting towards Whitney it was obvious that he had plans for the blond jock. Wade was displaying the typical grooming behavior of a predator—shamelessly pandering to Whitney, so that Whitney would feel like he had a bunch of guys who cared about him, and that he belonged with Wade's gang. So that Whitney might feel obligated to do something for them in the future.... like committing a crime.

Clark tended to be a fair guy... despite all the “sins” that Whitney committed in the past, Clark thought that it would be unjust if Whitney got into trouble for something he didn't do. At the very least, the only things Whitney should get in trouble over, was for the things he actually did do in the past. If that made sense.

So it was for this reason that Clark Kent was now at the Fordman's store.

He found Whitney scanning shoes and putting them into shoe boxes in the back of the store.

“Hey, Whitney.” Clark greeted the blond boy, and Whitney glanced his way wondering why Clark was here.

“So... I was wondering if I could have a few minutes of your time. I need to tell you something....” Clark Kent said as he fidgeted slightly.

Whitney snorted at this. “It's not like I have anything better to do right now. So go ahead.”

Clark decided not to beat around the brush. “So, I saw you hanging out with Wade and the others at a party...”

“Wait, you were there? I don't think I saw you at all...” Whitney interrupted.

Clark sighed. “That's not the point. I wanted to warn you about Wade. He's bad news, okay? You shouldn’t be hanging out with him...otherwise he might get you into trouble for something you didn't do.”

Whitney scoffed. “Oh really. And you know this how?”

Clark Kent shifted his feet as he replied: “Look, it's hard to explain, okay? But please think about what I said. After all, you've got a bright future ahead... what with your football scholarship to metropolis university and everything. It would be a shame that you lost that just because you fell in with a bad crowd.”

A dark shadow fell over Whitney's face as soon as Clark Kent mentioned the football scholarship.

Whitney started laughing darkly. “It must be nice for you, huh? Just knowing that the farm is always there for you and that if your plans for the future fails, you can just become a farmer like your dear old dad. I don't even have that kind of stability!”

Clark looked confused at Whitney's reaction. “What are you talking about? What happened?”

Whitney glared at him, as he answered: “I lost the football scholarship, okay? I'm not going to Metropolis University or any other place. And I'm not even sure if my family's going to be able to keep this store, what with my dad's hospital bills practically putting us into debt. So yeah, It's not like I even have anything to live for.”

Clark blinked at this, not sure what to say. Honestly, this explained why Wade seemed interested in Whitney. If Wade knew that this guy was in deep debt, and didn't have a future.... then Wade knew that Whitney might be willing to do anything that would earn him money, maybe?
He made a last-ditch attempt at reasoning with Whitney. “Still, that doesn't mean that you should hang out with a bad seed like Wade.”

The blond jock narrowed his eyes at Clark. “Why are you so concerned for me, anyway? It's not like we're friends at all.”

Clark thinned his lips, unable to come up with a retort to that. Well, Whitney had him there. He could still remember the day when Whitney and his pals picked Pete Ross as their scarecrow target.

Clark Kent had intervened, allowing Pete Ross to run for it while Clark held his ground with the guys. Of course that had ended up with Clark Kent being scarecrow-ed himself since he denied the football jocks their original target.

Pete Ross couldn't believe that Clark had ended up being scarecrow-ed in his place, and told Clark that he owned him one. The two of them had also decided to pay back the jocks by pranking them. So they had replaced all the soap in the locker room with those dye blocks that they had carved to look like soap.

When the football players all came out of the locker room shower, they were covered in bright orange, green and blue dyes that wouldn't come off for weeks.

Pete and Clark had laughed over that prank for months every time they were reminded about it.

“Right... I'll just go back to work. I'd appreciate it if you would leave.” Whitney told Clark, as he turned his back to him.

Clark left the store with a dejected expression on his face. At least he tried to warn Whitney?

His moody thoughts were interrupted when Lana came up to him and shoved a clipboard under his nose.

“I'm petitioning to keep the Talon from being torn down and turned into a parking lot. Will you sign?” Lana told him, as she held up the clipboard that was half-filled with signatures.

“They're doing that? I didn't know that the building was going to be torn down...” Clark wondered as he signed on the clipboard.

Lana was rambling about the Talon and it's history, and why it shouldn't be torn down when she gave him an idea. If Clark couldn't get though to Whitney, maybe Lana could.

“I was just inside talking to Whitney. I was pretty shocked to learn that he lost the Metropolis University scholarship. Poor guy, he's had a real string of bad luck lately.” Clark replied, trying his best to sound sympathetic... which wasn't too hard.

“Wait, what? He lost his football scholarship??” Lana looked shocked, like this was honestly the first time she heard of it.

Clark couldn't help but feel like he had landed on a minefield here. “Errmm... he didn't tell you? I just assumed that since you were one of his friends that you knew...”

Lana shook her head, but she looked vaguely relived. “No. He was acting strange lately, and he wouldn't even talk to his girlfriend Joanne about what was wrong. But at least now I know what's been eating at him... no wonder why he was being so distant.”

Clark took this chance. “Yeah, I noticed that Whitney was acting strange myself too. He's been hanging out with some guys in town, and from what I hear they're bad news. Maybe you and Joanne could talk to him about that? You know, make sure he doesn't go down a bad path...”
Lana Lang gave him a strange puzzled look. “Why are you so worried for Whitney? I mean, I know that you don't like him... thanks to that scarecrow thing.”

Lana Lang had been one of the few who found out afterwards and didn't approve of what Whitney did. She honestly thought that the scarecrow tradition was a barbaric one... and that it was a tradition that should had died out a long time ago. But even then, Lana couldn't help but want to believe that Whitney was forced to do it thanks to peer pressure. After all, Whitney was her childhood friend and she knew that Whitney was a decent guy. So Lana didn't want to believe that Whitney had done it maliciously and enjoyed doing it.

Even so, She had gone to Clark Kent after that incident occurred and apologized to him for Whitney's behavior, hoping that Clark would forgive him and put it in the past.

Clark Kent hadn't filed charges or anything like that, so it seemed like her tactic had worked.

Clark sighed. “It's true, I wish that Whitney would face karma for what he did to me. Call me a weirdo all you want... but I would rather that he gets into trouble for things that he actually did do, instead of for something he didn't do. Which is why I don't want him to get into trouble for something he didn't do. If that makes sense.”

Lana frowned. “What do you mean, get into trouble for something he didn't do?”

Clark looked at Lana as he spoke, “Well, the guys he's with? I've been investigating them, actually.... There's this guy named Wade Mahaney, and he's the leader of some gang that he runs. And he's recruited Whitney from the looks of it... and I heard rumors that Wade might be setting up Whitney for a fall. I don't have evidence of this otherwise I'd go to the police myself... but I thought you should know. Whitney won't listen to me, he thinks that Wade's the greatest thing ever. But maybe he'll listen to you.”

Lana's eyebrows rose slightly at this, and there was a flicker of concern in her eyes. “Yeah, maybe. Well... thanks for telling me, I guess?”

Clark handed her back the clipboard with the petition on it. “Listen, I got to go now. Tell me how it goes with Whitney, okay?”

With that he left before Lana could say anything else.

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Macy was wearing what Tom liked to call their “Close encounters of a third kind” costumes, although it was anything but a costume.

It was a stealth suit of sorts, designed to hide their body heat from sensors of all types. Body heat sensors, Sonar, you name it. The fabric was future tech created by Lex Luthor, meant to absorb light of all kinds. Anybody wouldn't be able to tell if the person wearing the fabric was female or male, or even human. They also showed up as weird shadows on security cameras, or other visual tracking devices... making it easier for any random security guard to dismiss the “shadows” as an camera glitch.

Unfortunately, as useful as this fabric was it had a downside. The fabric tended to screw around with your eyes if you were the one wearing it, thanks to the fact that it absorbed all light before the light could reach your eyes. So as a result everyone wearing this suit had to wear special LED goggles if they didn't want to be blind wearing this suit. But on the plus side it gave you this cool effect where your eyes glowed, and the goggles also acted as a flashlight of sorts when you needed your hands free.
Which Macy needed right now as she was going through Wade Mahoney's garage loft in the dark.

She had another associate with her, and between the two of them they were overturning everything in sight looking for whatever caused the gang of robbers to go through the walls.

Nyx, her associate, noticed that the guys owned an computer and thought that maybe they stored the info on how they went through walls on it. So Macy simply nodded, and told Nyx to go through it while she kept an lookout.

Of course, going through the computer could take hours and they didn't have time for that. Nyx used an portable hard-drive that looked like an futuristic ubs stick, and plugged it in. Within seconds the computer flashed, displaying dozens of folders. An dialog box popped up, and it said: “Copying all files.” It showed a progress bar, which rapidly filled up.

Once it was done, Nyx pulled out the ubs hard-drive and then plugged it into her suit, which had an integrated mini-computer built into it. She said in an east Indian accent, “Computer, Search for anything relating to intangibility and the ability to go through walls.”

She then shook her head. “Ugh, Those guys are such pigs!”

Macy turned around to look at her in puzzlement. Nyx then explained, “90% of those files are nothing but porn! I'm going to have to delete those files and purge my entire hard-drive... ugh.”

Macy couldn't help but laugh. She then replied: “I'm not surprised. I mean... a bunch of ex-jocks living together in a garage loft? There was only two possibilities... they were all gay, or a bunch of straight alpha males who desperately needed outlets for their urges. Porn being one of those things.”

Nyx shivered as the porn files were deleted off her portable hard-drive. “It's still frigging gross. But at least I did find out how they walk through walls... you'll never believe this, but they actually use some kind of weird ink for it! Wade had the recipe for his custom ink in one of his fold---”

Nyx was about to finish her sentence when the robber gang surrounded Macy and Nyx.

“Bro, check this out! I don't know what the heck I'm looking at here...” One of Wade's boys exclaimed as they stared at the weirdos who were wearing some kind of alien costume.

Wade nodded. “Yeah, that's some grade A weird shit right there. Who the hell are you guys?”

Macy sighed, and held up one hand that had a glowing circle on it. Within seconds they vanished from sight in a flash of light.

As time froze up around Macy and Nyx, they moved quick. Wade's Gang had gotten caught up in the time distortion field the same way Lex Luthor had, so they would be stuck in time for a while the world moved on without them.

Macy apologized for not doing her job as the lookout. “Sorry about that. I should had seen those guys coming, but I guess they're still using their tattoos to walk through walls. Let's gather all of their tattoo equipment and get out of here!”

Nyx grabbed a bag and shoved all of the tattoo equipment into it, along with most of the glowing green vitals of ink. As Macy was about to leave with Nyx, she noticed a floppy disk that had the words “Luthor” on it. Her hunch told her to take it, so she quickly swiped it on the way out.

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13 hours later, Wade and his group blinked back into existence in a green flash of light.
“What the hell, bro?!” One of Wade's friends yelped as they looked around.

It was suddenly the middle of the afternoon for some reason, and the weird shadow-people were gone.

Wade had an sneaking suspicion that he had been played by Lex Luthor, so he promptly told his crew to check for anything that was missing. Sure enough, the floppy disk that he was blackmailing Lex Luthor with was gone. And his tattoo equipment was missing as well, which meant that Lex Luthor knew how they did it and had prevented them from doing it anymore.

Wade was used to the odd sights of Smallville, so the fact that he and the group had apparently moved forward in time didn't faze him. But he was feeling very upset right now, thanks to the fact that he was robbed. Robbing a bunch of robbers as payback? Who the hell did that??

“I have to say, Lex Luthor's got some real balls. Turning the tables on us like this...” Wade scoffed, as he tried to get his temper under control. He didn't succeed, and he grabbed an random object and threw it across the room in a fit of fury.

“What are we going to do, boss?” One of the men looked at Wade worriedly. They all had thought that they could easily get away with this criminal career for a long time because they had unique skills that nobody else could do. But it turned out that Lex Luthor had a few tricks of his own, and had sent his men to steal his things back. Worse, they had made it so that Wade's gang couldn't walk though walls anymore!

And It was obvious that Lex Luthor was going to call the cops on them any minute now that he found out who they were, and where they lived.

Wade smirked evilly. “Unfortunately for Mr. Luthor, I still have the ink formula memorized.... and I also know how to do tattoos the old fashioned way. We're going to hit Lex hard, show him that nobody messes around with us! It doesn't matter how many fancy tricks Luthor got up his sleeve.... we're still better than him.”

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The next day, Clark Kent was in Lex's office handing over all the evidence he had against Wade Mahoney. Well, what little evidence he had anyway, because most of it was largely circumstantial.

Lex was impressed as he looked though the 20 pages that Clark had given him. This collection of pages had a very detailed account of Wade's past. It went into great detail about the dozens of unsolved robbery cases in each town that Wade had lived in. And of course, whenever he moved elsewhere the robberies in town would stop. Yet nobody ever made the connection, because Wade often had a solid alibi that put him elsewhere at the time of the robberies. Still, his alibi meant little, when Wade could have easily told his men take turns robbing people in two small groups. This way one group would cover up for the other one by claiming that that they had been partying it up at some place, and so on forth. It was a very clever set up... no wonder why Wade was able to get away with it for so long.

“You collected all of this information in a week?” Lex wondered out loud.

Clark smiled shyly. “All I did was go around town looking for people with green tattoos. Once I found them, Chloe did the rest by doing her Google-fu magic.”

Lex chuckled at Clark's description of Chloe's computer skills. “I didn't know they allowed Internet access for all the patients at the hospital.”
Clark smirked. “Well, normally they don’t but Chloe was going stir-crazy just lying there in the bed all day... so Pete helped her by hooking up her with her laptop and a Internet cable. She was also threatening to do a expose on hospital foods and where they really came from, because she doubted that it was fresh food. So I had to distract her somehow by telling her about Wade Mahoney.”

Lex smiled. “Nice to know that nothing can keep Chloe down, not even falling out of a four-story window. I'll have my security detail look into this... thank you for bringing this to my attention.”

Clark fidgeted. “you haven't heard from those guys yet? I thought they would had picked a spot for you to drop off your briefcase full of case by now.”

Lex shook his head. “They did pick some place they told me to be there by 6pm. When I got there last night, I waited for hours but nobody showed up. So I went back home and waited for news.”

Clark frowned. That was weird... very weird.

Clark had been spying on Whitney at the time, because he had been so sure somehow that Wade would come by and talk Whitney into doing something with them. Clark was waiting to catch Wade in the act, and he thought this had been the only way to do it. But all Clark got out of that was an awkward moment when he witnessed Whitney break down in front of his girlfriend Joanne and tearfully confess that he lost the football scholarship.

It had felt so wrong to be eavesdropping on an private moment like that.

Lex and Clark stood there in silence as they both wondered just what Wade was up to.

Finally, Clark moved away from the desk. “So.... you'll let me know how it goes with Wade, right? I guess I'll head home...”

Lex nodded. “Thank you for bringing this info to me.”

Clark was about to leave, when he suddenly heard something strange. There was sounds of loud whimpering coming from Lex's walls.

Clark turned around to face Lex. “Wait, do you hear that?”

Lex frowned and shook his head. “Hear what?”

Clark moved towards the source of the sound, and then pressed his ear against the wall. He heard the sound of muffled screaming, and nails against wood.

Clark's face paled slightly, as he moved away from the wall. His x-ray kicked in, and he saw one of Wade's men stuck in the wall screaming for help.

“There's somebody stuck in that wall!” Clark told Lex. Lex quickly reached for the phone without hesitation.

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A few hours later, there was brand-new holes in Lex's walls as Wade's gang was being gently extracted from them and escorted into hospital vans. There was bits of wood and metal still stuck in their bodies, so they needed surgery to get all of it out.... hence the reason why they were going to the hospital instead of jail for now.

The guys had been confessing all of their sins aloud while Clark helped the security guards tear
down the walls, and it was one of the strangest story that Clark had heard so far in his entire life.

Apparently, they had been getting ready to meet Lex at the meeting place when some random people in alien suits had appeared and stole Wade's tattoo equipment and Lex's floppy disk. But they did more than just that... somehow those weirdos had suspended Wade's gang in time until they reappeared 13 hours later.

One of the men described how pissed off Wade had been, because he honestly thought that those alien guys belonged to Lex Luthor and that Lex had turned the tables on them somehow. So naturally Wade had wanted revenge, because he felt that Lex had made a fool out of him. So he created a spur-of-the-moment plan where they would run though the mansion, assassinate Lex and then run back out.

But unfortunately for Wade... the ink formula that he had memorized had been one of the older formulas before Wade perfected it. And it also turned out that using needles the old-fashioned way instead of using a tattoo machine wasn't as effective. Using old-fashioned needles into the skin didn't put that much ink under the skin the same way a tattoo machine did, and it actually hurt more than a tattoo machine.

So when the guys were moving though Lex's mansion, the ink wore off pretty fast. So they had been stuck in the walls of the mansion for a whole day, trying to scream for help. And as for Wade? Well...

Wade was the only one out of the bunch who had died inside Lex's walls in a rather gruesome way. He had been walking though an electric wire when his body solidified, So the electric wire running though his body ended up electrocuting him to death.

Everyone was hit with the strong stench of overcooked human flesh once they got to opening up the wall that Wade was stuck in. Lex looked like he wanted to throw up, but he held it together as he yelled for somebody to cut off the electric power.

Nobody wanted to think about what would had happened if all of them had died, or if Clark hadn't heard them trying to scream for help. It was the sort of thing that inspired nightmares that would last for a whole year if you thought about it too long...
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

A blend of the episodes Zero and Nicodemus rolled into one. This is part 1 of 2.

Chapter Notes

I wanted to do something about Lana's role with the Talon building. Put simply, it didn't make sense that Lana managed to single-handedly save the building. At least, by having Lex be so impressed her that he put her in charge of the building. Besides, she was like 14-15 years old without any real business experience at the time, which made Lex's choice even more foolhardy and strange. Especially when you take into account that they made fun of what a horrible waitress she was in one ep. And yes, that's canon.

So I'm trying to have Lana's role with that be a little more realistic here.

This is also the chapter where Chloe and Pete finally finds out Clark's secret! Kind of.
This Ep is a blend of two eps, Zero and Nicodemus.

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--Weeks later, at Smallville high school--

“And so this concludes the lesson for today. But before you go, I have an assignment for you to do.” Mr. Austin the English teacher said.

The entire class groaned. Obviously the teenagers didn't want any extra homework this week. The teacher couldn't help but smirk at their reaction.

“Now, it's not going to be so bad. All you have to do is do a six-page biography about one of your fellow students. But the catch is, you can't choose who the student is... I'll pair you up with a random student, and over the week you have to get to know that student and then write about them as if you were writing about a famous person. The purpose of this is to see how well you can write, and also so that you can get to know people outside your own social circle. Line up and I'll give each one of you a page on the student that you're supposed to be interviewing.”

As the students left the room with their assignments, both Chloe and Pete ran up next to Clark.

“So who did you get?” Pete asked, but cut Clark off before he could answer. “I got Stan... you know, the one who runs the student store. Man...plenty of hot ladies I could be interrogating right now, and I get a lame guy? I'm starting to think this thing was rigged.”

Chloe was grinning like an idiot the whole time as she listened to Pete bitch about getting stuck with a guy. Pete looked at her suspiciously. “You're starting to creep me out, Chloe. Who did you get?”
Chloe grinned evilly in response. “I got the illustrious Mr. Kent himself here.”

Pete laughed. “Oh wow. I thought my assignment was going to be challenging enough to write about, but maybe you have me beat.”

“Hey! What is that supposed to mean?” Clark wondered as he glared at Pete.

Pete chuckled slightly. “Well... you have to admit that it's going to be a real challenge to be able to six pages on you without it getting boring. There's not much to write about you after all....”

“Hey, I do plenty of stuff.” Clark protested.

Chloe chuckled. “Well, I'm sure that once I deploy my journalistic skills on you, I'll be able to unearth a skeleton or two.”

“You do realize this is a class project, not a corruption scandal, right?” Clark Kent asked as he looked down at the blonde walking by his side.

“Hey, who did you get anyway?” Pete Ross wondered.

Clark sighed, knowing that he was going to get teased for this. “I got Lana Lang.”

Predictably, both Chloe and Pete made “Ooohing” sounds at this and then grinned at him teasingly.

“You get to interview the girl you have a crush on? How lucky for you...” Chloe teased.

Pete raised his eyebrows. “I'm really starting to think this project was rigged... I mean, Clark gets Lana Lang and I get Stan?? Life's not fair at all!”

Clark chuckled. “Yeah, and Chloe gets me for some reason. I guess you did have a point when you said that Chloe was going to have a hard time writing about me. I mean, she doesn't even need to interview me, she already knows everything about me.”

Chloe looked thoughtful. “I don't know. Maybe there's a new angle there... something about Clark that I didn't know about before.”

Clark's smile quickly vanished at this. “What do you mean?”

Chloe turned towards Clark with a gleam in her eye. “You're adopted, right? Maybe I could do this biography on what it's like to be an adopted kid.”

Clark felt a mixture of relief and slight trepidation. Being interviewed about what it was like to be adopted sounded harmless enough... but the way Chloe said it sounded like she was going to do more than just that. “Alright...?”

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Thankfully Clark Kent managed to get out of that situation by claiming that he needed to go interview Lana Lang.... which was pretty much the truth.

He found her standing outside of the closed Talon building, passing around a petition to save the building.

“They're going to tear down this building and turn it into a parking lot. If you're against this, please sign this.” Lana Lang was saying to a random passerby. The guy signed it, and then continued on his way.
Lana smiled as she waved at him. “Thank you!”

She turned around, and saw Clark Kent. “Hey. Want to sign this petition?”

Clark smiled. “I already signed it, remember?”

Lana frowned, before remembering that he had done that weeks ago. “Oh yeah, that's right.”

Clark smiled as he walked up to her. “How many signatures do you have so far?”

“Around 500. I need at least 1,000 before I can make the guys reconsider turning the building into a parking lot.” Lana frowned slightly.

“Hey, that's not so bad. You're halfway there!” Clark said.

Lana sighed. “Yeah, but the deadline is rapidly approaching. If I don't get all 1,000 signatures by then, they're going to tear down the building.”

Clark's slight smile faded at this. “Oh.”

The two of them stood there not knowing what else to say. Finally Clark spoke up. “Um, I have this assignment from Mr. Austin in English class.”

Lana's mouth quirked upwards. “That thing where you have to write a biography on a random person? I got that too...I ended up with one of Whitney's friends on the football team.”

Clark nodded politely at this. “I see.”

Lana looked up at Clark. “Since you're here... I guess that means you're here to interview me?”

Clark nodded again. “Right. But I wasn't sure how to say it without sounding like I was hitting on you.”

Lana chuckled at this. “Say... how about we get some drinks at the beanery and we can talk about that? While I'm there I might get some more signatures for this petition too.”

Clark shrugged. “Sounds good.”

With that the two of them walked across the street towards the coffeehouse.

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--At the Luthor Mansion--

Lex Luthor frowned as he got the latest security reports from one of his guards.

Lately, there had been an anonymous phone number calling from Metropolis every day. Needless to say it looked like Lex had a new stalker-slash-harasser on his hands. Probably another one of Lionel’s disgruntled ex-employees who decided to take it out on Lex because they were too afraid to confront Lionel directly.

Lex had honestly lost count of how often that happened. It got to the point that Lex often wished that Lionel Luthor would stop making enemies out of people that he had employed in the past. Really, was it too hard for Lionel to let down people easy if he was firing them? At least Lex was an adult now, and had learned how to defend himself from those people. It had sucked when he was a young kid, unable to do anything about the situation.
“Have you traced the phone calls yet?” Lex asked.

The head of his security guard, Mr. Rain, nodded his head. “Yes. It came from a pay phone on Shutter Ave, just outside of an abandoned building by the 78th and Main.”

Lex frowned slightly. Wasn't that where the Zero Club was at before it was shut down?

“The phone calls comes in at a certain hour... keep watch and see who calls from that pay-phone, and I think we'll catch our culprit.” Lex replied calmly.

The head of the security guards smiled. “That's what I was thinking myself, and my men are already on it.”

---At the secret base---

“I can't believe Macy got into trouble. She was only doing what she was told to do.” Tom sighed, as he ate his lunch in the cafeteria.

A tall muscular man, who were much older than Tom, sat across from Tom. He then said: “Can you blame the higher ups for being pissed off though? She was supposed to carry out her mission without altering the time-line. But she altered things so much that she even changed the way that one guy died. He was supposed to die by having a car fall on him, not by electrocution.”

“Does it really make any difference how he dies? I mean, he died both times anyway.” Tom pushed up his thick-rimmed glasses.

“It wasn't just that. The guys were supposed to show up with Whitney Fordman at the meeting place with Lex, and Clark Kent was supposed to save both Whitney and Lex from those guys. But none of that ever happened. All because Macy stole things while the gang was watching and accidentally made them think that Lex did it. So instead of recruiting Whitney for the latest heist, they spent all that time making more ink and planning to assassinate Lex in his own home...” The guy explained.

Tom mulled this over, and just responded with a “I see.”

Nyx, a young lady who looked like she came from east India, rushed over to Tom's table. “Guys, guys! You'll never believe this.” She exclaimed in a heavy accent.

“What is it?” Tom asked.

Nyx then spoke quickly. “Well, you know that floppy disk Macy picked up? The higher ups were looking at it...seeing what kind of blackmail material that those robbers had on Lex. It turns out that Lex is investigating his father much sooner than expected. He wasn't supposed to be looking into his father's crimes until two years later.... yet, Lex is doing that years ahead of schedule.”

Tom's eyebrows raised at this. He started thinking out loud. “So.....that means that things already changed big time even before Macy made a mistake. I guess this is one of those 'Time ripples' that the higher ups were warning us about. We've been doing things behind the scene, trying our best not to change things too much... but despite this we already changed a lot of things... I see.”

The muscular man sighed. “So I guess that means we have to spend more time watching both Luthors to make sure that Lex doesn't suffer from our mistakes.”

---The Kent Farm---
Clark walked into his house, and looked around. “Hey, mom and dad? I'm home!”

He then walked into the dining area, and were surprised to see Chloe sitting there interviewing his folks.

“So how did you adopt Clark? Did you do it though an office or though an agency... and how long did that take?” Chloe was asking his parents, as she looked through her list of questions to ask.

“Well....” Jonathan nervously started to answer, but then Chloe cut him off.

“Oh, my tape recorder's empty... I forgot the tapes in my car! Hold on, I'll go get them.” Chloe stood up, and nearly ran into Clark when she turned around.

“Chloe, what are you doing?” Clark wondered.

Chloe smirked. “Well, you were avoiding me all day so I thought I'd get a better start on my assignment if I went directly to the source... your parents. Now if you'll excuse me I need to get the tapes from my car.”

With that Chloe left.

Clark turned to face his parents with a slightly puzzled look on his face.

“Son, is there anything you'd like to tell us? Namely, something about a school project?” Jonathan looked up at his son questioningly.

Clark shrugged. “It's this project that Mr. Austin gave us. We're supposed to do a six-page biography on one of the students in school. Chloe was assigned to me, and she thought it would be interesting to do a biography about what it was like to be adopted.”

Martha sighed. “It wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for the fact that Chloe's been asking some uncomfortable questions about... things. Things that I don't want people knowing about.”

Clark frowned. “What do you mean? The adoption is legal, right? I mean, it's not like we have to tell her about the ship in our cellar or anything. We can just tell her that I was adopted from that one agency you told me about.... right?”

Both Jonathan and Martha looked very uncomfortable at this.

Clark paled slightly, when he noticed their reactions. He realized just then that his adoption wasn't as legal as his parents had claimed it to be. Apparently, there was a lot of things that his parents still hadn't told him about.... it seemed as if they needed to have a conversation about this after Chloe was gone.

Chloe came back just then with her tapes, so he couldn't say anything else.

She sat down, and grinned at everyone. “Got them. It's a good thing that you're here Clark. I actually do have a few questions for you too, and I can interview all three of you at the same time. That'll save me time!”

“Well... actually I have to do my farm chores first, and then work on Lana's Biography after that.” Clark said as he shot Chloe an apologetic look.

“But it'll only take a short while...” Chloe looked puzzled, and Clark deflected by saying: “I know, but I'll talk to you later, I promise!”
With that he quickly left.

Chloe turned around to look at Clark's parents. “Don't take this the wrong way... but were your son always so.... weird?”

Clark's parents just smiled weakly in response.

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--The next day, at the Luthor Mansion--

Lex was listening to the stalker's phone calls that security had taped with a expression of great concentration on his face.

“I know why Amanda died.. it had to do what happened at Club Zero, and that you were at fault! But I need to hear the truth.... so give me the truth already!” The male voice said. His voice sounded increasingly deranged with each phone call he made.

Lex sighed. There was something really familiar about that voice, but for some reason he couldn't figure out who the stalker was.

Honestly, it was giving him a headache trying to figure out where the hell he heard that voice from. He rubbed his temples, and then pinched his nose in an attempt to ward off the headache that was coming.

Mr. Raine, the head of his security detail, came in. “Sir, you have a visitor... he claims to know you, and says it's urgent.”

“What's his name?” Lex wondered.

“His name is Max Kasich.” the guard replied.

Lex frowned slightly at this. First the phone stalker, now Max? This was too much of a coincidence. “Send him in.”

Lex remembered Mr.Kasich all too well. He was the bouncer who helped keep the peace at Club Zero. And for an large sum of money, Max Kasich had been willing to take the rap for the death of Jude Royce. And of course Lex had helped in court by saying that what happened to Jude had been self-defense... so as an result Max hardly faced any jail time, and were able to walk away with his money.

A large intimidating-looking black man walked in... or rather, he was the type who would normally look intimidating thanks to his height and build. But right now the man were trembling like a leaf, and looking about himself like he was expecting to be attacked by an ghost any minute now. He didn't look like he was a bouncer of an once popular nightclub anymore.

Now, if a tough bad-ass bouncer was acting like a frightened little boy you knew something was up. Something bad.

“Max, what's wrong?” Lex got up from his desk and walked around it towards the dark-skinned man.

Max chuckled weakly as he twisted his lucky ring around his finger nervously. “I'm not sure how to say this without sounding crazy...”
Lex Luthor smiled at the man, trying to calm him down. “I don't know, I've seen a lot of crazy things in my life so far. I don't think anything you say would be able to top what I've seen so far.”

Max smiled weakly, as he recalled what happened to him in Metropolis the other day. “It was the damnedest thing ever... There I was, bouncing for a brand-new club. I was just minding my own business and making sure that the riffraff didn’t get in. That’s when this man came up to me, demanding to know what happened at Club Zero.”

Lex’s eyes brightened slightly at this. Ah, they would finally find out who this mystery stalker was.

“This is the part you're going to find really hard to believe... but he looked exactly like Jude Royce. I knew it couldn’t really be him, because he's dead. But it was the damnedest thing ever, he acted and spoke like the real thing. It was as if Jude Royce came back to life. And he was threatening me big-time if I didn’t tell him the truth about what happened at Club Zero.” Max told him the rest of the tale.

Lex froze slightly at this. Max was right, that did sound a little hard to believe. In fact if Max had came to him with this an year ago he would had laughed right in Max's face for even daring to suggest that dead men could come back to life.

Unfortunately for Lex Luthor, he had seen too much of Smallville's weirdness that he actually got used to it. After all, there was that mutant giant pig who had crushed his last car like it was a toy. That had been Smallville's way of telling Lex that everything thought to be impossible was now possible.

A dead man coming back to life actually seemed very plausible, now that Lex was used to living in a town like Smallville. That was actually kind of sad and just plain weird now that Lex thought about it. It was like Lex was living in one of his beloved Warrior Angel comics now. For in comic books death was never permanent... so if Jude Royce wanted to come back to life and haunt him, then why not? Anything was possible in a comic book world!

A slightly hysterical laugh found itself escaping from Lex's mouth, and Lex clapped one hand over his mouth.

Max Kasich misinterpreted Lex's reaction and he sighed. “I knew you wouldn't believe me. But it's the truth, I swear. I didn't know what to do, so I came here.”

In another reality, Lex Luthor would've gotten upset at Max for coming to Smallville. He then would remind the bouncer about the code of silence that they each had sworn to, that they weren’t to even speak to each other anymore. And who knows, he might even send the bouncer to one of his places in metropolis.

But, Lex Luthor found out weeks ago that Amanda Rothman was dead... and not only that, but that she had committed suicide. This gigantic cover-up was meant to protect her, and now all of it was for nothing... because she was dead.

So just what was he protecting now, exactly?

Now the only person he could protect was right here in front of him.

“I've been getting calls from a stalker, who's been demanding to know the truth about Club Zero... and I think it might be the same person who approached you. It might be dangerous for you to go back to Metropolis, so I think you should stay the night here. Alright?” Lex replied.

Max simply nodded, and he looked relived that Lex was letting him stay here.

Lex then came to a sudden realization over why that voice on the phone sounded so familiar. It had
been the same voice that he heard when he called Amanda's place, only to be told by her brother that she was dead. That voice belonged to Amanda Rothman's brother!

He promptly summoned his security detail and told him about his suspicions, and told them to track Mr. Rothman.

---Smallville high school---

“...... and all they could tell me was that Clark hated peas. I'm telling you, they're hiding something about Clark's adoption!” Chloe was griping about how Clark and his parents stonewalled her the other day.

She and Pete was walking down the hallway, and Pete scoffed.

“Why are you focusing on that when there's other things you could be focusing on? Like the fact that some guys were found stuck inside Lex's walls? I always thought there was something strange and creepy about Lex Luthor... How do we know that he didn't put them there on purpose?” with that he shot her a meaningful look.

Chloe chuckled dismissively. “You don't need to make Lex sound like a mass murderer, Pete. Besides, Clark already told me all about them... apparently they were the robbers from a while back who were hitting every place in Smallville. They could walk through walls, but then the method they used to do that just stopped working... it wore off, and they found themselves stuck. Clark promised me that he would write the article for the torch, because he was there when he saw it happen.”

Pete scowled slightly. “Yeah, well, Clark also told me about how Lex held off on telling the cops everything, even though he couldn't tell me why Lex would do that. That's very fishy, don't you think so?”

“Look, Pete... I know how much you hate the Luthors but don't you think it's time to move on? I mean, I've heard the story about the corn factory a million times, but it happened when you were like, what, a toddler? I think you're letting your family influence you too much... after all you were too young to really remember what happened back then.” Chloe pointed out.

Pete scowled slightly at that. “I grew up seeing my family suffer, man. What, I'm not supposed to hate somebody for making my family suffer??”

Chloe nodded at that. “True. But, from what I've seen... your family seems to have moved on, and they're all doing fine now. Whenever I go over to your house, I don't see them ranting about how evil the Luthors are and how ruined their lives are. Your mom's a respectable judge at the local courthouse here, and your father seems to be doing well as a horse breeder. From what I hear he makes a lot of money breeding and selling horses. If anything Lionel Luthor might have actually done them a favor even if he was stabbing them in the back as he did it. From what I hear back then the canned corn factory wasn't doing too well, and it was actually bankrupting your family while they tried to sell it. Do you think your parents would be where they're right now if they were still struggling to run a canned corn factory?”

Pete scowled even harder. “Still doesn't change the fact that Mr. Luthor is a backstabbing bastard.” He replied stubbornly.

Chloe raised her hands in mock surrender. “No argument there. Now back to the topic of Clark Kent. You've been friends with him since you two were babies. Is there anything interesting you can tell me about him...?”
Pete relaxed as the topic changed. He thought for a minute, and then said: “Well there was this time in sixth grade...”

--Later that day--
Lex Luthor left the hospital with an thoughtful expression on his face. He had been visiting the rooms of the men who worked with Wade Mahoney and questioning each one of them about what had happened at their garage loft. Normally, he would had done this ages ago, but they had gone though a week-long surgery where they tried to remove every foreign item in their bodies and afterwards the nurses wouldn't let him visit them... saying that only family members were allowed to see them.

It had taken a lot of effort for him to finally convince the doctors and nurses into letting him visit those men.

Lex was glad he did it, because in the end he got a lot of interesting information out of them. Such as the following:

1. Those “aliens” had the ability to send groups of humans forward in time 13 hours later. Or at least Lex assumed this was the case, because those men had re-appeared in that spot 13 hour later. Just like how Lex and his men had reappeared at the pond site 13 hours later after they ran into those creatures. Or maybe it was the ability to suspend them outside of time and space?
2. Lex was also starting to suspect that whatever the “aliens” took for themselves wasn't so random. It wasn't the pond that they stole, it was Sean inside the pond they were taking. It wasn't tattoo ink and a tattoo machine they stole from the robbers. They were taking the robber's ability to walk though the walls. And come to think of it, when Victoria visited him a while ago, there had been the incident with the Palmers' children turning into invisible stalkers. They stopped having the ability to become invisible after all the roses in his garden was stolen by somebody... and as an result was caught very easily by Clark Kent. The aliens must have stolen his roses back then, now that he thought about it.
3. Lex was therefore building up a theory that those so-called aliens were in fact a group of humans in costumes who were planning to use those things for something.... but what?

Lex felt as if he was missing out on something big, but he didn't know what it was. and that was actually a rather frustrating feeling. He couldn't wait until the day until he finally grabbed one of those so-called “aliens” and interrogated them on what they were doing with those things that they had stolen from people.

His cellphone rang, so he paused to pull out his phone. “Lex Luthor speaking.”

It was his security detail telling him that they had caught Mr. Rothman and another guy in the act. Apparently they had the plans to the Luthor Mansion, and that Mr.Rothman had been planning to pass himself as an construction worker there.

For the Luthor Mansion needed to go through a little bit of remodeling thanks to the large holes in his walls. So he had been asking around for a local guy who could help with that. Lex couldn't help but wonder how Mr. Rothman had heard about that all the way from Metropolis. Clearly, Mr.Rothman had a really good information network if he was able to hear about everything in Smallville and Metropolis.

Lex told them that he would be there shortly, and closed his phone.
He was about to move towards his car again when he was startled by a sudden presence at his side.

“Hi! Will you sign my petition?” Lana Lang asked, as she held up a clipboard and a sheet of paper. “Don't you have to tell me what you're petitioning for first, before I agree to sign it?” Lex Luthor wondered as he looked around the parking lot. Where the heck had she come from? It was like she had popped up out of nowhere!

Lana told him all about the Talon, and it's importance as an historical building. “..... and they're planning to turn that into a parking lot. Can you believe that?”

Lex shook his head. “That seems like a waste of perfectly good estate. Alright, you've convinced me... I'll sign this.”

He bent over to sign the clipboard, and Lana Lang beamed at him. “Thank you so much!”

Something occurred to him, and he couldn't help but ask: “By the way, how large is the Talon?”

Lana Lang frowned at the odd question. “Well, it used to be a movie theater that could seat 200 people. Why?”

Lex seemed satisfied with the answer. He then told her, “I was looking for a perfect place to start up a second business. I wanted to invest in something that would be good for Smallville, and have something here besides the crap factory. Clark Kent actually gave me the idea to start up an coffeehouse a while back. But none of the buildings in Smallville I looked at so far, were sufficient enough. They were all too small for my tastes.”

Lana seemed slightly surprised by this, but then she smirked slightly. “You do realize that if you open your coffeehouse there, you'll be directly competing with the existing coffeehouse across the street? That's a pretty gutsy move. After all, The beanery is a pretty popular place.”

Lex smirked back. “I've always been a gutsy person. After all, I can't get ahead in life if I'm scared of a little competition.”

Lana simply nodded at this. “Well, Good luck with that. I'm off to the hospital, see if I can get a few more signatures there.”

With that, she walked off in the direction of the hospital building.

Lex was smiling as he walked back to his car.

The two of them didn't notice the ambulance vans racing into the ER section of the hospital, or the EMTs pulling out unconscious people on stretchers. One of the unconscious people were holding a strange-looking flower.

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Clark was in a bad mood when he came home after school. He had gotten into a pretty bad argument with Chloe over his adoption, and the worst part was that he didn't know what to tell her to make her back off.

He didn't really speak to anybody after that, and were mostly silent as he went to help his father with feeding the cows.

Jonathan noticed though, and he sighed. “Look... Clark, I'm sorry about this. I'm sorry I wasn't able to say anything to her without rousing her suspicions. Heck, the only thing I could think of was to tell her that you hated peas.”
Clark spun around and told his dad, “She asked me about Metropolis United Charities, dad. Is there anything about that you can tell me about, at least? Or is that just a huge secret too, like everything else about my adoption that you haven't told me yet?”

Jonathan sighed, and muttered under his breath, “I used to think perseverance was an admirable quality.”

Clark shook his head. “I just don't understand why you won't tell me about the adoption process itself. After all... you've already told me everything else. The fact that I'm an alien, and so on forth. What else could there be?? If I knew more then at least I could be able to come up with a good excuse for why we can't tell her.”

“Look, son... the way we adopted you were really... um, unorthodox. I mean, it's not everyday that a baby just falls out of the sky right into our laps, so to speak. And we couldn't exactly go up to the courthouse and tell everyone, 'we found this baby, can we keep him?' Why, there would had been a long, lengthy legal process where they tried to find your parents, took your blood for DNA testing and so on forth before they would had let us keep you. For all we knew, it would had taken years before they allowed us to officially adopt you. Or worse, they would had realized what you were and took you away from us.” Jonathan explained all of this with a weary expression on his face.

“So you faked my adoption papers and everything else?” Clark quietly asked. It had never occurred to him that he could had easily been taken away from his family for this, had it ever been found out that he wasn't legally adopted. And the idea of it scared him shit-less, to be honest. It would had been one thing for him to be taken away by the government because he was an alien, but to be taken away from his own family because his parents were suspected of kidnapping him from some other family? That was somehow equally horrifying to him.

The Kents were the only family he ever knew, after all. Far as he was concerned they were his real parents... but he knew that the courts wouldn't probably see it that way.

“I'm pretty sure that the adoption papers are legal. At least I think so...” Jonathan told Clark, but the way he said it made him sound like he wasn't so sure about that.

Clark looked up at his father in disbelief. “You think so?? You're not sure?”

Jonathan nervously rubbed the back of his head. “Martha and I had to use some contacts we knew in Metropolis in order to skip a lot of the due process that goes on with an legal adoption. We had to do this so that we could legally keep you home without having to wait years. The person we knew, assured us that the adoption papers themselves were legal. He was a very shady person... but we were so happy to have you home with us that we didn't ask too many questions about the papers. So you could say that the papers are mostly legal far as I'm concerned.”

That didn't instill great confidence in Clark at all. So the papers were probably legal, but there was also a great chance that his adoption was also illegal?? Great, yet another thing for him to worry about.

Jonathan frowned as something else grabbed his attention. “Wait, you hear that? The cows....”

With that he rushed up towards the hill where all the cows were supposed to be grazing for grass. To his surprise, the cows were all acting strangely. They were mooing loudly, and running around like playful puppies.

They were butting heads with each other, chasing each other around, and rolling around on the grass.
Jonathan relaxed slightly, even though he was slightly puzzled. The cows weren't normally this playful, and he wondered what had put them in such a happy mood today. He only ever saw this kind of behavior from them when they were let out after a long winter trapped indoors.

Even Clark had to smile when he saw the cows. “Well, I’m glad the cows are having a better day than I am.”

But the smiles didn't last long, once the cows started to collapse one by one.... like they fainted from being over-active.

“Oh, Jeez!” Jonathan exclaimed as he rushed over to one of the cows to see what was the matter with them.

He knelt by one and started checking her vitals. He was so focused on his task that he didn't notice the strange orange-yellow flowers growing out of the grass, nor the way they seemed to turn towards him the more he moved.

He bent over, pressing his head against the cow’s chest so that he could listen to her heartbeat. That was when the flowers struck, spraying him with their pollen. Jonathan slowly got to his feet, as he started sneezing multiple times. He rubbed his eyes too to get rid of the flowery gunk in his eyes.

All of this went unnoticed by Clark, who were nearby checking on another cow.

“This is weird. All of their vitals are normal... but their temperature is higher than normal. Do you think they caught a fever or something?” Clark wondered as he turned to look at his father.

Jonathan didn't hear a word his son said. Instead, he was focused on the fact that he suddenly felt as if all of the burdens of the world was lifted off his shoulders. He felt lighter, younger and refreshed.

He suddenly realized that he had been wasting his life worrying over everything way too much. He didn't really take the time to smell the flowers, so to speak. He really needed to relax more...

“Dad? Are you alright?” Clark's voice finally got though to him. Jonathan blinked, and then smiled at his son.

“Ah, let's not worry about that too much. I'm sure the cows are just fine... they just tired themselves out playing around like that. Let them rest.” Jonathan said dismissively as he headed back towards the farmhouse.

Clark was doubtful, but he decided to go with his father anyhow. After all, his father knew cows... and if he said they were just tired from all that activity he was probably right.

---The next morning at school---

“And after that, he went to lie down on the sofa instead of going out to work on the farm like usual!” Clark was telling Pete how weird his father acted this morning.

Pete couldn't help but laugh. “Wow. Drinking beer, mouthing off and counter-macking with your mom? Congratulations, Clark, your dad's regressed back to being a teenager.”

Clark sighed. “It's not funny, Pete. The cows hasn't still gotten up from their so-called nap. In fact it's like all of them are in a coma.... and normally my father would be sick with worry over them. But it's like he doesn't even care at all. And you know how much my father cares for the cows... this isn't
like him at all.”

Chloe was sitting nearby, listening to all of this. “Yeah, that's really strange. First the cows start
acting strangely, but then they faint. And then your father starts acting weird.... do you think there's
something on the farm that's making them act that way?”

Clark frowned slightly... never having made the connection between the cows and his father. “Do
you really think there's a connection there? I mean that does seem like something of a stretch....”

“My gut instinct says yes. I'll come over after school today, okay? I'm sure your parents would love
some documentation of what's going on with the cows should they need it. You know, for insurance
and stuff.” Chloe said. Meaning that she just wanted to investigate any possible weirdness that could
be occurring on the Kent farm.

Which was just fine with Clark. Anything that distracted her from the adoption thing was a good
thing in his book.
He nodded at the blonde school reporter, and she smiled back.

That was when Mr. Austin came in, carrying a portable stereo that was loudly blaring the music of
the Beatles. Everyone turned to look at their English teacher with puzzled expressions. To their
surprise, Mr. Austin put the stereo on the chair and climbed onto his desk. He stood up on his desk,
and then started dancing and singing along to the song.

“Oh yeah, I'll tell you something, I think you'll understand, when I'll say that something. I wanna
hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand, I wanna hold your hand!!” the middle-aged man was
singing loudly and badly, as his dancing feet knocked off all the papers and other objects off his
desk.

Pete laughed. “Okay, what the heck? What's gotten into Mr. Austin?”

Clark simply shook his head, as he had no clue. He noticed that there was a large, strange-looking
yellow flower tucked into Mr. Austin's shirt pocket, but dismissed that as an unimportant detail.

It turned out that Mr. Austin wasn't the only one who were acting weirdly at school. Quite a few
other teachers were acting strangely too, and some students as well.

Even Lana Lang, who was normally quiet and reserved, were wearing some sort of black outfit that
revealed how long her legs really were. And she was flirting with every male in sight... which was
very out of character for her.

Clark tried to get a straight answer out of her, such as when did this strange behavior start? But Lana
Lang seemed uninterested in answering any of his questions, and instead lured him to the swimming
pool.

It was there that Lana Lang actually stripped down to her underwear and started swimming in front
of Clark, much to his shock. Clark tried to talk some sense into Lana Lang, but she wasn't listening at
all. Instead, she playfully pulled Clark into the pool even though he still had all of his clothes on.

Unfortunately for him, Lana Lang managed to get away somehow just as Principal Kwan caught
him climbing out of the pool.

Clark was telling Chloe Sullivan and Pete Ross about Lana Lang's little escapade in the pool as they
drove up to the Kent Farms.
“So yeah... long story short, I got detention on Saturday.” Clark finished his tale.

Pete looked highly envious.
“Man, what I wouldn't give to be in your shoes...” He muttered under his breath.

Chloe was laughing so hard that tears came to her eyes, much to Clark's annoyance. “So she just stripped down right in front of you? Lana Lang in all her glory...”

“Most of her glory. Not that Kwan saw it.” Clark muttered.

“Well, at least you'll have a nice picture to daydream about in Saturday detention.” Chloe couldn't help but tease as she stopped her car in front of the Kent Farmhouse.

Pete simply nodded in agreement at Chloe's words, still looking envious at the thought that Clark got to see a half-naked girl. And not just any girl, but a girl Clark had a crush on too. He seemed to be silently praying that one day that would happen to him too.

All three of them got out of Chloe's car, and Mr. Kent was walking outside to meet them. He had a hunting rifle in his right hand.

“Hey, Mr. Kent. How are you feeling? Clark told me that you weren't feeling so well today...” Chloe greeted the elder Kent with a big smile.

“What do you mean? I feel perfectly fine.” Mr. Kent scowled slightly at the blond girl. “Or at least, I was feeling fine until YOU came here. Are you here to pester me about how I got my son again?”

Chloe glanced over at Clark, wondering what was up with Mr. Kent. Clark just looked scared and embarrassed all at once.

“Mr. Kent, It's not like that at all. We're just here to see how the cows are doing....” Chloe said.

“LIAR!!” Mr. Kent roared, and Chloe jumped at his violent tone of voice. “You're here to break up my family! You're here to rat me out to the government and take Clark away from me!!”

“Dad! Stop, this please. You're not acting like yourself....please calm down.” Clark pleaded as he walked over to his father.

Mr. Kent pointed his hunting rifle right at Chloe Sullivan. He then replied, “It's alright, son. I'm not going to let anybody threaten my family....”

With that, he pulled the trigger.

Clark screamed “NO!”, and moved quickly. The world seemed to slow down, and he quickly moved in front of Chloe before the 12 gauge shotgun shell could hit her. The red bullet exploded upon impact against his hard chest, and the buckshot inside the broken plastic casing scattered everywhere.

The world returned to normal speed, as everyone started screaming.

“Oh my god!!” Chloe screamed,

Pete was screaming “Holy Shit!” as he rushed over to see if Clark was okay.

Mr. Kent seemed shocked that Clark Kent had taken the bullet meant for Chloe Sullivan, and he passed out. Clark grabbed him before his head could hit the ground, and gently lowered him to the ground.

“Dad! Are you alright?” He yelled, but his father was unresponsive.
Martha had rushed out at the sound of the shotgun going off, and yelled, “What's going on?”

“Mr. Kent just shot his own son!” Pete yelled back, as he frantically checked Clark for any wounds.

“What? Jonathan wouldn't do that...” Martha said as she rushed over to Jonathan's side.

Clark's shirt had a large hole in it, but he didn't look like he had been shot. Instead, there was simply a large ugly bruise forming there where Jonathan had shot him.

Pete stared at Clark's chest in disbelief, wondering how the hell Clark wasn't a bloody mess. One didn't walk away from a large buckshot shell point blank with just a nasty bruise.

Chloe stood there in complete shock, her mind unable to process what just happened. Okay, she could process what happened but she just couldn't believe what happened.

Mr. Kent, the guy that Chloe thought of as a second father (kind of), had just tried to kill her. Because he thought that she was trying to break up his family?

Clark had taken the bullet meant for her, and the bullet barely scratched him at all. Meaning that Clark was completely invulnerable... to bullets at least. Chloe had always suspected that Clark was a meteor mutant, because hello, that would explain so much about him. But to have it confirmed like this....

Jeez! That was not how she imagined Clark coming out of the metaphorical meteor-freak closet. She had always pictured it as something more.... romantic instead. In her reoccurring fantasy, Clark would confess his feelings for her. Clark would tearfully tell her he feared that Chloe would never accept him because he was a meteor mutant, and that he thought that their love was never meant to be. That was why he had been too scared to tell her earlier. Chloe would tell him that she had no problems with Clark being a meteor mutant, and that she actually thought it was super cool. They would then drive off into the sunset and get married in Vegas.

Chloe was mostly over her crush on Clark, but that didn't mean that she stopped fantasizing about silly stuff like that.

She was snapped out of her shocked thoughts when Martha cried out: “Jonathan's burning up! He's got a high fever.... we've got to get him to the hospital!”

Chloe moved quickly, once she realized that she had been just standing there like an slack-jawed idiot.

She helped both Clark and Martha carry Jonathan into the Kents' pickup truck. She then told Martha: “We'll be right behind you in my car, okay?”

Martha simply nodded and got into the truck. She sped off, and the teenagers all rushed back into the car in order to follow her.

Once they were on the road though, there was an awkward silence so thick that you could cut though it with a butter knife.

Clark was hunched over with a miserable expression in the backseat, looking like his entire life was about to end. Pete was in the passenger seat, looking like he was still trying to understand what the hell just happened back there.

Chloe on the other hand, she was practically vibrating in her driver seat now that the adrenaline was pumping though her body. And she kind of looked... slightly ecstatic?
Clark finally spoke up. “Guys... I'm so sorry about my father. But you have to understand that he wasn't himself... that he was affected by whatever it is that's been going around Smallville. You saw how weird some people at school were acting, right? I think those people were also affected by the same illness that got my father. So you see, my father can't be held responsible for his actions... right?”

Chloe simply nodded. “Yeah, I understand, Clark. I know your father wasn't acting like himself so I don't blame him at all. I'm not going to get him in trouble for what he did, alright?”

Clark looked up with an hopeful expression on his face. “Really?”

Chloe nodded again. “Yep, totally cool here. Although... it might be nice for Jonathan to apologize to me after all of this is over?”

Pete choose this moment to explode. “How can you two be so calm about this?! I mean... Chloe, you were nearly killed! And Clark should have died from that hunting bullet large enough to create an cannonball-sized hole in a human being! But he's still alive, and acting like he wasn't just shot in the chest by his own father!”

Chloe just let out an slightly hysterical laugh. “What, you think we're calm?? Seriously, have you taken a good look at the two of us, really?? I mean... look at Clark! His father could go to jail or something for what he did.... so obviously, he's worried. Right, Clark?”

Clark just simply nodded as Pete looked back at him.

Chloe then added, “Then there's me. For the longest time I've always kind of suspected.... no, strike that. I've always known that that Clark was a meteor mutant. But I was never able to confirm that, and I was kind of waiting for Clark to tell me his secret. Let me tell you, being nearly killed by his father and having Clark take a bullet for me was not how I ever imagined that to happen, okay??”

Clark looked surprised. “You knew I was different....? How? I mean, I did everything I could do to hide it!”

“Wait a minute. You're a meteor freak, Clark??” Pete's voice went up a few octaves as he tried to process the idea that Clark Kent, the timid farm-boy, actually had superpowers.

Chloe scoffed. “Come on, Clark. When you do your usual heroics... you're not exactly subtle about it. For example.... remember how you saved that waitress from that homicidal serial killer who could age himself up or down? Apparently, there was plenty of witnesses who saw you saving that waitress from that tow truck. That truck has some really weird dents in the undercarriage, you know. You're just lucky that the Smallville citizens aren't willing to talk about all the weirdness that goes on around here. Otherwise, if they compared notes they would realize that you tend to run around saving the day a lot. I only managed to connect the dots myself because I snoop around a lot.”

Clark thought back to that day, and realized that Chloe was right. There had been a few witnesses at the time... but he had been so focused on stopping Harold that he didn't bother to do damage control with any of the witnesses. His mom had been the only one to think of calling everyone to see how they were doing. Didn't that waitress say that she was so grateful for the save that she didn't care why Clark had been there or how he did that? Which isn't the same thing as not seeing Clark use his super-strength, now that he thought of it...

Damn.

All the memories of his past saves came flooding back, and in many of them there had been a few witnesses....even though they hadn't been able to explain what they saw or heard.
Clark took a few deep breaths, as he tried to calm his growing panic. Damn, how many people had seen him when he thought he was being so discreet? Apparently, he didn't even know the meaning of discreet! Chloe was right... he was lucky so far that most of the Smallville citizens were the type to turn a blind eye to his actives.

“My god. This explains so much.” Pete was saying. “I mean, I’ve always known you were a little weird... but man. That does explain how you were able to beat up that bully up in sixth grade. He was larger and older than we were at the time!”

Pete frowned. “Hey wait a minute... how long did you have super-strength?? When did you start getting it?”

Clark smiled nervously at the question. “Um. I've had that ever since I was a baby? I don't know, I've had it for as long as I could remember.”

“Oh, awesome!” That was Chloe. “Your parents brought you home on the day of the meteor shower, didn't they? Did they ever tell you how you were exposed to the meteor rocks?”

“Well, my mom really wanted me. And my parents were scared that the authorities wouldn't let them keep me if they ever reported that there had been an baby abandoned by the side of the road... besides, for all they knew my biological parents might have been killed in the meteor shower, so there was that too.” Clark wasn't completely comfortable twisting the truth around like that... but in a strange way it was sorta of freeing to be able to tell his friends a partial truth instead of a outright lie. Besides, Chloe was the one who thought he was a meteor freak, and he wasn't going to dissuade her of that notion.

So Clark might as well as roll with that, even though that part was a lie?

Chloe was practically vibrating in her seat again. “Oh boy. Everything makes so much sense now! The real reason why Mr. and Mrs. Kent didn't want to tell me anything about the adoption... and why Metropolis United Charities only ever handled one adoption-- yours. It was an illegal, fake adoption! And you must had gotten an massive dose of meteor rocks as an baby... that's why you're so strong and fast!”

“Chloe, Pete... you can't tell anybody about this, okay? My parents could get in trouble! Then you really wouldn't be able to see me again. They'd take me away....” Clark pleaded, using his patented puppy dog eyes on both Chloe and Pete.

Chloe and Pete looked at each other, and then back at Clark.
“Dude, you're my best friend. Of course I'll keep that secret for you.” Pete said. Chloe smiled as she returned her attention to the road. “Ditto to that.”

Clark gave both of them a huge grateful smile.

To be continued in the next chapter...
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Part two of the last chapter. unhappy with some of the scenes, so I may go back and redo them one day.

Chapter Notes

I had the most shitty week ever. Somebody stole a package that I was waiting for, and I somehow managed to burn the bottom of my feet so badly that there were blisters. Heatwave+hot pavement+bare feet=burned feet. I meant to have this chapter up much faster than I planned... but then that week happened. And it just dampened my mood for a while there, you know?

The Kent family was all together in an hospital room, with both Clark and Martha watching over an unconscious Jonathan Kent. Chloe and Pete was watching them from the hallway outside.

“I'm still not over all of this. Still processing some stuff, you know? How the hell did you know that Clark Kent was a meteor freak? I mean... I grew up with him and I were friends with him longer, and I never noticed at all!” Pete was still freaking out, but at least he was doing it in a calm manner.

“Smallville blindness, maybe?” Chloe suggested. “I mean, you were born and raised here your entire life. So you might had adopted some of the Smallville citizens' tendency to be oblivious to what goes on in front of them. I'm from Metropolis originally, so I don't suffer from Smallville blindness... so to speak.”

Pete pondered this. This did seem like a reasonable explanation of sorts....but he had to admit that it sorta hurt his pride to realize that Chloe had noticed those things about Clark before he did. After all, he was Clark's friend first and knew him the longest.... shouldn't that had counted for something?

Speaking of Chloe...

Pete then looked at Chloe suspiciously. “I still think the way you reacted back there was kind of weird. I mean, anybody else would be scared and freaked out over the fact that they were very nearly shot by their best friend's father. But you? You just brushed that aside and acted so ecstatic once you found out why Clark's father was acting so oddly. That's weird, dude.”

Chloe shrugged. “I can't help it. I just love finding out things like that... it's such a rush, you know? It's like how you feel after you score an touchdown in a tough football game.... it's that same feeling for me. It's one of the reasons why I became a school reporter. And maybe I'm a little bit of an adrenaline junkie, too. although I could had done without the being shot at part.”

Pete just shooked his head. “That's understandable, sort of. But I still think it's weird as hell.”
That was when they both noticed that Lex Luthor had rushed into the ER lobby, helping somebody else carry in an unconscious woman.

--- earlier that day---

Lex Luthor felt like he had been put through the emotional wringer and then hung out to dry.

His men had arrested Mr. Roy Rothman, and Lex had driven all the way to Metropolis to personally meet with him and his accomplice. Mr. Rothman's accomplice actually did look like Jude Royce's perfect copy, right down to his eye and hair colors. It was eerie meeting with the man who had intimidated Max Kasich so much that he went running to Lex in Smallville. Max was right, it was like Jude had come back to life.

But with some mild interrogation Lex discovered that this duplicate was actually called James Naismith. A short order cook who worked in Blüdhaven, a small city near Gotham.

Roy was practically foaming at the mouth with anger and he had been ranting about how Lex couldn't keep his dirty past secret forever.

Since Amanda was dead now, there was no longer any point to keeping this part of his past secret. So, Lex Luthor had agreed to tell both Roy Rothman and James what really happened in the past.

He told them about how he had taken Amanda to Club Zero. He figured that the woman should have some fun partying before she married Jude in two more days. It was there that Amanda had discovered that Jude Royce had been cheating on her. With two women at the same time, no less! She threw her ring at him. Jude blamed Lex for bringing Amanda to Zero, claiming that Lex had somehow set him up... that was when Jude stabbed Lex in the stomach.

Amanda had actually been the one to kill Jude Royce, defending Lex Luthor from any more knife attacks. Lex couldn't stand the idea that Amanda could go to jail for killing a cheating scumbag like Jude Royce, and especially because she had done it to save Lex's life.

Lex sighed, as he gave Roy an deeply apologetic look. "I'll admit that I did fuck up things big time. I didn't even bother to ask Amanda what she wanted to do. I just took over from there, without even thinking about what it was that Amanda wanted to do. I told myself that I was protecting her, that I knew what was the best thing for her at the moment. I was like a knight charging in to save a fair maiden from trouble, but I didn't stop to wonder if Amanda even wanted a knight protecting her in the first place. I never even asked her how she felt about the whole situation. Now that I think about it... Amanda was always the sort who liked to confess her sins. If she tried to hide something she did wrong, she was the type who would end up so consumed by guilt that she would eventually end up confessing to her teachers and parents. Oh yes, I did fuck up big time when I failed to take that into account. No wonder why she committed suicide... she must had felt so guilty about the whole incident... and to make it worse she couldn't talk to anybody about it."

It hurt to realize that fact... that Amanda might have committed suicide because he had been too prideful. That he thought he knew it all, inducing the best way to protect somebody else. When in reality his attempt to protect Amanda ended up doing far more harm in the long run. It was a bitter lesson that he learned far too late.

Next time Lex Luthor wanted to protect somebody? He'd just have to ask them how they wanted to be protected... or if they even needed protecting in the first place.

Roy Rothman hadn't wanted to hear this at all, and got even more upset at this. He was still
screaming about how Amanda was an innocent soul who couldn't have done something like that, when Lex Luthor left him.

That had been on Lex's mind the entire time on his long drive back to Smallville.

Unfortunately for Lex, he were going to be met with more trouble at his mansion. His cook and most of his staff were acting very strangely. This incident only started after they had gotten an shipment of flowers.

The Luthor Mansion always got an shipment of roses each week, so that it would always have vases full of fresh roses. But this time the shipment had been different... it was full of strange yellow and orange exotic-looking flowers instead of the usual roses.

When they called the local flower store where they usually got their roses from, nobody answered at all.

So the mansion's staff simply shrugged their shoulders, and decided that the would use the yellow flowers instead for now. But their strange behavior promptly started up after they put the flowers into the vases.

His cook, who went by the name Mrs. Higgins, seemed to want to act on a burning desire of hers to tie Lex Luthor to a chair and force feed him food. It would have been funny, if it wasn't for the fact that his cook was a scary, large and muscular woman who easily subdued Lex Luthor. She tied him to a chair in the dining room, then put a large tray full of food that was inhumanly impossible for one person to eat all at once, in front of him.

There was a few dozen sandwiches of all kinds, two large bowls of Tomato soup and potato soup, and a large pile of assorted fruit.

“Alexander, I've always thought that you were too thin. I can't help but worry that you're not eating enough.” Mrs. Higgins had told him, “Which is why it always drives me nuts when you eat only a muffin or a fruit each morning! I bet you never eat anything at work for lunch too. And then there's suppertime where you hardly order anything too. I've decided to put my foot down. This time, you're going to eat more!”

At first Lex had gone along with it, hoping to talk Mrs. Higgins into untaking him once he had a few bites to eat. But Mrs. Higgins weren't satisfied with just a few bites, and actually expected him to eat the entire tray full of food.

Thankfully there had been a few people on his staff who were still unaffected by whatever caused the behavior. They rushed into the dining room and subdued Mrs. Higgins before she could force Lex to eat any more food.

Mrs. Higgins fainted thanks to a high fever afterwards, so his staff called the local 911 area. But the emergency phone lines were all tied up... it turns out that whatever was happening at the Mansion was also happening all over Smallville.

So Lex volunteered to go with one of his butlers when they personally escorted Mrs. Higgins to the ER room at the hospital.

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---present time--

“Yeah, it's been happening at my home too. Half of my staff is acting really strange.” Lex was telling Chloe some of the story of what had gone on at his mansion.
Clark came out of his father’s hospital room once he realized that Chloe was talking to Lex. “I wonder what's causing this...” Clark wondered as he listened to Lex's story.

Lex shook his head. “I don't know. The remaining staff, who was unaffected by whatever this was, said that it didn't start until after the maids complained about wrong flowers being delivered to the mansion. They remembered that fact because the Senior Housekeeper were raising a huge stink about how ugly the flowers were. They didn't understand why that was a big deal at all.”

Clark suddenly remembered something. “Hey wait a minute... Mr. Austin was wearing a strange-looking yellow flower on his shirt when he was acting weird during class. And there was some yellow flowers in the cows' field. Jonathan knelt on the ground where those flowers were....”

“Wait a second... you think flowers are behind all this weird behavior? That's a stretch even for you, dude.” Pete replied doubtfully.

“I have to agree with Pete Ross. How can a flower affect people like this?” Lex wondered.

“Well, we better investigate that just to make sure. We have to cancel out all the possibilities before we find the source, right? Clark stays here with his dad, while I check the Kents’ fields for any signs of those flowers.” Chloe suggested.

Pete shook his head. “I'm not letting you go out there alone, Chloe. Whatever it really is, it could affect you. You need back up.”

“That's actually a good idea. But Chloe, you better wear a face mask if you go up there. And I agree with Pete, you should take somebody with you just in case.” Clark replied.

Chloe simply nodded. “Sure, whatever. And this is better than just sitting around waiting for the doctors to do something, anyway.”

So with that both Chloe and Pete was back at the Kent Farm.

“It's funny, you know? We were originally coming here to check on the cows and Mr. Kent... but then all that stuff happened. And now we're back here for our original purpose.” Chloe thought out loud to herself, as she snapped pictures of the unconscious cows lying in the barn stalls. She was wearing an white medical mask that the hospitals gave out to people for free whenever they were feeling sick.

She then walked into the house, where Pete was looking around for anything weird. He was wearing a medical mask too as well.

There was no sign of any weird flowers or anything else in the house that could had altered Mr. Kent's behavior.

But Pete seemed fixated on a picture on the wall. Chloe walked over to him, and then glanced at the picture.

It was a photo of Mrs. Kent and Mr. Kent, holding a happy-looking toddler with dark brown hair and green eyes.

“My mom used to tell me that I would get jealous of Clark when I was a toddler.” Pete said, “Clark was so cute and friendly to everyone he met... so all the adults would fuss over him and talk about how cute he was. I got upset because I wanted that kind of attention too.”
Chloe chuckled. “I'm sure you were a very cute baby...”

Pete shook his head, growing angry by the second. “That's not the point though. I guess what I'm trying to say is.... Clark was always such a nice guy, even back then. So that's why everyone liked him. So I can't help but wonder.... just what kind of asshole would leave him all alone on the side of the road?? Seriously, what kind of parent would do that? It's not like he was the worst baby in the entire world or deformed!”

Pete paused slightly, before quickly adding: “Not that abandoning an baby would be right in any circumstances. But you know what I mean, right??”

Chloe nodded. “Yeah, I know what you mean. And I agree with you. But Clark did say that it was highly possible that his parents died during the meteor shower. They could had died the same way Lana's parents did... by a meteor strike. From what I hear, her parents were pretty much vaporized, all that was left of them were bits of bone and blood on the pavement. They had to have a closed casket funeral. So..... suppose Clark's biological parents had been outside during that time too? Their bodies were probably hard to find afterwards, because they were like, vaporized and stuff. Clark is probably lucky to be alive in the first place if that's true.”

Pete calmed down at this. “Yeah, I guess you're right, they have to be dead. Any other explanations for why he was all alone as an baby would have been way messed up.”

Chloe had an speculative look in her eyes. “It makes me wonder what his biological parents were like, though. I wonder if there's something in the Smallville records about missing people...”

Pete raised his eyebrows at Chloe. “You better not go digging into that! Remember, we promised Clark that we wouldn't tell anybody else about the Kents taking him in.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Dude, relax. I'm not going to go around telling everyone about that. If I find anything, I'll go straight to Clark and hand all my files over to him after I find out everything. That way nobody else will know.”

Pete just shook his head. “Your curiosity is going to get you into trouble one of those days. Come on.” With that he walked out of the house.

Chloe followed him, and they walked all the way to the fields where the cows had collapsed. Sure enough, there was plenty of yellow flowers everywhere amongst the tall grass. At first, Chloe thought they were dandelions or some other weed.... until she looked closer.

“Clark was right... those flowers do look weird. They look way too exotic to be part of Smallville's natural landscape, they look similar to the jungle flowers that I've seen in books. Do you think they were imported over here from elsewhere... maybe a new invasive species like the creeping ivy?” Chloe asked Pete, as she snapped a few pictures of the flowers.

Pete bent over to pull up one of the flowers. “I still find it hard to believe that this flower could be behind the weird behavior that we saw around Smallville. It looks so harmless.”

“Errmm.... I don't know if you should be doing that.” Chloe tried to stop Pete, but it was too late.

Pete held the flower close to him as he examined it, and it sprayed a load of pollen right into Pete's eyes.

“Ah, dammit! It got into my eyes!” He yelped, as he threw the flower down and started rubbing his eyes frantically.

“Let's go back in the house. We need to flush your eyes out.” Chloe said, as she quickly guided Pete
back into the house.

“So much for the medical masks. We should have worn protective eye-wear too!” Pete grumbled as he sat down at the Kents’ dining table. He angrily ripped his medical mask off, and started using it like a tissue for his eyes.

Chloe rushed over to the kitchen sink and started wetting a rag under the running water. She then carried the wet rug over to Pete. “Here you go. Hopefully that'll help. If not, I guess we need to use eyedroppers to wash it out. Huh, I wonder if they have that here?”

Pete took the wet rag and dabbed at his eyes. Chloe went upstairs to check if they had eyedroppers in the medical cabinet.

Pete started chuckling to himself. “Man, it's been such a crazy day. So crazy, I feel like I could scream. I really need to vent...”

With that thought in his mind, he got up from the table and walked outside.

When Chloe finally came downstairs with an eyedropper, she found both Pete and her car gone.

“Hold on, Chloe. Calm down, you're not making any sense.” Lex Luthor said. He was holding the cellphone in a manner so that both Lex and Clark could both hear Chloe on his cellphone.

“Right. Clark, your hunch about the flowers were right. There's something freaky about those flowers... and they seem to have this ability to spray a large amount of pollen right at people who got too close to the flowers. The medical masks alone did nothing, because it also can get into your eyes. Pete Ross was sprayed right in the eyes, you see. I went upstairs to get a eyedropper for him, and when I came down he was gone.... and so were my car! I'm worried about him.” Chloe explained.

Something about this was bothering Lex. He knew he had heard something about those flowers before... but where?

“Chloe... can you send a picture of those flowers to my cellphone? I want to know what those flowers look like.” Lex asked.

Moments later, a picture of a yellow flower popped up. Clark was looking over Lex's shoulder as he said, “Yep, those were the flowers I saw in the fields. I also saw Mr. Austin wearing one that was tucked into his shirt pocket.”

The picture jogged Lex's memory, and he sucked in a deep breath. “Clark.... remember when I told you I had taken a tour of Cadmus labs to see if I should become one of their investors?”

Clark looked confused at this, but he nodded.

Lex then told Clark everything he had learned about Dr. Hamilton and why they had hired such a sketchy professor in the first place. “They had resurrected this flower from the early 1800's, I think. They had this book on what they called the Nicodemus flowers, and how it would cause people to act on their hidden desires and fears..... it also had an native American cure for those who were affected by the flowers.”

Chloe was listening too as well from the other end of the cellphone, and she was freaking out slightly. “Wait a second. Lex. You actually got into that place?? I've been trying to get into there forever and you just got in like that??”
Clark ignored Chloe, and focused on Lex. “If they do have a cure for this flower, then we should go over there.”

Lex nodded. “Agreed. I’d like to know how the hell a bunch of scientists failed to contain something simple as a flower.”

“Hey, Hey! Stop by the farm and pick me up before you go there... I want to go with you! Please?” Chloe whined slightly as she listened in on her cellphone.

Lex shook his head, even though Chloe couldn’t see him. “Sorry, Chloe. There's no time, we need to get that cure soon as possible. If they do have one.”

With that, he hung up.

Clark quickly told his mother about what was happening inside Mr. Kent's hospital room, and then he rushed out of there. “Lex, I'm coming with you.”

Lex simply nodded, and they rushed down the hall towards an elevator.

---Camdus Labs---

“W-wait a second! You can't just come in!” Marty Munn stuttered as he tried to block Lex and Clark from coming into the building.

Lex put on his best, charming fake smile. “Mr. Munn, was it? This is Clark Kent, my friend. We're here because we're concerned that there may be a dangerous breach of security at your building. Tell me, do you recognize this flower?”

With that he held up his cellphone, displaying a picture of the Nicodemus flowers living in the Kents’ grass field.

Marty Munn looked puzzled. “Yes, that's the Nicodemus flowers that Professor Hamilton is working on. What of it?”

Lex's charming smile took on a dangerous edge to it, as he asked, “See something unusual about this picture? For instance, ever notice that those flowers in this picture are somewhere where they don't belong?”

Marty Munn paled slightly when he realized what Lex Luthor was implying. “That's impossible, sir. At Camdus Labs we follow very strict protocols for keeping dangerous items secure and away from the public. We keep the research subject locked up in sterile conditions, making it impossible for the flower to repopulate itself or spread its' pollen around.”

“Is that so? Then how do you explain the fact that this Nicodemus flower seem to be repopulating everywhere around Smallville at a rapid pace, and even appeared in the fields of the Kents' farm? Half of Smallville's citizens are in the hospital currently... along with Clark Kent's father.” Lex wondered out loud, as he stepped closer to the balding man.

“I-I....i.... I don't know...” Marty stuttered again, as he tried to come up with a explanation for that.

“Maybe we could get a better answer out of Mr. Hamilton. Mind if we go in and talk to him?” Clark Kent said as he was very impatient to get this over with.

“That's a very good idea, actually.” Lex said, as he shoved Mr. Munn aside and went inside the
building with Clark Kent.

Both Lex and Clark rushed down the hallway. Lex then pointed as he said, “I think I remember Mr. Hamilton working this way from the last time. Follow me.”

Unfortunately for Clark, the hallway they were going down just happened to have that display full of meteor rocks that Lex had admired on his last visit.

Clark found himself bowled over with the most intense pain that he had ever felt in his entire life the minute he walked near that glass case display. He fell to his knees, clutching at his stomach.

There was that familiar feeling of meteor rock pain, but there was some other things that he had never felt before... It was like there was a dozen people grabbing at him and then trying to pull him apart in different directions.

He glanced up at the display case... and to his horror, there was more than a dozen meteor rocks, all different colors. They were all glowing brightly. It seemed like the other colors were having different effects on him, but the different effects were all blurring together in a way that Clark couldn't tell what they were doing to him or what the effects were supposed to be.

That was when Clark remembered. Lex had told him about the different meteor rocks in the past, when he was telling him about his last trip to Camdus Labs. How could Clark have forgotten about that?? He should had known to be on the watch out for meteor rocks!

Clark couldn't help himself, he started puking. He then collapsed to the floor, as his veins started popping up though his skin. He started choking, as his lungs started to contract like something was squeezing all the air out of them.

“Clark!! are you alright??”

He could hear Lex's panicked voice and a shaking hand on his shoulder but he felt too out of it to even respond. After a few more seconds he couldn't even understand what Lex was saying as he felt his mind go.

He could hear two men speaking to each other. One was furious-sounding, while the other one seemed to be stuttering a lot.

He felt himself being dragged away by two sets of hands, which was kind of a relief because he could feel the space between him and that horrid meteor rock display increasing. He gasped loudly as his lungs started to work normally again.

There was no more pain, which was a relief... but he still passed out all the same.

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Clark woke up with a start, and found himself lying on a stretcher. Marty Munn was the first to notice, as he tried to give Clark a reassuring smile.

“Hey, you're up. How are you feeling?”

Lex was nearby, yelling at Mr. Hamilton and some other people who were wearing lab coats.

“I can't believe how irresponsible you all were. You certainly didn't follow any of the safety protocols, otherwise we wouldn't have half of Smallville acting like this or dying in a hospital bed! And I swear, if anything happens to Clark, I'll have every health investigator coming down on your heads. EPA, the CDC, and everyone else I can think of! I'll even bring in the FBI and any other
agencies if I have to. I swear, Camdus labs will be no more!” Lex was ranting as he threatened everyone in the room.

“Lex.” Clark croaked, his throat feeling very dry for some reason.

Lex spun around at Clark’s voice, and he rushed over. “Clark! How are you feeling?”

Behind Lex, the group of lab scientists all looked relieved that Lex wasn’t screaming at them anymore.

“Feeling somewhat better than I did a moment ago. What happened?” Clark said, and that was the truth. He could feel himself returning to normal strength now that he was away from that display of meteor rocks. But for now he wasn’t up to admitting that he had an meteor rock allergy, so he just played dumb.

Lex glared at Marty Munn. “I believe the supervisor here can tell you that. Go ahead, tell him how foolish you were.”

Marty Munn chuckled nervously. “Um, Clark. Did you know that 3% of the population have an meteor rock allergy, because they’re extremely sensitive to the radiation that those rocks give off? Normally, human beings aren’t affected at all by low traces of radiation and thus those rocks are considered to be safe. But, there are different types of radiation... from the cancer-causing kind to space radiation. The rocks emit the same type of radiation that you would find in outer space, but very little is known about that kind of radiation... so we don't know any of the real effects that it would actually have on human beings. One of our staff members developed an severe allergy to those rocks, and so we created some lead shielding and protective gear. I can give some of the gear to you, since it seems that you're one of the 3% who's allergic to those rocks.”

Lex shook his head. “Clark, did you know you were allergic to meteor rocks? Wait, sorry, that was a stupid question.. obviously you didn’t know. Anyway, at any rate... this just shows you how incompetent those people really are. They knew there was some people out there who were allergic to this stuff, and they didn't take measures to put in proper shielding around that display. And that wasn't all. Apparently, they allowed Dr. Hamilton here to take some of his work home... and by his work I mean his flowers. Can you believe that? After all Marty Munn’s talk about safety protocols, they did something so stupid.”

Clark quietly processed all of this as he slowly got off the stretcher. He felt like he could walk and run normally now, which was good.

“Lex... did you get the cure for my dad and the others?” Clark asked, because that was all he wanted to know right now.

Lex nodded. “Yes, I’ve already sent everything we needed over to the hospital.”

“Then let's get out of here. I don't want to be here any longer than I have to be.” Clark told Lex, as he looked up with a pleading expression.

Lex simply nodded. He then glared at Marty Munn. “This is not over.”

With that, Lex helped Clark walk out of there.

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Lex was still pissed off, as he sped towards the hospital in his sliver Porsche. Clark was sitting in the passenger seat next to him, and his head was resting against the glass window as he soaked up the sun rays from outside the car.

“Are you really alright, Clark? I.... well, you scared the hell out of me back there. I've never seen
somerbody get such a violent allergy reaction to something like that before.” Lex finally spoke.

Clark chuckled humorlessly. “Yeah, well. It scared the heck out of me too. I didn't know I could feel that way around them. I mean, the green ones always made me feel slightly nauseous but that was it. I've never passed out or felt pain like that before.”

Lex shook his head. “That's it. Camdus Labs told me before that those things could cause cancer in human beings... but now I find out that people have an allergy to them too? That's it, those rocks have to go. I wonder, is there a way to destroy them all?”

Clark smiled slightly. He did like the idea of destroying every piece of meteor rock out there so that he didn't need to worry about them. But... “Let's focus on one thing at a time, Lex. We focus on getting my dad better first... and then afterwards we can talk about that. Ok?”

Lex simply nodded.

---The Kent farm, a few days later---

Things were tense and awkward around the dining table, as Clark was telling his parents what happened the past few days. He was sandwiched between Chloe and Pete.

“... so I had to tell Pete and Chloe why you were acting that way. So, yeah they know that you found me as a baby and took me home. That you didn't report an abandoned baby to the authorities because you wanted to keep me for yourself.” Clark was explaining.

Chloe then spoke up. “Don't worry. I won't tell anybody at all.”

Pete nodded. “Yeah. Clark's my best friend, and it's obvious that he's happy living here. So what if it was an illegal adoption? My lips are sealed.”

Martha looked like she couldn't figure out whenever to be relieved or be worried. “Thank you. That means a lot to me.”

Jonathan Kent seemed like he was at an loss for words, but he had this to say anyway. “Thank you. Honestly, I don't know how to apologize for my behavior. I just can't believe that I could actually try to hurt somebody just because I wanted to protect my family... I'm not sure if I like that side of myself.”

“It's okay, Mr. Kent. You weren't the only one who were acting like they were pod people. Half the town were acting crazy too. So don't feel too badly.” Pete replied.

Chloe snorted at this. “Speaking of crazy... Clark, you'll never believe what Pete Ross was up to after he took my car for a joyride.”

Pete Ross started blushing. “Shut up, Chloe!”

Turns out that Pete Ross had taken Chloe's car to race others on the country roads, and afterwards he made out with a highly flirtatious Lana Lang who were still high on flower pollen.

Clark chuckled. He had heard all about it from other sources... but Pete Ross seemed to want to spare his feelings by not talking about it. After all, Pete Ross still thought Clark had feelings for Lana Lang.

There was a knock on the door. Chloe got up. “I'll get it for you!”
with that she walked over to get the door. She opened the door, and were slightly surprised to see Lex Luthor standing there.

“Hey, Chloe. Can I come in?” Lex asked politely.

“Um, sure I guess?” Chloe said as she moved aside to let Lex in.

Lex Luthor moved towards the area where everyone was seated, and he looked at Mr. Kent. “How are you feeling, Mr. Kent?”

“I'm feeling fine, thank you.” Jonathan replied, as he wondered why the hell Lex was standing in his dining room.

Lex then turned his attention to Clark. “Are you feeling better, Clark?”

Clark shifted in his seat uncomfortably. He never told his parents about what happened at Camdus, because he didn't want his parents to worry. After all, they were already worrying about other things so much already. “Um, yeah I'm fine.”

Jonathan caught on, and he narrowed his eyes at his son. “What is he talking about, Clark? I thought you were unaffected by the flowers...”

Lex raised his eyebrows. “Wait... you didn't tell your parents?”

Clark slouched over in his seat. “I just didn't want to worry them too much....”

Lex shook his head. “Clark, your parents need to know about this! In fact they have a right to know about this.... how can they protect you if they don't know that you have a new allergy?”

“What new allergy? What is he talking about, Clark?” Martha couldn't help but be even more worried than she was before.

Chloe and Pete wisely choose to stay silent though this exchange as they watched to see what would happen next.

Lex then told the adult Kents what Marty had told him. “Apparently, 3% of the human population can develop an allergy to meteor rocks... at least according to Camdus labs' studies. They were doing a lot of experiments on meteor rocks in that building.... and well, Clark had a bad reaction to the meteor rocks. I have to be honest with you, it really scared the heck out of me, seeing Clark like that. It was just as well that the people there knew what to do and got Clark to an safe zone.”

“What!!” Jonathan exploded. “Clark, you know that we're supposed to stay away from places like that. Why did you go there?”

“I'm sorry, I forgot that they did experiments on meteor rocks. I was more worried for you than I were for myself at the time.” Clark replied defensively.

Martha sighed. “I'm sorry too. I let him go there, Jonathan. I forgot about that too.... otherwise I wouldn't had let him go there.”

Lex took a deep breath. “Alright. I take it that you two already knew about his allergy for a while, then. I guess I was worried over nothing.”

Martha smiled thinly, and tried to downplay the effects the rocks had on Clark. “I wouldn't really call it an allergy exactly. I mean, we always knew that Clark would feel sick around the rocks... but they
seem harmless anyway. We keep them away from him, however.”

Lex shook his head. “That wasn't what I saw at the labs, Mrs. Kent. Clark Kent almost died... he was throwing up and then he passed out. For a moment there... he stopped breathing. Why do you think I said I was so scared? It was a good thing that the guys there knew what to do in order to save his life.”

“Oh my.” Martha looked stricken at the way Lex described it. And she spun around to look at her son Clark.

Jonathan looked sour at this. “Yep, Clark didn't tell us about that. We'll have a long family chat about that after you're gone.”

Pete and Chloe was listening to all of this with wide eyes.

Lex realized just then that he most likely got his friend in trouble with the parents, and he shot Clark an apologetic look. “...Right. I just wanted to make sure you two were prepared to keep Clark safe. After all, this is a rare allergy... it's not like they have an Epi-pen for that. Uh, I'll just be leaving now. I'll see you around Clark.”

That finally got Chloe to speak up. “Hey, wait up, Lex! You've got to tell me what the inside of Camdus labs were like!”

Chloe stood up, and looked at Clark. “I'll see you tomorrow at school. Bye, Mr. and Mrs.Kent!”

With that she followed Lex out the door.

That left Pete, who looked extremely uncomfortable now. He finally spoke up. “Um, yeah, I guess I'll be going now. Bye.”

With that he left.

Once everyone else was gone, both Mr. and Mrs. Kent turned to their son wearing identical expressions of disapproval.

“Son,” Jonathan said, “I want you to tell us everything that happened... and I mean everything.”

Clark groaned and rested his head in his hands. That was the other reason why he didn't want to tell his parents... because they would've scolded him for going into areas that he wasn't supposed to go into.

“Gee, thanks very much, Lex.” He muttered to himself.
What, Clark's Superman? No way!

Chapter Summary

This chapter deals with the Camdus guys' reaction to the discovery that Clark is an alien. Also, Lex buys out the Talon.

I wanted to play around with the reason why nobody ever recognizes Superman and Clark Kent despite the fact that they're the same person. A pair of glasses is pretty weak for a disguise, but what if it wasn't a disguise in the first place?

Lex laid in bed, wide awake. It was 12 am in the morning already but it was just one of those nights where his mind was too full of thoughts, feelings and the like. So he couldn't sleep at all.

His mind was dwelling on the mystery that was Clark Kent. His savior, his best friend... and maybe one of those meteor mutants that Chloe had mentioned.

His mind kept on replaying that incident in the Camdus hallway. Clark had looked like something out of a horror movie. His veins was bugling outwards all over his body... some veins a sickly green, some were red, and some were yellow. Clark looked like some kind of rainbow-colored monster with how much his skin and veins swelled outwards.

Lex had seen violent allergic reactions before at excelsior prep. One of his classmates swelled up around the face and stopped breathing, because one of the teachers forgot that the student had an peanut allergy when passing out snacks. Fortunately that student had an Epi-pen shot for his allergy, and didn't die from that.

So Lex knew how allergies worked... for instance, he knew that people didn't magically get better in a snap if they dragged the person away from the source that caused the “allergy”. Other things needed to be done, like giving the person pills or shots that would treat the symptoms. But the people at Camdus hadn't done any of that. They just simply put Clark in a lead-lined room, and that was it. Yet Clark seemed to recover instantly, as if he wasn't suffering from an allergy in the first place.

Lex knew that Marty Munn was full of it when he claimed that 3% of the population suffered from this so-called “allergy”... it sounded like the man made it up on the spot in an attempt to explain what happened to Clark. Yet, Marty seemed to know what were happening to Clark... he just didn't want to tell Lex Luthor the truth for some reason.

Lex wondered if that lie about a small percentage of the human population being allergic was some attempt to cover up an illegal experiment.

Lex knew that Marty Munn was full of it when he claimed that 3% of the population suffered from this so-called “allergy”... it sounded like the man made it up on the spot in an attempt to explain what happened to Clark. Yet, Marty seemed to know what were happening to Clark... he just didn't want to tell Lex Luthor the truth for some reason.

Lex wondered if that lie about a small percentage of the human population being allergic was some attempt to cover up an illegal experiment.

Something occurred to Lex just then. Most people usually blamed the mutations in people and animals on his fertilizer plant, while a few like Chloe blamed it on the meteor rocks.

But what if Camdus labs were the real source behind it all? What if the real reason why Marty Munn came up with such a outrageous lie, was due to the fact that they were secretly running experiments on the entire town? Chloe was probably correct about the meteor rocks, but Camdus all but admitted to running experiments using meteor rocks. They showed him the cancerous rats, and the growing area where the flowers used to be at....that was it. It seemed odd that they would only have those two
projects running for 10 years the whole time they were here...surely they had projects on the side that they never told anybody about?

Honestly, the only reason why he even went along with Marty's obvious lie was because of Clark. Clark looked so frightened afterwards, as he tried to get off that stretcher and stand on his shaky legs. He clearly didn't know what was happening to him, and so Lex felt that if Clark thought this kind of thing happened to others too... then maybe he would feel less frightened.
And, Lex was willing to go along with a lie if it meant that he would eventually find out the truth.

Meanwhile, Marty Munn were giving his report to his superiors in a dark dim room. The light shone heavily down upon his balding head, while he nervously recalled everything that had gone on with Lex's second visit. His superiors were surrounded in shadows like usual.

“When I saw the meteor rocks glowing in Clark's presence... and the pain he was in.... that's when I realized who he was. There's only three people in the entire world that I know of who's affected by the meteors in such a way, sirs. Superman, Supergirl, and his cloned son, Superboy.”

This caused a loud murmur to go around the room.

One of his bosses scoffed at this. “Don't be ridiculous. We have video and photographic evidence of Superman and Clark Kent being in the same room together. There's no way they could be the same person.”

The second boss made a 'hmm' sound and then replied: “Didn't Superman have robot duplicates of himself at one point though? They even came out in droves against Darkseid's army only to be destroyed. So wouldn't it be possible for Superman and Clark Kent to be in the same room together that way if they were the same person?”

The first one shook his head. “There's still the fact that Clark Kent has green eyes and brown hair. Superman has black hair and blue eyes. I doubt that even at super speed he would be able to use eye contacts and wigs without being found out. I also know for a fact that he doesn't have shape-shifting powers where he could change his hair color and eyes at will.”

The third shadowy being, at the table where all the superiors sat at, finally spoke up. This person sounded feminine compared to other bosses at the table. “Actually... I've noticed that Clark Kent without his glasses have hazel eyes. Under certain lighting, the color of his eyes seems to change. Even the color of his clothes seems to bring out the green or the blue in his eyes, depending on what he wears. It's possible that his iconic blue supersuit was a deliberate choice to bring out the blues of his eyes. And Clark's glasses could make his hazel eyes look completely green.”

The second one murmured thoughtfully at that. “That's actually a very clever way to separate Superman and Clark Kent in the public eye. He doesn't even need a mask that way. And I suppose he uses gel that darkens his brown hair when he slicks it back like that... and when he goes back to work in the office, the gels dries and wears off so that it's back to its' usual brown color. That, or he washes it off and dries his hair at super-speed....”

First boss let out a loud growl. “Don't you realize this completely derails our plans? We were waiting for Lex or Clark to find out about the aliens coming here to Earth... so that we would convince them to work together? But the fact that Clark was an alien all along throws all our plans out the window!”

The female boss chuckled. “Not necessarily. We just need to convince Lex that Clark isn't the vanguard of an invasion force... that Clark is just as equally invested in keeping Earth safe from
dangerous aliens. After all, he would have to be right? After all, he was raised as a human, and sees Earth as home.... We just have to get Lex to see that.”

Marty Munn interrupted, with a nervous look on his face. “I-i t-think that Lex Luthor isn't going to trust any of what anybody says from Camdus anymore. I mean, I made up the lie about human beings being allergic to meteor rocks too on the spot and I think Lex Luthor knew that. He blamed us for not keeping an tight reign on Hamilton's activity, and for endangering Clark.”

the second boss made a humming noise at this once again. “Don't worry. Hmm-mm. We'll find a way to work around that too. You're excused for now.”

Marty simply nodded and walked out of there fast as he could. Being in that room always made him nervous.

Back in the room, everyone was discussing this new discovery, and how to work this to their advantage...

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---roughly three weeks later---

Lana was fidgeting nervously as the men went over her petition to save the Talon building. All four of them were sitting in the office of the Smallville bank building.

Finally, one of the elderly men spoke. “It's true that I said I would reconsider turning this building into a parking lot if you got me the signatures of at least 1,000 people. It seems that you've done just that.... but...”

“But what? You promised me!” Lana couldn't help but pout.

“You have to understand our position. For years, we've tried to get a buyer interested in the Talon. But nobody's interested in a run-down movie theater with old equipment. With everyone renting DVDs or being able to watch movies online, nobody really goes to the movies in Smallville anymore. And quite frankly, keeping this building in tip-top shape when nobody's interested in it is a huge drain on the taxpayers' money. That money should be used elsewhere, like the public roads.” the elderly man tried to explain to the teenage girl.

“But--!!” Lana's protest was interrupted with a knock at the door.

“Oh, come in.” the elderly man said... and the door opened to reveal Lex Luthor.

All four people, inducing Lana, looked surprised as Lex waltzed into the room carrying some folders.

“Lex? What are you doing here?” Lana wondered, as Lex turned to look at her.

“I could ask the same question about you...” Lex raised one eyebrow as he replied.

Lana then told him about the petition.

Lex then smirked. “Well, then. This a very happy coincidence, because it so happens that I'm interested in buying that building.”

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---The torch office---
Chloe was humming slightly to herself as she put up the newest articles up on her wall of weird. The Torch newspaper had been covering what went on in Camdus Labs... and their irresponsible behavior that had allowed an centuries-old extinct flower to grow in public again.

Lex Luthor had been very willing to be interviewed about what he saw inside the mysterious building on his two visits there, once he realized that an expose on Camdus Labs would spell trouble for them. Considering that Lex had a very low opinion of them at the moment, he was all too happy to talk about every questionable thing he saw there.

The only catch was, Lex asked to be cited as an anonymous source in her news article. This was the first time that Chloe actually got any information on this mysterious Camdus labs organization, so she was happy to acquiesce to that demand.

Besides... if Chloe wrote articles that destroyed the reputation of Camdus, maybe they would send a representative to set the record straight, and to defend their side of the story. She gets even more information out of them that way. It was basically a win-win situation for her right now.

Not to mention that Lex had told her about his new theory regarding meteor mutants—that maybe Camdus Labs were behind all the mutations. Sure, they didn't cause the meteor shower but they did show up shortly afterwards before all the mutations started occurring.

So now Chloe had four on-going theories for what caused the existence of meteor mutants.

1. The run-off chemicals from the fertilizer plant is behind everything... the most popular theory held by the citizens of Smallville. But this was due to the fact that nobody liked the Luthors much, and used that theory as a excuse to trash-talk the Luthor family.
2. The meteor rocks themselves had a strange type of radiation that mutates everyone.
3. There was Lana Lang’s theory, which combines theory 1 and 2 together. Luthorcorp chemicals and meteor rocks together make for a powerful mutant formula.
4. Lex's latest theory... the Camdus guys were secretly a bunch of mad scientists who were running experiments on the clueless citizens of Smallville. Maybe they were even working for the government and trying to create super-soldiers.

Clark came into the room with an slightly annoyed expression on his face.

Chloe just got done posting her new articles up just then, and turned to greet her friend with a smile. “Hey, Clark. How’s it going?”

“Terrible!” Clark grumbled, as he sat down at one of the computer desks. “My parents are breathing down my neck and not even letting me go anywhere alone unless I'm at school. I wish that Lex hadn't ratted me out....”

Chloe couldn't help but chuckle slightly at this. “Well.... I can kind of see where Lex and your parents are coming from. They just want you to be safe, Clark. I mean, Lex was trying to be a responsible adult and letting the parents know that their child might be allergic to something. And your parents just found out that you pretty much walked right into a dangerous situation. Give them time to get over that, and they'll stop breathing down your neck.”

“Speaking from experience, Chloe?” Clark looked up at the blonde girl.

Chloe nodded. “You know it. I've lost count of how many times my dad acted like that whenever he found out about some of my dangerous sleuth work. He'd act overprotective for a while until he was
sure that I wasn't deliberately jumping headfirst into danger. Then everything's back to normal like usual.”

Clark just smiled at this.

Days passed, and it seemed like Chloe was right... his parents just needed reassurance that Clark was going to be alright despite all the crazy stuff that happened.

Now that he thought about it, he supposed that his parents had the right to worry. After all, his two best friends found out that he was adopted under illegal circumstances. And Lex found out about his “allergy” too...

and if that wasn't bad enough, his friends now thought he was a meteor mutant.

It might be a matter of time before they found out that he wasn't a mutant but rather an alien.

No wonder why his parents acted like his friends were going to rat out him any minute now, or that Lex was going to come by with meteor rocks. But none of that happened so far.

His parents were finally starting to relax more now that they realized that their world wasn't ending any minute now.... so to speak.

And Clark could finally go out without being escorted by one of his parents for once today... he never thought that he would enjoy walking down main street by himself so much. Yet here he was.

He was just enjoying his stroll down main street when he noticed that the doors to the Talon building was open. It was usually barricaded up as to prevent teenagers from breaking into the old building and using it as an make-out spot.

He heard voices inside, and two of the voices sounded like Lex and Lana.

His curiosity piqued, he decided to go into the Talon building and see for himself what was going on.

The main entrance was full of people, mainly construction workers and some inspectors milling around the room as they checked the building over for possible damage. In the center of the room Lana seemed to be arguing slightly with Lex Luthor.

“Just let me help with something here... I know you brought this building, but I also want to leave my mark here.” Lana was pleading slightly.

Clark decided then that it was safe to go into the building, at least without getting in trouble for it. He walked up to the two of them and greeted them.

“Hey, guys! What's going on?” Clark replied, “Um, the door was open so I let myself in...”

“Clark.” Lex greeted the young man with a smile. “Well... I took your advice and decided to open this coffee shop. But as you can see, it's not quite ready yet..”

What advice?” Clark wondered, and then recalled that he had told Lex something like that some months back. He was honestly surprised that Lex had taken his off-hand comment so seriously, because Clark had forgotten about that until now.

That was weirdly flattering in a way. He turned his attention on Lana.
“So I guess that petition of yours worked? Congratulations!”

Lana smiled wryly at this. “I wish I could say I saved the Talon, but... Lex was really the one who saved the day here. The petition did make the guys at the bank think twice, but they were still saying it was a drain on the tax payer money to maintain a public building that wasn't being used often. Then Lex came in saying he wanted to buy this place.”

Clark couldn't understand why that bothered Lana Lang. “It sounds like you got what you wanted. Yet you don't seem to act very happy about that.”

Lana chuckled, looking sheepish at this as she answered, “I know this sounds really stupid... but I wanted to be part of the Talon's history. People are going to remember Lex buying this place, but is anybody going to remember a high school girl petitioning to save the Talon? I just wanted to leave my mark here...”

Clark nodded at this. “I don't think that sounds stupid. I mean, all that hard work you did over a entire month collecting 1,000 signatures? If I were in your shoes, I'd want a little recognition too.”

Lana smiled. “I should've known that you would understand what I meant.”

Lex was half listening to this conversation as he surveyed his workers moving around the place. He then finally said, “I think I have an idea that might make Lana happy.”

Once he was sure he got their attention, he said: “I've noticed that the Beanery tends to attract older adults more than they do young people, due to the fact that they don't make menus for people on the go. The beanery seems to come from a time where you sat down and drank your coffee, and it only cost 50 cents. The teenagers only go there because there's not really any other place to hang out...”

Clark didn't seem to understand where Lex was going with this, but Lana caught on.

“In other words, you need the fresh perspective of a teenager to turn the Talon into a super-hip teenage hangout?” Lana asked, as she pointed at herself.

Lex smiled at this. “Kind of. I want to do a survey around high school to see what everyone there wants the most out of a coffee-house hangout. Of course, I have my own ideas of what makes a ideal coffee-house, but I think if you were to become my temporary assistant on this project we could find the perfect balance between a functional coffee-house and a popular hangout.”

“Awesome. I'm in.” Lana Lang agreed to the plan.

Lex smirked, as he turned to Clark. “Clark, will you do the honors of being the first to answer our survey? What do you look for in a place where you can hang out with friends?”

Clark looked surprised at being asked that, but he recovered quickly. “It'd have to be someplace that gives us a small degree of privacy, where we can talk about whatever without being overheard. At least for me anyway...”

Lex nodded in approval. “Private booths and seating. Very doable. That's something I want as well.”

Clark frowned as he looked around the place. “I don't see any areas here that could be used privately... it's all open spaces and stuff.”

Lex replied, “There's actually more rooms in the back. Why don't I give you a tour of this place, and you can hear more about what I have planned for this building.”
Clark shrugged, and simply nodded his head. It wasn't like he had any other places to be. “Sounds good, Lex. Lead the way.”

--At the secret underground base--

“WHHHHAAATT!!! You got to be kidding me!” Macy yelped loudly. The organizer who summoned everyone here just sighed.

“What is it, Macy Munn?” He rubbed his forehead. The Munn family annoyed him to no end...the excitable teenage girl Macy and her father Marty put together often created tons of paperwork that HE had to deal with. The worst part was that they didn't mean to cause so much trouble.... they just accidentally did it while doing their jobs. Which was somehow worse.

The higher-ups had summoned every agent in the area for some big meeting... something about changing their plans. And they had just told everyone in the room that Clark was Superman.... or rather, was going to become Superman in the future.

Macy started laughing hysterically. “No offense, sir... but you're kidding, right? There's no way that timid farm-boy could be superman. That's like saying Paris Hilton is secretly Mother Theresa.... That doesn't make sense!”

The rest of the agents started murmuring at this. One guy raised his hand. “She does have a point, sir. Clark Kent doesn't even look anything like Superman. Sure, he's got the same strong jaw and a similar build but the rest of him? Nah.”

Another one spoke up. “That would explain why Clark somehow have multiple powers while most meteor mutants only get one power. But... Clark Kent always goes out of his way to avoid being seen when using his powers to help. He shies away from the public spotlight.... I don't see how such a shy guy would suddenly become more willing to be in the public eye 24/7 in the future.”

The organizer of this meeting slapped his hands, getting everyone to quiet down. He then answered everyone.

“Maybe he just gets over that shyness? And you have to admit it, everyone here never even thought that Superman had a secret identity. I mean, he was so open about who he was... everyone knows that he's Kal-El, the last son of Krypton. He's an alien who doesn't hide his face behind a mask. Maybe that's what made this disguise so clever. Clark Kent found a way to tell the entire world the truth, and then hide in plain sight, because nobody ever thought that Kal-El the Superbeing would ever have a private life of his own on earth. They can't even fathom the idea that a farmer couple from Kansas could have found a god-like being as a baby and raised him to be their son.”

Nyx, who were sitting next to Macy Munn, nodded at this with a thoughtful expression. “Using the truth as camouflage.... that's really clever. He's being honest with the world, save for the part where he doesn't tell them that Clark Kent and Kal-El is the one and the same.”

Macy looked at her friend like she was crazy. “Are you forgetting about the part where Clark Kent and Superman look nothing alike??”

Nyx thought about this for a while, but then pointed out: “When Marilyn Monroe was younger, she didn't sport her iconic look. Growing up she had brown hair, and only became a bottle blonde when she started modeling. As a matter of fact, her real name was Norma Mortenson....and before she started modeling and acting, she worked in a factory. If we time-traveled all the way back to when she worked at a factory, I doubt we would even recognize her. We would probably just think that
she was a random chick who looked like a brown-haired Marilyn Monroe. We couldn't even imagine such a famous movie star and sex icon working in a run-down factory or looking so plain... that is, if we didn't know it was her.”

“Okay, okay. I get it. people can change over time. even their appearances can change, I guess. Still... it's weird, you know? To think that Superman used to be such a timid farmboy who hates being in the spotlight....” Macy replied.

“Okay, enough idle chat-chit! We're here to talk about our mission!” The leader and organizer barked.

Everyone in the room snapped to attention, and the leader spoke once again.

“As you all know, we were waiting for the first signs of alien activity. For both Clark and Lex to become aware of it too as well, so that we could start feeding them both information about Darksied. But we've found out that Clark is, or going to be, Superman. So everything Clark's done counts as alien activity. Therefore, we're going to speed up our plans somewhat by skipping Phase A and heading straight to Phase B. Lex Luthor doesn't seem to trust Cadmus much anymore, so we're going to have a difficult time trying to win him over to our side. The same goes for Clark. So for this reason our superiors decided that in order to get Clark and Lex to work together, we would have to play the villain.”

There was some puzzled murmurs at this in the crowd, as the guy continued with laying out the plan for them: “We're going to pose as a threat to Smallville that Clark and Lex cannot stop by themselves. We plant ideas into their heads that if they worked together, they could stop what is seen as an unstoppable threat to mankind. In other words, they're going to be groomed for their future roles in the war against Darkseid. We eventually reveal over time to them the real reasons why we're doing what we do, while still appearing villainous. In the end our role will be that of well-meaning villains who kidnaps meteor mutants in order to build an army against Darkseid. Of course there's the chance that Lex or Clark is going to think that we're crazy, and won't believe us about Darkseid. But that comes to the other part of our mission. We're going to collect evidence that aliens do exist, and plant them around Smallville.”

Macy raised her eyebrows as she looked at her friend Nyx. “Playing the villain to save the world? This should be interesting.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Our time travelers put their "evil plan" into action, and Clark finally gets a glimpse of the weird so-called "aliens" with the glowing eyes.

Chapter Notes

I was looking up information on the Talon Coffeehouse, when I came across some interesting tidbits. Namely, the reason why Lana did a Egyptian motif for the coffeehouse. Apparently, the writers at the time was planning to for Lana to have mystical ties to a Egyptian goddess or something, but that evolved into the french witch story-line instead.
I honestly thought that was a stupid reason, and I decided to simply chalk it up to Lana being a teenager who thought Egypt was cool instead. Of course... Lex doesn't share his ownership of the Talon with anybody in this new reality, so I've decided to change the look of the Talon in this timeline entirely. So The Egyptian look will be nixed in favor of Lex's love of all things Greek and Roman. Hey, why not go completely AU at this point?

--on Sunday--

“So what were the results of the survey, Lana?” Lex asked as he sat at an table across from Lana.

They were inside the Talon, which was still under construction.

“I have to say it was kind of unexpected. I thought that for sure they were gonna comment on how they wanted the place to look or something like that. Instead, the majority of the students said they wanted an good alternative to the school cafeteria. They don't like the fact that they have to spend lunch money on canned food that the school warms up for them. They said they were willing to travel off-campus during lunch break for good food.” Lana replied.

Lex smiled. “They're used to home-cooked meals, I take it. I can see how microwaved foods would pale in comparison to their parents' cooking.”

Lex then nodded thoughtfully to himself as he wrote something down. He then said: “I've been thinking of turning this into a cafe of sorts. This way it would set us apart from the local coffee-shop.”

Lana frowned at this. “There's a difference??”

“For rest of the world, there would be no difference at all. However, in the USA, when people think of cafes they assume that the cafes are meant to focus on food, just not coffee. Admittedly, I brought this building with the intention of importing coffees and teas from all over the world. I wanted to show everyone how coffee should be done compared to that cheap swill that Beanary claims to be
coffee.” Lex answered. He paused slightly, before adding, “But I also don’t mind bringing in good food to compliment the imported coffee and tea.”

“You're importing stuff from all over the world? So are you going to go with a international theme for your Cafe?” Lana asked.

Lex looked thoughtful at this. “I haven't thought much about the new look for the Talon. I was going to leave it up to the interior decorator, but a international theme does sound good. What would you suggest?”

Lana bounced in her seat slightly as she replied, “I would probably paint different sections of the Talon to represent famous countries from all over the world. France, Italy and Egypt. Ooh, we could even do Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs for the Egypt section. We could cover those pillars in hieroglyphs! That would be so cool.”

Lex’s face was impassive, but inside he was cringing slightly as he tried to picture those tall pillars covered in tacky-looking hieroglyphs. He could understand that to a teenage girl, that sort of thing seemed very exotic and appealing, but as an adult he couldn't help but wonder if that sort of thing would be too much for everyone else's tastes.

“Hmm, don’t you think that motif should be toned down a little bit? After all, each country should be represented properly and that Egyptian thing would probably stand out too much--” Lex was trying to diplomatically veto Lana's idea without being rude about it, when a bunch of men in dark masks burst into the room.

They ran straight for Lex, and before Lex had any time to react he was knocked down. He found himself being pinned down as they jabbed a long needle into his neck. It was a syringe with a long needle, and they had just injected something into him.

He let out a bloodcurdling scream as the serum took effect, and the blood-veins started glowing green all over his body. The men took that as their cue to leave, and they quickly left the way they had come in.

“Lex!!” Lana cried out as she quickly moved to his side. Lex was in too much pain to respond, and he passed out.

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--days before the attack--

It was a busy, heretic scene as everyone in the chemistry labs were busy mass-producing the two different types of serums that they had brought with them back to the past.

The first one was the pure white serum that neutralized powers given to people by the meteor rocks, using the white meteor rock as the base. It was due to the fact that the white type seemed to cancel out all the other effects caused by other colors of the meteor rocks.

The second was a glowing green serum that was meant to increase the power levels of meteor mutants with existing powers or abilities.

It was the second kind that one of the superiors were holding in her hand. “Are you certain this will work on Lex Luthor?”

The supervising scientist at her side nodded his head. “Oh yes. Think of meteor abilities as a sliding scale from 0 to 11. Zero means that they have the potential, but doesn't have powers. 11 is when
they're at their most powerful. Basically, this serum will dial most mutants all the way up to 11.”

“Where is Lex on that scale of yours? I've heard rumors that he was one of them, but I've never really seen any evidence of that.” She wondered.

He chuckled. “He's closer to zero than he is to 11 at the moment. He seems to have a mild regenerative ability, which already saved his life countless times. But it's such a passive ability that he can easily pass himself off as a normal human. Even Lionel Luthor thought his son was a mostly normal guy for a very long time, and this is the same man who treated his 9-year-old son like a lab rat after the meteor shower.”

“I'm guessing that by boosting his regeneration ability, we're going to prevent his death in the future? After all, if he can instantly heal from broken bones and the like, then he could be effectively be invincible. Not at superman levels, but still.....” She couldn't but happily imagine how it was going to change the future now that Lex had enhanced abilities.

The scientist nodded. “Not only that, but he would also be technically immortal. After all, if his ability becomes powerful enough he would be able to regenerate his whole body from a single drop of blood. The enemy vaporizes his body, but if they fail to account for anything he leaves behind...bam, he comes back to life!”

The female superior couldn't help but look worried at that. “Okay, I already see a few problems with that. Number one, what happens to his memories if he regenerates 'from scratch'? Chances are, Lex is going to be useless to us if he doesn't retain his memories after being killed. Number two, you said he can form his whole body from a single drop of blood. What happens every time he has a nosebleed or get injured? Are we just going to have dozens of Lex duplicates running around?”

The scientist simply shrugged at this. “That's going to be Lex's problem from now on, not ours. I suspect he'll find those answers quickly on his own, anyway.”

--At the hospital, present time--

Lana was pacing around the ER waiting room, when Clark rushed into the room.

She spun around. “Clark! I'm so glad you came. I tried calling Lex's father, but there was no answer...”

“Lana, what happened? My mom didn't say much other than to say that you told her on the phone that Lex was attacked.” Clark wondered as he stared down at her with a worried expression.

Lana finally sat down on a nearby chair, which was a relief for her sore legs. “I don't know what exactly happened really. I was chatting to Lex about his plans for the Talon, and then all of a sudden those men dressed in black broke in and attacked him. They injected him with something, and then left quickly. It all happened so fast....”

“How is Lex doing?” Clark asked.

Lana shook her head. “I don't know. When they rushed him into the ER, he had a really high fever and stuff. His body temperature was so high that one of the doctors said something about his brain frying if they didn't bring down his body heat. That's not good, right??”

Clark looked alarmed at this. “Are you sure that's what they really said?”

Lana fidgeted. “Well, no.... they used some medical term I didn't understand. But the way they were
talking about it, it sounded like they were talking about his mind frying if his body temperature wasn't brought down.”

Clark was about to say something, when Pete burst into the ER room looking very panicked.

Pete's dark brown skin looked a few shades lighter than his usual color, as if all his blood had been drained from his face. He was also sweating profusely. Clark Kent could only remember seeing Pete once like this before... and that had been when he had been home sick with a nasty bout of flu that lasted weeks.

He also noticed that there was an ugly purple welt forming on Pete's neck, and at the center of the welt there was a large puncture wound.

“Pete? What happened??” Clark said, as he quickly walked over to his male best friend.

Pete's face lit up when he saw Clark, and he seemed relieved to find that Clark was here. “H-help... Chloe. She's in....car. We...attacked....”

He was practically incoherent at this point as he tried to explain what was going on. He passed out soon as Clark touched his shoulder, and Clark was forced to catch Pete before his head hit the ground.

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--Some time later--

Clark managed to get the full story out of both Pete and Chloe once the two woke up again.

Pete had been helping out Chloe in the torch office, putting together the next newspaper for Monday, when it happened.

A bunch of guys in black came in and attacked the two of them. They pinned the two teenagers down and had injected something into their necks, before leaving. It had happened so quickly, that both Chloe and Pete had no explanation for what happened. They were wondering what the heck just happened, when the effects of the serum finally hit them.

They started to feel dizzy and sick.... It was at this point that Pete thought that they should go to the ER room, because clearly whatever it was that they were injected with weren't doing them any good. So they went into Chloe's car, but at that point Chloe had passed out... so Pete was forced to drive all the way to the ER room, despite the fact that his vision was so blurry and he couldn't see the road that well. It was honestly a miracle that he even managed to arrive at the ER room successfully.

Clark noted that Lex had the same welt on his neck where he had been forcibly injected with some kind of weird green serum.

So clearly, It was the same guys that attacked Lex. They had gone for him first, and then went after both Pete and Chloe. But why? What did they get out of injecting people with whatever was in those syringes?

Not to mention, it couldn't help but feel a little personal because those men had gone after all of Clark Kent's friends. It was like somebody was trying to send him a message or something.

He was still at the hospital waiting to see what the doctors had to say about his friends' illnesses, when Lana Lang showed up at his side.

“Clark! You won't believe this!” She gasped for air, because she had ran all the way over to Clark.
“Most of Smallville was attacked by the same men who attacked Lex and your friends.”

“What??” Clark asked, and Lana turned on the TV in his friends' hospital room and changed the channels until it landed on the local news.

“Breaking news alert!” The TV newscaster said, “There's been a series of attacks in Smallville, all perpetrated by a small group of men. They're going around injecting people with an substance that causes people to fall ill not shortly afterwards. So far, we have 10 known victims but there's more reports coming in. The men are described as being dressed from head to toe in black, with black masks over their faces. They're still at large, so all Smallville residents are advised to stay at home and lock up until the police catch the suspects. If you spot any suspicious people, you are also expected to call the police hotline, 315-568...”

As the TV channel rattled off the rest of the phone number, the teenagers looked at each other.

“Oh Jeez.” That was all Clark said, because he didn't know what to say to this turn of events.

Lana simply nodded, understanding the feeling behind those words.

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--a few days later--

The situation in Smallville seemed like an echo of the last attack an decade ago. More than a dozen people were attacked in a day, and the men disappeared quickly afterwards like they had super-speed.

There was some differences now, however. Last time, it had mainly been kids between the age of 10 to 18 years old that had been targeted. Now, there was nothing that connected all victims together other than the fact that they were all injected with a weird green serum. The victims came from all walks of life, from the toddlers to the elderly. Some were teachers, some were farmers, and some were students.

To the average policeman or a certain school reporter, the attacks appeared to be highly random.

At first, Everyone thought that maybe those guys were domestic terrorists that infected the citizens with some disease in order to send a message to America. But... Everyone recovered pretty quickly after two days of rest, and they all felt very healthy afterwards.

And the doctors couldn't find any evidence of a disease or some other drugs in the victims' system. In fact if it wasn't for the bruises on everyone's necks, the doctors would had never guessed that they were injected with something.

“I just don't get it at all! The last attack that happened years ago, at least had a pattern, where all the victims had powers and had that taken away. I thought for sure that they were government guys or something. But my research indicates that none of the people in the recent attacks have powers. I know I'm not a meteor mutant or anything, so why attack me? None of this makes sense.” Chloe was gripping over what happened as she was going through her research notes on her computer.

“Maybe those new guys are copycats? I mean, they were adult men an decade ago... they have to be pretty old now. So they trained new guys to do the same thing they did years ago. That makes sense, right?” Pete suggested, but the look on his face showed that he was just as clueless as Chloe was.

The two of them were sitting inside the Torch office, with Clark watching them.

Chloe considered Pete's words for a second there. “That does sound possible. I'll put it down on the list, but I still can't discount the possibility that it's the same guys as before.”
She wrote down 'Copycats??' in her notepad, and then looked at Clark. “What do you think, Clark?”

Pete and Chloe had told Clark a few days ago about their side project, where they were trying to track down all the 8 kids who had been attacked.

Naturally, it led Clark to wonder if both Pete and Chloe had been targeted because they were getting close to the truth or something. Of course this brought up the logistical problem: If Pete and Chloe was being targeted because of this, then why did they target Lex and other smallville citizens too?

Not to mention, both Chloe and Pete admitted that they forgot about that side project for a while when they were distracted by other things. So it wasn’t like they were getting close to “the truth” anytime soon, whatever that “truth” was.

Clark chuckled uneasily. “I still can't shake this feeling that you guys and Lex were being targeted deliberately for a reason... but then it doesn’t explain why most of Smallville was targeted too, you know??”

“In other words, you're just as clueless as we are. Great.” Chloe responded with a frustrated look on her face.

“I suppose you can keep on doing what you were doing before... interviewing everyone. Maybe the victims saw or heard something that the police didn't think to ask about?” Pete suggested.

Clark nodded at this. “Yeah. That seems like a good idea. I can help with the interviewing process too... I could start with Lex and Lana, see what details they might had left out with the police??”

Pete snorted. “You just want a excuse to see the two of them.”

Clark simply shrugged at this. That was true in a way... he hadn't seen the two of them since the attack a few days ago.

Lana's aunt Nell Potter was paranoid that her niece was going to be attacked too any moment. She hadn't let Lana out of her sight at all. And Lana wasn't allowed to go to school alone, she had to be escorted by Joanna or Whitney at all times.

But that wasn't as bad as Lex Luthor and his father Lionel. Lionel had actually flown in doctors and the like from metropolis, and demanded that Lex undergo a whole barrage of tests. Everything from STDs to Cancer, etc.... you name it. Clark had overheard him say that, and he couldn't help but feel sorry for Lex. He couldn't imagine having to put up with that??

---The Luthor Mansion--

“Save for the unusual high white blood cell count, Lex is perfectly healthy.” The doctor said, as he handed Lionel the results.

“Doesn't a high white blood cell count indicate Leukemia?” Lionel wondered, as he looked at the results with a frown on his face.

“That was my first thought, yes... and we did test for that. But, Lex has no signs of having Leukemia. As I said before, he's perfectly healthy. As a matter of fact, every organ in his body is in such pristine, perfect condition that you wouldn't have known that he used to do...things...in his youthful days.”

The doctor said, before subtly referring to Lex's past with alcohol and drugs. Of course, most of that knowledge came from the tabloids... so maybe Lex's past activity was exaggerated.
It was the strangest thing, though. Most adult bodies showed some signs of wear and tear, even in the most healthy human body. But Lex's body? He was like a newborn, with hardly any signs of his internal organs being used for anything recently.

“See, dad? All of this was for nothing.” Lex said, as he put his white shirt back on after one of the other doctors drew his blood.

Lionel humphed at this. “You can't be too careful those days. There's people out there, who would be all too happy to infect the Luthor heir with something....”

“Normally I would agree with you, but it seems that I wasn't their target. Apparently, all of Smallville was the target. I just happened to be in the area...” Lex replied.

“That's the other thing I wanted to talk to you about, son.” Lionel said as he walked over to his son, “I think you've stayed in Smallville long enough. I want you back in Metropolis.”

“Abandon the factory so soon, when I'm finally starting to make it profitable? I don't think so.” Lex scoffed as he pulled on his gray business jacket over his white shirt.

“They still haven't caught the people responsible for the attack on Smallville. It's foolhardy to stick around when they're still on the loose.” Lionel said, as he grabbed Lex's shoulder. “You would be much safer back home, where you belong.”

There was a part of Lex that wanted so badly to believe that Lionel's concern for his safety was real. But there was one thing that Lex had been keeping to himself ever since he woke up after the attack. Even though the rest of his body felt the same as ever, his mind seemed to be going into overdrive now.

He was now hyper-aware of everything and everyone around him, and reading people now became effortless.

Lex Luthor could see a random stranger 50 feet away from him, and automatically deduce everything about the stranger like he was Sherlock Holmes. He could tell what the stranger was feeling and why he was feeling that way just from his mannerisms alone. Looking at the stranger's clothes easily told Lex just what profession that man was in, and how much money he made.

Lex was able to read people before, but not like this. This was as if somebody boosted his ability as far as they could take it to extreme lengths. Before, reading people was something of a guessing game for him.... he never quite knew if he was right or not. But now... it was like he simply knew he was right each time. No second-guessing himself anymore.

Lionel Luthor had sent decades training himself on how to put on an convincing act. All in the name of manipulating people into doing what he wanted, of course. But to Lex, his attempt at playing the part of a concerned parent now seemed paper-thin, and not very genuine at all.

It was strange... Lex knew that in the past he would had been swayed by this act, and would've seriously considered going back to metropolis with his father. He would have asked Clark whenever he should go or stay. He would have been torn between wanting to please his father or staying in order to prove to his father that he was now his own man.

But now that Lex could read his father so easily, he now knew that Lionel had some ulterior motive that had nothing to do with Lex's safety. Lionel gave off some behavioral tells when Lex mentioned the factory, so the factory probably had something to do with it.
He decided to test his father, see what other information he could get out of Lionel's subconscious behavior.

Lex shook his head at his father. “You know I'm not the type to tuck my tail in and run if there's danger. Not when there's a profit to be had. Besides, if I run, doesn't that mean the terrorists win?”

Translation: Lionel was feeling threatened by Lex's newfound independence in this town, and were worried that he was losing control of his son. He liked to keep his son under his thumb at all times.

Slight twitch of the hands, and Lionel narrowed his eyes only so slightly.
Translation: Lionel was feeling threatened by Lex's newfound independence in this town, and were worried that he was losing control of his son. He liked to keep his son under his thumb at all times.

“Son... I know you set out to turn the factory into a high profitable business. But your life isn't worth this. It's just a fertilizer plant.” Lionel stroked his beard as his eyes shifted around the room.

Lionel's subconscious behavior sent Lex a different message than he was saying with words entirely.
Translation: Lionel was planning to do something with the factory, and he wanted to lay the blame on his son Lex. This way Lex wouldn't have a place in Smallville, and Lex would be forced to work under his father again for a long while.

“The Captain always goes down with his ship. Sorry, you know how stubborn I am... I'm not going to change my mind on this.” Lex replied in a carefree, breezy way as he silently dismissed all the doctors who were just loitering around at this point.

“As I recall, I did tell you that you only get one chance at defying me. Keep that in mind.” Lionel said, as he walked out of the room.

Lex didn't need his newfound ability at reading people to know that was a threat.

Lex casually walked over to his office desk, and sat in front of his computer. He started typing, bringing up the website for Bruce Wayne's Company.

If this whole people-reading skill turned out to be bullshit, and that he was really high from whatever was in that syringe?

Well, it still didn't negate the fact that Lex Luthor really should had thought of a game plan to prevent Lionel Luthor from destroying all of his work. It was better to have backup plans and have nothing happen, than it was to have something happen without a backup plan.

After all, didn't Lionel Luthor do this before? He did have a habit of building things up only to tear them down when it suited him to do so.

The renovation was still going on, and now everything in the former movie theater was like a blank canvas. All the walls was covered with white plaster, to fix and hide any cracks from days of being abandoned.

Thanks to the attack on Lex, Lana abruptly found herself in charge of the whole renovation while Lex was recovering. It was nerve-racking to be suddenly in charge of everything without a single warning. Lex had named her his temporary assistant, but she never knew that Lex actually put that into official writing. She thought that he had simply made up the position for her in order to stop her from pestering him, and to get rid of her.

But no, it turned out that Lex was quite serious about the whole thing, and now she had a dozen construction workers listening to her every command. But at least it was better than being stuck at
home with Nell all day.

Nell had turned into an overprotective helicopter parent ever since the attack on all of Smallville, and literally wouldn't leave Lana alone. She felt the need to constantly check on Lana every 10 minutes. Lana understood why Nell was acting this way, but her patience was wearing thin.... and she just needed to be away from her home for a while.

So, here she was, listening to the interior decorator that ramble about his designs for the Talon. His name was Anton, and he spoke with a heavy french accent.

“Fair zis cafe, ai feel zat eet would do nicé-lee wiv a modairn steel look. All clean linés, non cluttair.” He gestured around the room.

Lana honestly had no idea what he was saying half the time, but thankfully the guy had brought his sketches of the talon, so that she knew what he had in mind. She couldn't help but grimace slightly as she went through the sketches.

The sketches depicted a completely industrial look for the Talon, with steel high support beams and steel tables, etc. the walls were completely white, and the floor was gray concrete.

Lana wondered if this was what Lex was into... but she just knew this wouldn't work for the Talon. Besides, the whole point of saving the Talon was to have most of it intact... not change it completely. The wood floors had to stay, at least.

Lana smiled weakly at Anton as she said, “Well, actually.... Lex told me that he wanted an international theme for this cafe. Something that reflected the cities where the best coffees came from. Greece and Paris, for example. I don't think the industrial look will work because of that.”

Thankfully Anton didn't look too dejected, and only looked thoughtful at Lana's comment. “Intairnashe-onal, éh? Oui, ai can do zat.”

Again, Lana had no idea what he just said but she just smiled and pretended that she did. “Great! Here's your sketchbook back... “

There was a knock at the door, and Clark tentatively opened the door into the talon building.

“Hey, Clark.” Lana greeted, “How can I help you today?”

“Hey. I wanted to see how you were doing, and Nell Potter said you were here....” Clark explained why he was here.

“As you can see, I'm fine. No offense, but I'm kind of busy here.” Lana couldn't help but feel a little annoyed at the interruption. Earlier today, one of the contractors told her that it would cost 5,970 dollars to fix the roof.

To a teenage girl, that was a lot of money.... you could buy four horses with that money! She told them to do whatever they needed to do, and hoped that Lex wouldn't be too mad at her.

Clark looked around, and couldn't help but be impressed at how quick the renovation was. Last time he saw this place, it had been a dark and cluttered place. Now the clutter was gone, and the walls were painted white.

He said, “I'm surprised that you guys are still going though with the renovation even with what happened to Lex.”
“You know what they say. The show must go on.” Lana replied.

Before Clark could say that he was here to interview Lana about the attack on Lex, there was a blood-curling scream coming from Talon's kitchen.

Without thinking, Clark rushed at an human pace into the kitchen area along with the other workers.

In the kitchen there was a guy sitting in the corner with a terrified look on his face. Clark slowly walked over to the guy, and asked: “Are you alright?”

Clark recognized the guy, he once helped Jonathan Kent with an construction project on the farm. His name was John Bythe, and he owned a construction and renovation company in Smallville.

John raised one hand shakily, and replied: “Do you see what I see?”

Clark frowned slightly as he looked at John's raised hand. It looked like it had been dipped in shiny, siver paint. “Um, it's sliver?”

John seemed slightly relieved at this, because apparently that meant he wasn't losing his mind. But he was still worried because this meant something weird was going on.

“I... I was just installing the large steel fridge over there. When I touched it, my hand turned this color. It just grew all over my hand so fast.... it scared me.”

Clark simply nodded. “Yeah, that's strange. We'll get to the bottom of this, okay? Can you stand up?”

John was more calm now, and he nodded back in response. As he stood up, his other hand touched the white plaster walls. That was then the two of them saw it.... John's right hand took on a white hue, like his hands were made out of plaster.

This upset John all over again, as he rushed away from the walls. “What is happening?!”

‘He just recently gained the ability to take on the properties of anything he touches?’ Clark thought to himself. Out loud, he said: “Okay, let's just stay calm. We can figure this thing out, and get this thing under control.”

Behind Clark, the rest of the workers were all watching curiously from the door way.

“What is happening??” John repeated the question as he looked down at his mismatched hands, and started to hyperventilate.

Clark grabbed John by the shoulders, and demanded that he look at him. “Look at me! Stay calm, just keep on looking at me. Okay, good. Now picture your hands the way they were before... just picture them as normal human hands. Take a deep breath, relax....”

John listened to his commands, and sure enough his hands were slowly returning to normal.

Clark let out a small chuckle, as he wondered if this was how his dad felt whenever he had to help Clark cope with his powers.

John looked down at his hands, which was back to normal. He let out an relieved sigh.

“Okay, I think that you should put on some gloves just to be safe?” Clark suggested.

“Actually, I think I should go home. My wife didn't want me working today to start with, because I was attacked by those men. We didn't know what kind of drugs they pumped into me...” John said.
He was calm now that he considered the possibility that he was simply hallucinating, because of the mysterious drugs that his attackers had injected into him. Yep, he was probably high right now. There was no way he was transforming into something strange and freakish.

Clark looked surprised at this. “You were attacked a few days ago too? Um, could you tell me all about it?”

John nodded. “Sure. I can tell you about it on the way to my truck.”

John walked out of the kitchen with Clark following closely behind, and told the other guys that he was taking a sick day off.

John then told Clark a very brief story about his attack... which didn't give Clark anything new. It was the same old story where people were just minding their own business, when they were suddenly attacked out of the blue by men in black masks and outfits. And the men would vanish afterwards.

“It wouldn't had been so bad, I guess.. if it wasn't for the fact that my son's having nightmares about it. And my wife was pregnant with our second child, and the stress caused her to give birth to our daughter a month early. Thankfully our daughter is okay... she's a healthy preemie, you know?” He rambled slightly as the two of them walked to John's blue truck.

“Oh no. I'm glad everyone's fine now. Do you have any idea why those mystery men attacked you?” Clark asked.

John shook his head. “No. I wish I knew why. Not knowing why those men did that... well, that really gets to me, you know?”

Clark simply nodded in understanding. Not knowing why somebody did that could lead you to imagine all sort of reasons why they did it. Every possible reason you came up with, were more unpleasant and scary than the last one.

John opened the door to his truck, and bid Clark goodbye before he got in and drove off. Clark was waving good bye when a strange thing happened.

People in black alien suits and glowing googles rushed towards the road and stopped in front of the blue truck. John skidded to a stop at the unexpected sight, and they held up their right hand. Clark noticed that there was a glowing green circle on each right hand. There was a flash of green light, and they disappeared. The blue truck was engulfed in the green light, so it disappeared as well.... taking John Bythes with it.

“What the heck??” Clark said out loud, and he could hear other people on the sidewalks reacting the same way. A small crowd gathered behind Clark, wondering what just happened... and if they just all saw the same thing.
Drone remix, part one

Chapter Summary

Clark and the gang tries to connect the dots as they try to figure out what happened to John Bythes from the last chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clark was pacing around the Torch office, as he told everyone his tale.

“And then all those people in weird alien suits with glowing eyes showed up out of nowhere, and they made the truck disappear. Well, they disappeared along with the truck too…”

“Weird.” That was all Pete had to say once Clark finished his story.

“You know what? I think Lex needs to hear about this.” Chloe said.

Clark and Pete turned around to look at Chloe quizzically.

“Why, it's not like he has anything to do with what happened. Well, aside from the fact that it happened outside of his new cafe.” Pete wondered.

Chloe looked sheepish as she told them, “Well.... I wasn't supposed to tell anybody this, but a while ago Lex had a run-in with those weirdos that Clark here spoke of. They abducted him for a while and then caused him to reappear in his backyard 12 hours later after it happened. He was investigating what happened him, and asked for my help because I'm the expert on weird stuff happening around Smallville. He actually gave me 200 dollars to stay quiet about the whole thing.”

“Lex was attacked??” Clark looked worried at this. “When did that happen?”

“Why would Lex keep that secret?” Pete couldn't help but look suspicious at this.

“It happened like months ago... so it's been a while. And he didn't want it getting out that he was abducted by aliens... he was afraid that the entire town would paint him as a total wacko-job or something like that.” Chloe answered.

Pete snorted at the thought that Lex Luthor worried more about appearances than finding out the truth, but that explained everything so he didn't say anything else.

“Sounds like I do need to go visit Lex. He might had found out something about those weird guys.” Clark said.

“If he discovered something new, let me know?” Chloe asked.

Clark simply smiled and nodded at her. Chloe smiled back.

Lex was still fine-tuning his counterattack plans against his father when Clark came in.
Lex looked up from his desk. “Clark. What can I do for you?”

Clark fidgeted slightly. “How are you feeling? Your father said he was gonna put you through tests, last I heard.”

Lex sighed. “Yeah, I just got done with the last one. Honestly, it was like I was nine years old all over again.”

At Clark’s questioning glance, Lex told him: “When I was nine years old, I was here in Smallville with my father. The meteors fell then, and it took away my hair and asthma. My father wondered what effect that might have on my health, and so he decided to turn me into his personal lab rat. For the next two years, I was put through all kinds of tests at laboratories and hospitals.”

Clark looked horrified at that. “I’m so sorry.... I never knew...”

Lex chuckled. “Hey, it's alright.... I turned out okay, didn't I? I suppose it just shows you how overzealous my father can be when it comes to my health. Honestly, that man?”

Lex made the crazy sign as he indicated at his head, showing Clark just how much he thought of his father.

That earned a wry smile from Clark, at least.

Lex then got up from his seat, and walked around the desk. “But something tells me that you’re not here to ask how I’m feeling. You have something you want to ask me?”

“Well, the thing is.... I had a run in with some weird people wearing alien suits and I told Chloe all about it. And then she said you had a similar experience?” Clark answered.

Well, the farm-boy certainly had all of his attention now. “Sounds like an interesting story. Maybe you should start from the beginning?”

Clark moved to the sofa while Lex grabbed two bottles of water from his personal mini-fridge for them. Clark then started from the beginning when he went into the Talon looking for Lana.

“...After I calmed him down, he wanted to go home. So I was seeing John Bythe off when he got kidnapped by those... people. I can't help but worry about his safety, you know?” Clark reached the end of his tale.

Lex smiled reassuringly. “I'm sure he's alright. If the pattern holds true, then he'll reappear in 12 hours.”

Clark looked up at Lex. “How do you know that?”

It was Lex's turn to tell Clark everything... inducing the theory he had about those people's motives. He verbally outlined what he knew of them, and even pointed out that those people might have been the ones who stole his rose bushes.

“I originally thought that was the work of pranksters.... but it's strange that they would only take the green ones and not the rest of the flowers. I have no evidence it was the same people as the ones who took those robbers' tattoo equipment and my pond. But I'm pretty sure that they were behind that too.” Lex said.

Clark frowned. “Um.... this was the time when your girlfriend Victoria visited you, right? And she ended up getting attacked by the invisible Palmer siblings...”
Lex nodded. “That's right. And we never did find out how they became invisible. Around that time
the roses were stolen... and just like that, they couldn't turn invisible. They said that the main
ingredient they used had been stolen, so they couldn't make more of whatever it was that made them
invisible.”

Clark caught on. “I see! The robbers were using special tattoos to walk though walls... that got
stolen. The roses got stolen for the same reason. The pond was taken because it had a meteor mutant
in it....”

Lex nodded again. “Bingo. They're collecting supernatural items.”

Clark looked worried, as he said: “But... that means they might not release John back to where he
was after 12 hours. He just recently found out that he had a meteor power... the power to absorb the
properties of metals and other minerals, I think. His hand became like steel when he touched the steel
fridge in the Talon’s kitchen. And then his other hand took on a plaster white look when he touched
the walls. He was freaking out pretty badly over that because he didn't know what was happening to
him.”

Lex frowned at the implications of that. “Doesn't it seem strange that they would grab him so soon?
He recently developed that ability, and ten minutes later they show up. It's like they knew he was
going to have a meteor power soon and were watching him....”

Clark paled when he realized what Lex was hinting at. “John said he was one of the many people
who were attacked by those mystery men. He got injected with something, just like you did...”

Lex narrowed his eyes. “The mystery men and the alien suits are connected then. And if I'm reading
this situation right, they inject people with something that gives people their powers. Then they wait
to see what the effects are. Once the people have developed something they find interesting, they
swoop in and take those people....”

Clark swallowed, trying to push down the growing lump of fear he felt growing in his throat. “But
that means they're pretty much spying on everyone in Smallville. You and my friends were attacked
too! Does this mean they'll be coming for you and my friends?”

Lex had a grim expression on his face, as he pondered this. He didn't like this any more than Clark
did. But They didn't have any real evidence for what were going on here...so this theory of his, were
just a theory right now.

“Listen, Clark. This is just a unproven theory right now. We don't actually have any evidence that
backs up my theory... so for all I know I could be wrong. Let's just stick to the basics of what we
know for now. And right now I know that they have a pattern of letting people go after 12 hours. So
John may come back unharmed after 12 hours. OK?” Lex said, in what he hoped was a reassuring
tone of voice.

Clark calmed down at this. “Yeah... I hope you're right.”

The clock chimed a few times, and Clark looked up at it. His worry turned into horror as he realized
how late it was.

“Oh no! I was supposed to be home by 6! I'll see you later, Lex!” Clark yelped as he got up and
rushed out the door.

Lex couldn't help but chuckle. Everyone in Smallville could be experimented on and kidnapped any
minute now, yet Clark still worried about getting in trouble with his parents. How typical.
---The next day---

“I don't know, man. Lex sounds like a crazy conspiracy theorist. Should we be taking anything he says at face value??” Pete pointed out, as he and Chloe stepped off the school bus.

When Clark got home the other day, he called up both his friends in a three-way call and told them everything that Lex had told him.

Chloe was still wondering about Lex's theory, but Pete didn't buy it at all.

As the two of them walked towards the school, Chloe pointed out: “Well, a lot of weird stuff have been happening in Smallville. Is it really so far-fetched to think that there's some group who's spying on the entire town and running illegal experiments?”

“Well, no. But the thing is... if Lex's right, then that means that we're gonna turn into meteor freaks and get abducted by those creeps. Is that what you want? Honestly, I think he's wrong and that he's just a crazy conspiracy wack-job.” Pete replied just as they reached the doors.

“Pete, you shouldn't be denying something that's going on in front of you just because you don't want it to be the truth.” Chloe said, as she opened the door, “That's what everyone else here in Smallville is doing!”

“I think it's working out just fine for everyone else. They get to pretend everything's fine, and they don't jump into dangerous situations unlike somebody I know...” Pete retorted, as he raised his eyebrows at Chloe.

They walked into the building, and they noticed all the posters telling everyone to vote for the new school president.

“Oh... that's right. I forgot the school elections were coming up, what with all the excitement that was going on.” Chloe said, as she looked at the posters.

The posters showed three people who were running-- Paul Chan, Felice Chandler, and Sasha Woodman.

Pete smiled at this, relived at the topic change. He spoke, “Who do you think will win? I like Paul, he's a really nice guy. But those elections are basically nothing but popularity contests, so I think Felice will win. She's the most popular one out of them, after all.”

Chloe raised one eyebrow. “You haven't mentioned Sasha Woodman at all.”

Pete snorted at the thought that such a mousy-looking girl could win. “No offense to her, but she's more of a follower than a leader. She doesn't exactly look commanding to start with too. She's a total wallflower.”

“Oh, I'm a wallflower?” A voice said from behind them.

Pete and Chloe turned around to see Sasha Woodman standing behind them. She had long brown hair, and dark eyes that was obscured by a pair of glasses. She was the kind of girl who didn't exactly stand out, appearance-wise. In fact she looked like a stereotypical nerdy girl that nobody gave a second glance to.

Pete chuckled sheepishly, and he couldn't help but feel slightly ashamed that she overheard him
saying that. “I... err.... I didn't mean to offend you.”

Sasha chuckled. “It's alright. But you really shouldn't judge a book by it's cover... There's more to me than you realize. And I suspect the entire school will know it by the time the election's over. Those losers that you mentioned doesn't even have a chance against me.”

With that she walked off towards one of the classrooms.

Chloe chuckled. “Well, she's certainly not lacking in self-confidence.”

Pete frowned slightly. “Huh. That wasn't like the Sasha I know. Usually, she's more.... high-strung.”

Sasha Woodman chuckled to herself. Normally, a remark like that would had upset her more than it did. But today, she was feeling invincible and on top of the world.

She was one of the people who were attacked by the mystery men in the past few weeks... but now she no longer felt like she was the victim of any attack. Instead, it was highly obvious that they had given her a gift.

Before the attack, she was but a simple girl who could control bees. But now her pheromones had became more powerful, enabling her to control the people around her. She discovered this by accident, when her parents were unwittingly turned into mindless drones who listened to her every command.

Instead of stressing out about the other rivals, she would simply find a way to turn the entire school into her personal hive. All the teachers and the students would turn into her personal drones, and they would have no choice but to vote her the school president. Paul Chan and that blond girl didn't even have a chance against her.

For she is the school's queen bee... even if everyone else didn't know it yet.

“Hello, earth to Clark?” a hand waved in front of Clark's face, and he blinked.

He was sitting with his friends at an cafeteria table during lunch time, and he had barely touched his food. That's how his friends knew there was something wrong.

“Is something wrong? You haven't touched your food at all.” Pete wondered.

“Sorry, I'm just worried about John right now. You know, the construction worker I told you guys about?” Clark replied.

Chloe smiled reassuringly. “Well, Lex said they usually let people go after 12 hours. I'm sure John is safe and at home right now.”

“Well, I'm gonna find out where he lives, then. I want to make sure.” Clark said.

“I'll come with you. Besides, I already know where he lives... thanks to my google-fu magic.” Chloe told Clark.

Pete shook his head. “Leave me out of it. I've had enough of this conspiracy bullshit. Just for once I'd like it if you two would talk about normal stuff... like who you're going to vote for during the school election. I'm gonna vote for Paul, if you care to know.”
Before Clark had any chance to say anything at all, a fight broke out in the cafeteria room.

“Just what do you think you're doing with my boyfriend??” Felice Chandler yelled, as she tried to drag her boyfriend away from Sasha Woodman's side.

Felice Chandler looked like your stereotypical, popular girl. As a matter of fact, her attitude and her looks made her look like she belonged in the movie “Mean girls”. Behind her stood her three friends: Joanne Varnes, and two brown-haired girls that Clark didn't know the name of.

Felice Chandler's boyfriend were a friend of Whitney Fordman's, and very obviously a jock as a well. He stood at Sasha's side with a slightly stoned expression on his face.

Sasha Woodman scoffed. “Not everything is about sex, you know. I simply asked your boyfriend to become my running mate for the school election. I need a strong man to do all the heavy lifting for me once I become school president, after all.”

Felice stared at the mousy-looking girl in front of her with a expression of disbelief on her face. “You seriously think you're gonna win?”

Sasha chuckled as she stepped towards the blonde girl. “I just don't think it... I KNOW I WILL WIN!”

With that she let out a strong burst of her pheromones to unsettle the other girl. She then added, “Just ask your boyfriend Chad. He agrees I'm a shoo-in for the election.”

She looked back at Chad, and asked: “Don't you?”

Chad still had this slightly stoned look on his face, but he focused on his girlfriend. “Sasha... She's the Queen of this school...”

Felice Chandler gasped loudly at this. She couldn't believe her ears... her own boyfriend was voting for this loser over her??

“Mister, you just earned yourself a break-up!” She tearfully yelled, as she turned around and stomped away.

Her three friends followed after her.

Chloe whistled after the latest drama was over. “Wow. Sasha sure has some balls on her. I was going to vote for Paul Chen too, but I'm starting to think maybe I should vote for her instead. I mean, standing up to the cheerleader squad like that? She even managed to get Felice's boyfriend to work for her... That's really impressive.”

Pete shook his head again. “I don't know... there was something strange about Chad. He looked like he was stoned out of his mind.”

Chloe snorted. “Football jocks using drugs? Gee, what a shocker.”

Pete narrowed his eyes at Chloe. “Don't you start, Chloe. I'm on the football team, you know. And I know Chad. He isn't the type to do drugs at all.”

Chloe couldn't help but look skeptical. “Are you suggesting that Sasha Woodman drugs people into doing her bidding?”

Pete sighed. “No! All I'm saying is, there's not something quite right with Chad. I'm gonna go talk to him... see what's up with him and Sasha.”
With that he got up from their table and walked over to talk to the football jock who were still standing by Sasha.

Chloe turned around and made eye contact with Clark. She raised her eyebrows at him, and Clark simply shrugged his shoulders.

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--After school--

Chloe was driving towards John Bythes' address, and complaining about Pete Ross at the same time. “Seriously, what is with Pete? One minute he's willing to come along with us on our investigations, and even help us out. And then the next minute, he wants nothing to do with it and pretends that there aren't something weird going on in this town.”

Clark was in the passenger seat, listening to her. He then answered, “Well, you know Pete. He doesn't have the same tolerance for weird stuff that we do. He only can take in so much before he wants a break from it all. I have to admit, it's been a lot to take in the past few days... even for me! I honestly don't blame him for wanting a break from it right now.”

Chloe narrowed her eyes at this. “Okay, I'll agree that he doesn't have the same tolerance that we do. But it kind of sounds like you want to do the same thing that Pete's doing. What's up with that?”

Clark sighed. “Well... I mean, look at it from my viewpoint, okay? Ever since I was a baby... I was always different from everyone else. Weirdness was hardwired into my life from day one... so, yeah, there are times when I just want a break from that too. All I've wanted in my entire life was to be normal, to be like everyone else. So pardon me for sympathizing with Pete on this.”

Chloe never thought of it like that before. Pete lived in Smallville for much longer than she did, so Smallville weirdness was probably hardwired into Pete Ross's life similar to Clark's life too.

Huh. In a way, that would also explain why the rest of the Smallville citizens seemed so hellbent on pretending that there wasn't anything strange going on in their town. Why they tried so hard to act like Smallville was just your normal, small town that you see everyday. Maybe it wasn't a type of blindness that affected the entire town... maybe it was just a desire to fit in with everyone and lead a simple life. And you couldn't do that if you were constantly pointing out how weird your life could be. So maybe it was simply easier for everyone to pretend that everything was fine, that nothing was going on...

Chloe realized that they just arrived at the location on her gps, and she told Clark: “Looks like we're here.”

John Bythes lived in a building that was directly behind his... store? Chloe didn't know the right word for it, since it seemed to be a mixture of office space for his construction/remodeling company and hardware displays that was meant to showcase what they could do for you. There was even a section inside that had a model kitchen, with a standing sign next to it that said: “50% off kitchen remodels”.

The two of them got out of the car, and walked towards the residential home. There was a six-year-old boy playing outside in the front yard.

“John said he had two kids... a son and a newborn daughter. I guess this is his kid.” Clark told Chloe.

Chloe put on her best charming smile. “Hey, kid. Is your parents home? I'd like to speak to them.”
The boy looked up at them solemnly, and then he ran into the house without a single word.

“Okay...?” Chloe looked over at Clark with one eyebrow raised.

“John also said that his son was having nightmares because of the attack. He might not trust strangers because of that?” Clark offered up a possible explanation for the boy's behavior.

“Ahh.” Chloe readily accepted that without any more words.

A tired-looking woman came outside.

“What do you folks want?” She asked.

“Um...I wanted to know if John Bythes were here? I saw him yesterday and he was pretty shook up about something, and I wanted to know if he was okay?” Clark answered. He purposefully omitted some of the details because he didn't want to come off crazy.

The woman looked vaguely upset at this, but then she calmed down a little. She then asked, “What's your name?”

“Clark Kent, Ma'am.” Clark replied.

“And I'm Chloe Sullivan. I run the school newspaper.” Chloe answered as well.

Mrs. Bythes nodded. “I know your folks, Clark. They're good people. And of course, I've heard about the infamous school newspaper that you run, Miss Sullivan. Tell me... what were my husband doing last time you saw him?”

Clark told her a highly edited version of what happened at the Talon cafe, leaving out the part where her husband developed meteor powers. Clark felt that part was way too personal, and was something the husband should tell his wife himself. He also left out the part about the aliens.

Mrs. Bythes looked at Clark in disbelief. “Wait a sec, my husband was acting out of sorts and talked about how he was drugged.... and you let him drive off... alone? What if he was hallucinating at the time?”

Clark rubbed the back of his head. When the woman put it that way, it did sound pretty bad.

“Well, he said he should had been home instead of working in the first place. I agreed with him. Sorry... it didn't occur to me that he needed an escort home. I... I guess I should had kept him at the Talon and had him ask you to come around to pick him up.”

Clark couldn't help but look horribly guilty as this just occurred to him.

Mrs. Bythes sighed. “I ain't faulting you none for this mistake. You're just a kid... you couldn't had thought of that in the first place. At least with this information the police can finally act. You know they had the nerve to tell me that I had to wait 24 hours to file a missing persons report?? I just hope my husband's alright. That fool might've driven himself into a ditch if he was that drugged-up like you say.”

Clark sighed. “I hope so too. I'll be praying that he comes home safely.”

Mrs. Bythes smiled. “Thanks for telling me what happened yesterday. Not knowing why he didn't come home last night.... that was really getting to me, ya know?”

With that, the two teenagers walked back to their car.

“Why didn't you tell her about her husband's meteor ability? Or the aliens?” Chloe wondered.

Clark gave her a look. “Because having abilities is kind of a personal thing? I know the value of
keeping a secret, and I'm not about to out a man to his wife. He should be the one telling her himself. As for the aliens... do you really want to look crazy in front of everyone? Besides like Lex says, we're not even sure if they're real aliens. They look like humans in weird costumes to me.”

Chloe nodded in understanding. To be honest, She kept on forgetting that Clark was actually a bullet-proof meteor mutant until he reminded her. He just seemed so.... normal. Geez, no wonder why he was so sensitive about other mutants' privacy. He had his own secrets to deal with.

“I wonder where John Bythes is at right now...?” Chloe wondered out loud.

---In a underground holding facility--

John Bythes was very pissed off. No... he was way beyond pissed off. He was completely livid with rage!

He had been kidnapped against his will and brought to this place. Where they proceeded to explain that they had been the ones who attacked him, and turned him into a mutated freak with superpowers.

And if that wasn't bad enough, they explained why they did it. Apparently, the world as he knew it was going to end in 16 years thanks to an alien invasion.

They actually expected him to become a soldier for this future war against his will. Oh yes, they talked about how noble it would be, fighting to change the future so that his children would have a chance to live.

In very different circumstances, he might had been willing to sign up for this war. But the way they went about this left a bad taste in his mouth.

Experimenting on town folk against their will? Recruiting everyone as a soldier regardless of the fact that they didn't want it or weren't ready for it? NO. Just... no.

Right now, All John wanted to do was go back home to his family. Hold them in his arms. Maybe build a underground shelter home an equip it with emergency rations. He wasn't really keen on the idea of leaving his family behind to fight a war in the future... one that they might not even win.

No, he wanted to stay home and be a father to his children for as long as he could. Heck, his son needed to know how to hold a rifle properly in order to protect himself against aliens. Or how to forage in the wild for edibles if they took out all the places that produced food for the masses.

Didn't those guys realize that he would be more useful at home instead of being forced to be a soldier?

John chuckled. Those guys were kind of stupid in the head now that he thought about it. A well informed citizen is a well-armed one... or so the saying goes. If they knew there was a war coming up, why not tell the public? Why not warn everyone??

Running around like a bunch of mad scientists experimenting on people without their consent wasn't going to help anybody.

John shook his head at the thought. Yeah, he really needed to find a way to escape and get away from those nutcases.
---At the Woodman family's bee farm---

Pete stood next to Chad, with a expression on his face that indicated that he was on something. He stared off into the distance with a glass-eyed look, obvious to the fact that his body was completely covered in bees.

Chad too, were covered in bees but like Pete he was off in his little world and didn't even notice.

Sasha Woodman smirked slightly when she looked over at her two newly recruited drones. She then spoke to all the bees in the vicinity: “We have two down, but we still have the whole school to conquer. Help me with this.”

She then bent over a large bowl, and started gagging. She vomited, and a red nectar appeared in the bowl. The bees started swarming around the bowl, taking samples from it as they flew around.

Sasha discovered that her body could secrete a red goop that she preferred to think of as nectar. It even came out of her pores when she sweated. And it seemed that she could produce vast quantities of it in her stomach, which is why she was vomiting it out.

This red nectar was made of her pheromones, and Sasha decided to dub it “Hypo-pollen”... considering the hypnotic effects it had on both Chad and Pete. She already came up with a plan to use this on the entire school.

Her bees would take samples of this red nectar, and spread it all over school. Sasha would do the rest, like putting this in the school lunch tomorrow.

One way or the other, everyone were going to turn into drones ready to do her bidding.

With that thought in her head, Sasha smiled wickedly.

Chapter End Notes

I decided to turn Sasha into the actual queen Bee from the comic universe, with all of the same powers. well, most of her powers anyway. http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Zazzala_(New_Earth)
Sasha is now the Smallville version of Zazzala, the Queen Bee.
Part two of the Drone episode remix. :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Shit, I'm so late.” Chloe cussed as she parked her car in front of the school entrance.

She had been up all night researching stuff, and also getting into touch with the police to see if they had a list of people who had been attacked by the mystery men.

Chloe wanted to see if the others were going to be kidnapped too, or if John Bythes was the only one to be taken like that. And what better way to keep track of all the victims who were attacked?

That had taken her longer than she thought, and she ended up sleeping at 1am. Naturally this meant that she overslept, and had missed the school bus. Good thing she already had a car.

She rushed towards her classroom, and sighed in relief when she saw that the teacher wasn’t in the classroom yet. Maybe she wasn’t as late as she thought.

But all the same she quickly reached her seat and sat down.

Clark was smirking at her slightly when she sat down. “Normally I'm the one who's late. What's up with you?” He said.

Before she could respond, the teacher came into the room with a dazed expression on his face.

Mr. Blair walked towards his desk, and then turned to address the students. “Before we start history class, I would like to remind you all that we have a school election coming up. Who you vote for will decide the fate of the school for the next following year. With that in mind, I would like to say that Sasha Woodman is our queen... you all must vote for her.”

He paused for a second to let that comment sink in, and then he told everyone to open their history books to page 140.

Chloe raised one eyebrow at her teacher. She thought that teachers were supposed to be detached and not influence the school election? She knew there was something about that in the rule-books somewhere. And, what was with that phrase “Sasha is our queen”?

--During Lunch break--

The rest of the day just seemed to get weirder for Chloe.

The students were walking around school like zombies. They kept on running into her and didn't even bother to apologize to her. They just kept on walking by her like they had somewhere important to be at. Which was so rude, especially when one of them knocked her down.
Pete Ross were passing out fliers for Sasha Woodman in the hallways, and he kept on chanting the phrase “Sasha Woodman is our queen.” to all the students.

Chloe slowly walked over as she eyed Pete dubiously. “Didn't you say that you were voting for Paul Chan?” She wondered.

Pete looked glassy-eyed as ever, but he pasted on his best stoned smile as he turned to face Chloe. “Well, I changed my mind. What can I say, you were right... We need somebody who can stand up to all the popular kids and do what's right for this school.”

“You're so totally right!” Felice Chandler said, having overheard Pete. She had a drugged expression on her face as well, as she walked over to the two of them.

She then told Chloe: “I've decided that I'm no competition for Sasha at all. So I'm dropping out of the Election. Sasha is our queen!”

Pete giggled, and then lifted one hand for a high five. “Right on!”

Felice returned the gesture with a high five of her own, and she grinned like she was drunk.

“Okay...?” Chloe backed away slightly. This was way too weird, even for her. There was just no way that Felice would willingly drop out of the race like this. It wasn't just like her to do that... which meant that there had to be some brainwashing going on here or something.

She then took a second look at all the students who were walking like stoned zombies, and noticed that all of them were wearing pin buttons that had Sasha Woodman's name on them.

That was when realization hit her. She then groaned to herself, “Damn it, I was joking yesterday when I suggested that Sasha drugged people into doing her bidding. But I was right?”

She turned and walked away from Pete and Felice quickly. She had to find Clark, before Sasha got to him too.

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--- Meanwhile at the Talon ---

The renovation was nearly completed, and the new cafe now had this European feel about it...with a strong slant towards ancient Greek decoration. Lana knew how much Lex seemed to have a fondness for Alexander the Great... so she decided to have a large S-shield hanging on the wall behind the counter where they dialed up customers.

It was a white engraved one... and matched well with the white Greek statues of soldiers and generals that stood at attention throughout the room.

The walls were beige, and the occasional wall had murals of different landscapes from all over the world. The pillars were white, and also had that Greek feel to them.

To keep it from feeling too old fashioned she had the workers string up white Christmas lights all around the pillars and along the top of the walls.

She just hoped that Lex would like it. He was coming over today to check everything out.

She turned around to see Lex come in, and she held her breath as Lex took a look around.

He started chuckling once he saw the large Alexander S-shield breastplate on the other side of the
room. “You're pandering to my tastes, aren't you?”

Lana smiled cheekily. “Well, not completely. I still did the Egyptian motif in one of the sections, despite the fact that you didn't want it.”

At Lex's questioning look, she explained: “It's the theater room in the back. I figured that if the lights were going to be dim when showing movies, then the theme wouldn't be too much of a eyesore for the customers.”

Lex smirked at this. “I see. Do you have a list of what was done here? I want to make sure we haven't gone over budget.”

Lana handed over the clipboard she had.

Lex frowned slightly as he looked at the numbers. “Huh. I had a budget limit of 50,000. But the renovation only cost 20,000.”

Lana answered, “Well, that might be my fault. I decided to cut some corners and just do some things myself instead of letting a professional do it.”

Lex looked up from the clipboard, and he couldn't help but feel worried. “What did you do, exactly?”

Lana said, “Don't worry. I didn't do anything that would affect the Talon in a major way. I let the professionals handle the plumbing and other important stuff. But I personally painted the walls myself.. I thought that would be a good way to save money. Did you know that it costs 9,000 dollars to have a painter do all the walls and the murals?? I thought that was way too much money... no matter how good the painter was. So I just painted over the white walls with some beige paint, and then did the murals.”

“Well, that wasn't so bad. If he didn't like what Lana did he could always just paint that over. He walked over to one of the walls that had a mural of Ireland's green landscapes, and studied it.

Lana's painting was almost photo-realistic, save for a few amateurish mistakes there and here. Lana had strong artistic talent, but it was obvious that she hadn't been properly trained as an artist.

“You did this?” Lex asked, just to be sure. Lana nodded, and she suddenly looked nervous.

“Hmm.” Lex pondered this. “That's how you got so good at budgeting too, I imagine. I would never thought it was possible to do all of this cheaply and still get quality service.” Lex complimented her.

That caught Lana Lang off guard, and she couldn't help but blush. “Oh... I really haven't thought about that at all. I just did what I usually do in the drama club. I make the costumes and paint the backgrounds for school plays. I just applied that skill to the murals here.”

“Yes, that's how you got so good at budgeting too, I imagine. I would never thought it was possible to do all of this cheaply and still get quality service.” Lex commented.

Lana smiled.

He smirked again, and couldn't help but tease the young girl. “It makes me wonder how you failed so badly as a waitress, if you had those hidden talents all along.”
Lana's smile faded. “Hey! That's so mean!” she yelled as she slapped Lex's arm with both hands.

Lex chuckled. “Sorry....”

The situation at school was escalating quickly, as most of the school population was now under Sasha's control. Everyone was practically reenacting the night of the walking dead, just without the blood and gore, with the way they stumbled around the campus like a bunch of zombies.

And if that wasn't already bad enough, the school were completely filled with swarming bees that carried the hypo-pollen everywhere.

Clark, Chloe and Paul Chan was now hiding in the school basement, as they debated what they should do next.

“Why did it have to be bees?” Paul Chan moaned. He was afraid of bees ever since he was 7 years old, when he was stung by one and discovered that he had an allergy reaction to them. As soon as he saw bees coming for him, he hightailed it out of there and ran into Clark.

Chloe joined up with them moments later after that.

“I don't get it.... how does the ability to control bees give a person the ability control the school population too? I feel like I'm missing something big here...” Chloe wondered, as she tried to dial the number of the police. But for some reason the cell phone reception was down. That, or the walls of the basement blocked that somehow.

“I took good look at all the bees when we were running... they looked like they were carrying something... some red goop were all over their legs. It looked like they were smearing that everywhere they could touch. It had a strong smell, too.” Clark replied.

Chloe brightened slightly at that. “That could be it! Maybe Sasha Woodman discovered some kind of drug that could control people. Then she used her ability to control bees to spread that around school!”

The school intercom came on, and Sasha's voice could be heard throughout the school.

“This is a new day for Smallville. Today, the school is now part of my hive. But to keep this hive healthy and strong, we must get rid of all opposition against the queen. Felice Chandler has already given up on competing against me for School president. She swore her loyalty to me and gave up her queen bee status, in return for becoming one of my faithful drones. But here's the problem. Paul Chan haven't done that yet. So that means he's still competing against me for school president. As the queen of this school, I cannot have that happening at all. So I command all of you to find Paul Chan and bring him to me.”

The trio could hear the entire school body chanting “Sasha is our queen!” in response above them.

Paul whimpered slightly. “Damn, what did I ever do to deserve this? I had no idea that I'd be competing against one of those freaks when I ran for school president.”

Clark ignored Paul, as he looked at Chloe. “Do you think that water might wash away whatever it is that Sasha used to put the student under her control?”

Chloe pondered this. “That might be possible... but how are we going to do that?”

Clark then pointed up at the sprinklers which were just above them. Chloe grinned, as she pulled out a lighter out of her purse.
Clark thought about telling her that he could set it off with heat vision, but Paul Chan was in the room. So instead he just boosted Chloe up on his shoulders so that Chloe could reach the sprinklers with her lighter.

The school's sprinkler system was a rather old one that lasted ever since the 40's. If you set one off in one room it would trigger a chain reaction that went off in other rooms too. Unlike the modern versions where it would only go off in rooms where there was a fire.

Sure enough, the sprinkler system went off in all rooms soon as Chloe triggered it with her lighter. Clark could hear the yells of the students all over the school as they got wet.

He put Chloe down, and said: “While they're distracted we should run for it.”

All three of them ran up the stairs and towards the exit. They passed some loitering students in the hallway who looked confused, like they forgot what they were supposed to be doing.

Unfortunately, Sasha and some other students were blocking the exits, and was waiting for them.

“Using the sprinklers to distract and disorient my drones. Very clever, but not clever enough to get past me.” Sasha Woodman said, as she walked towards the trio.

She gestured at Paul Chan, and the bees swarmed towards him. He screamed and tried to run away fast as possible, but he tripped and fell to the floor.

Clark moved quickly as he could without giving himself away, and threw himself over Paul before the bee swarm could reach him.

Within seconds the two of them were covered in bees.

“Stop this! Why would you go this far just to be the school president?” Chloe demanded to know.

“Hmm, good question.” Sasha said, as she thought about that. Why stop at being the school president? She had seen how far her abilities could go, although her hypo-pollen could do with some fine-tuning. Humans were no good to her if they walked around like stoned zombies. She could easily rule all of Smallville with those abilities of her. Smallville first, and then she could go on to conquer the entire world. All of Earth would become one big hive.

She was so lost in that fantasy that she didn't notice a group of people in black alien suits silently sneaking up behind her.

But Chloe did. She widened her eyes as she watched the group sneak up behind Sasha, and each one raise their hand to reveal a glowing green circle. There was a green flash of light, and the entire group disappeared along with Sasha.

With Sasha gone, the bees stopped swarming. They started to behave like normal bees again, as they aimlessly flew around looking for the exit.

Clark and Paul slowly got up and looked around, but to their relief they were no longer covered in bees.

“What just happened?” Paul wondered.

“Good question. I didn't see what happened...” Clark said.

Chloe turned to face Clark, and answered, “Those guys in the weird suits that you saw before? They
were here.”

That was enough to explain things for Clark, so he simply nodded his head in understanding. But Paul just looked confused at this, as he had no idea what were going on here.

School was now closed for the next few days, as they needed to bring in somebody to deal with the sudden bee infestation. Nobody could explain why the bees from the Woodman farm suddenly decided to move into the school, but they were bringing in a specialist to capture all of the bees and transport them back to the farm.

Everyone in the school had been confused to why they woke up to find themselves wearing badge pins with Sasha Woodman's name on it, and at the sudden appearance of the bees flying around school... but in true Smallville fashion they opted to ignore that and pretend like nothing happened.

The torch crew was holding their daily meeting in Clark's barn loft, as they discussed the incident.

Pete shook his head, as he sat back on Clark's red futon sofa. “I can't believe I ended up getting mind-whammed by Sasha. Or that she would do something so crazy because she wanted to win the election.”

Clark nodded. “If you ask me... I think Sasha was taking that whole Queen Bee bit a little too far. All that talk about the school being her hive?? She seriously needs help.”

Pete nodded back in agreement, and took a sip from his root beer can that he was holding.

Chloe was looking down at her printed list of names with a frown on her face. She then looked up at the boys. “Guys.... It looks like Lex's theory is correct. Um, look at this.... this is a list of names. The names of people who were attacked by the mystery men.... guess whose name is on there?”

She then held up the paper, which had certain names highlighted with a yellow marker. Clark walked over to her to look at it, and he noticed Sasha Woodman's name was on there.

And according to the date next to Sasha's name, the attack occurred weeks before Sasha displayed her newfound powers to control the bees and humans around her.

“So.... Sasha gained this power because she was attacked.... then they came back and took her once she started displaying this power.” Clark said.

“But there's still parts of that theory that doesn't make sense. If everyone who's been injected starts having superpowers, then why haven't we started showing signs of that? I was injected, but I don't have the ability to control fire or something like that.” Pete pointed out.

“Well, that's because not all superpowers or abilities are flashy or are easy to detect. Some powers are so passive and so easy to hide... like Super-intelligence, for instance. How do you tell if somebody has super-powered intelligence or if they're just a normal genius?” Lex said, as he climbed up the stairs.

He then smiled. “Sorry, I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. I came over here because I heard that the school got infested by bees.... I wondered if there was more to that story.”

Clark smiled back. “Well... yeah, it's kind of a long story. But to make it short, there was this girl named Sasha, who could control bees and humans. She was brainwashing the entire school into voting for her before she was taken by our mystery men.”
Lex considered this as he came to a stop at the top of the stairs. “Huh. Interesting.”

Chloe pondered over Lex’s earlier words. “Passive abilities that are hard to detect, huh....So are you saying that Pete might turn into a genius?”

Lex shrugged. “That was just the first example I thought of. For all I know, Pete could end up having the ability to detect danger or something like that. Something low-key, and pretty impossible to out him as an mutant if that's the case. It'd be hard to take anybody seriously if they ran around saying, Pete Ross is a mutant with the superpower of detection.”

Clark looked tried to picture what superpowers of detection might be like.

Pete snorted. “Worse superpower ever. Everyone has the ability to detect danger to a certain degree, don't they? Even I have the sense to leave things to the police when things get to be too much for me.”

Lex smirked. “Isn't that the point though? After all, not all abilities can be flashy or even interesting...and some end up being something mundane that everyone already has... just slightly more enhanced. Like enhanced taste buds.”

Pete rolled his eyes at this. He then joked, “If I'm going to develop a superpower, I want it to be something cool. Like flying. What am I going to do with enhanced taste-buds?”

“You could become the world's top food connoisseur.” Lex snarked back, but then he grew serious. “Flying does sound like a cool ability to have. I'd love to fly under my own power too...”

Clark smirked, remembering their conversation the second time he met Lex.

Chloe looked worried. She shook her head as she said, “Be careful what you wish for, guys. All of the meteor mutants that I met, had this massive drawback to their powers. Sean had the power to freeze things, but he was always cold and had to seek warmth no matter what just to survive. What if in order to gain the power of flight, your bodies became so light that you could easily be carried away by a gust of wind against your will?”

Lex nodded. “Fair point.”

Pete scoffed. “Debbie Downer is on the loose, I see. Just when I was starting to warm up to the idea of having a power....”

“Maybe they're not creating meteor mutants?” Clark wondered, “I mean... what if they didn't know which people in town had powers, so they created a serum to expose those who had powers? And then the mutants' abilities just got out of control...”

“That's a good theory as any. It would explain why Pete and I haven't gotten superpowers out of this deal.” Chloe agreed.

Lex took in a deep breath, as he mulled this over. To be honest, he didn't like that theory very much. What would that mean for him? It was obvious that he was being affected by the serum somehow. Just the other night he managed to speed-read though a 800-page book in just 20 minutes... and even now he still managed to recall every page in perfect detail. He wasn't able to do that before.

It felt as if he was being transformed into a human supercomputer. He could process things faster than other humans did... and even learn things faster.

But what did that imply about him? He didn't like the implication that his intelligence was the result
of the meteor shower. Lex always believed that intelligence came naturally to him as a human being. This implied that he would've been one of those idiotic, spoiled kids who couldn't even wipe their ass without a maid's help if the meteors didn't rain down that day.

That thought was just too appalling for words.

No longer in a good mood, Lex excused himself from the group's meeting. “If you guys will pardon me, I have other things to do today. I'm a busy guy after all.”

With that, he turned around and walked down the stairs.

Pete frowned slightly. “Is it me, or did Lex seem rattled by Clark's suggestion?”

Chloe looked at Pete. “Really, I didn't notice.”

Clark blinked at this. If Lex was rattled by that, wouldn't that mean.....he was a meteor mutant?

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--- Underground---
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“Let me out of here!” Sasha screamed, as she banged on what appeared to be a force field that looked like a fence made out of electricity.

“Give it up. Nobody's coming.” Her neighbor in the next holding cell grumbled, “Besides, you're giving me a headache.”

Sasha leaned over and squinted hard so that she could look into the next cell. A blonde boy was leaning against the force-field of his cell, looking her way.

“You're the one who froze his ex-girlfriend's arm off and iced the school's swimming pool.” Sasha's eyes widened in realization.

The ex-jock smirked. “Guilty as charged. And I suspect you've got some kind of power too, if you're down here with us. What are you in for?”

Sasha stomped one foot in frustration. “I was turning the school into my personal hive. I was the Queen Bee of the school, and I had turned all the bees and the humans into my personal drones. I was winning, and nobody could have stopped me!”


That's when another voice piped up from a different cell right next to Sean's. “Don't knock it. Power over the insects can do so much more than you could ever imagine. In their ways, insects are far more useful than humans are.”

“Oh yeah, that's Bug boy. Considering how similar your powers are, maybe the two of you would get along...” Sean chuckled.

“Ahem, I would really like it if you didn't call me that name. I am Greg Atkins, King of the insects!” Greg snapped.

Sasha remembered Greg. Wasn't he the one who stalked and kidnapped Whitney's girlfriend Joanne? She didn't know that he could control bugs.
At any rate, this was giving her a idea. With their powers combined, maybe they could get out of here.

“How much do you guys want to get out of here?” Sasha asked, before she started vomiting up the red nectar that she dubbed Hypo-pollen.

“I wouldn't mind being free again, but it's no use. They put collars on us that inhibits our powers. I can't summon any insects to help us out.” Greg sounded regretful as he said this.

Sasha's hands touched the collar around her neck. So did this mean that she couldn't summon and control bees? Well... it didn't seem to stop her body from producing the red nectar. So there was a chance that she could still control people.

“Nah, I'm fine where I am.” Sean answered, as he returned to his bed.

Sean didn't want to go back to being Mr. Iceman if he could help it. As long as he wore the collar and the warm clothing that was provided to him, he stayed warm. Besides, this prison wasn't so bad. They gave him his own TV in return for behaving, and he was able to get all kinds of channels on this thing... even the porn channels. They said that they would give him exercise equipment if he kept up the good behavior.

Did he miss his friends? Yeah. Did he miss being the playboy of the school, fooling around with all the eager ladies? Hell yes. But freezing to death was the worst feeling anybody could have... and he always felt like he was perpetually freezing to death without the dying part when he was powered up. So until they found a cure for him, there was no way he was leaving here.

Not when they found a way to keep him warm. Sean laid down on his bed, and closed his eyes.

Sasha kept on vomiting up as much as red nectar as she could until her stomach hurt, and then she started smearing it all over the walls and the floors. She was going to cover her entire cell with her pheromones, so if any guard ever came into her cell they would fall under her spell. All she would have to wait.

Greg Atkins sat Indian-style on an mediation mat in his cell, as he pondered the latest newcomer. This one was like him. She had obviously ascended beyond humanity into the world of insects...which was surprising. He had seen her around school. But he never thought that such a wallflower would end up evolving the same way he did. Then again, he had been something of a male wallflower himself.

He always thought that the beautiful cheerleaders were the queen bees of high school, but maybe he had been looking in the wrong place? Sasha had been right in front of him back in school all along, and on top of it her family ran a bee farm! He clearly made a mistake when selecting his mate. Well, not again. He needed to observe her for a while, and learn everything about her. He would finally have his Queen Bee.

He smiled to himself.

Chapter End Notes

I decided that most of the captured meteor mutants couldn't be magically cured of their
obsessions overnight. So yeah, people like Greg has a long way to go before they're cured of their creepy behavior. Poor Sasha, she unwittingly became the new target for Greg's obsession. Oh well, I'm sure that will turn out okay??
Chapter Summary

This is a remix of that 19th episode of season one titled "Crush". I'm not writing the entire episode, I'm only writing the parts that changed due to "time ripples". So if I don't show scenes from this episode, you can assume that they happened the way it did on the TV show. So Lex's old nanny still pays him a visit, and so on forth behind the scenes. With that in mind, let's move on with the story!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lex was in the middle of an sparring match in his gym when the butler showed Clark inside.

He saw Clark in the corner of his eye, but he didn't stop sparring until his sparring instructor landed an blow. He stepped backwards away from the mat he was standing on and gingerly touched his bloody nose.

His sparring instructor was a large, muscular army guy with a standard buzzed haircut. The instructor made a tsk-ing noise, as he told Lex: “You've grown too soft. You haven't been practicing your combat skills on a regular basis like you promised.”

Lex sighed at this. “I know. My responsibilities got in the way.”

The army guy gave Lex a shrewd look. “You usually don't call me up unless you think something's going to happen. Your old man's been making enemies again, haven't he?”

Everyone who ever worked with the Luthors knew that Lionel Luthor's enemies had a tendency to go after his son. They felt that the son made for a easier target than the senior Luthor did. There was also that bit of logic that Lionel Luthor might be punished and hurt if his own son was harmed. Unfortunately for his enemies who wanted Lionel punished, Lionel wasn't like most fathers out there. Lionel Luthor wasn't the type to get upset if he saw that his son was harmed... his only concern was having a heir who could survive hardships and carry on Lionel Luthor's legacy. If Lex could survive anything Lionel's enemies did to him, then Lionel Luthor didn't care.

Lex slowly nodded. “I guess you could say that.”

The instructor shook his head. “Damn, son. After all those years he still hasn't learned how to not piss off people?”

Lex chuckled. “It's alright. I have one thing that he doesn't have.”

The instructor looked interested at this. “Oh? What's that?”

Lex smiled as he looked over at Clark. “Friends. We should take a break for now. I'll meet you here later on..”

The combat army instructor raised one eyebrow as he looked over at Clark. But he nodded, and left
Clark walked over as Lex sat down on one of the exercise chairs.

Lex asked as he opened a bottle of water, “What brings you over here, Clark?”

Clark fidgeted slightly, as he wasn't sure how to ask Lex this. “Umm... I was thinking about what you said the other day. You know, about how there were superpowers out that was hard to detect, because it was so similar to mundane abilities that people already have?”

Lex simply nodded his head, wondering where Clark was going with this.

Clark sighed. “I don't know how to ask this politely... and I know how people can be sensitive about this sort of thing. But... um, you were talking about yourself back then when you talked about those things, weren't you? I mean, you looked so upset at my suggestion the other day.”

Lex raised his eyebrows. Clark was far more perceptive than he gave him credit for. “In a way, I suppose I was talking about myself. The truth is, I don't know if I'm one or not. The reason why I was upset? Because I can't help but think that the serum they injected with me is doing something to me... but I can't tell if it's my mind playing tricks on me or if it's a real effect. If that even makes sense.”

Clark sat down next to Lex. “I can see how that could be a problem. You could be psyching yourself out because you're worried and scared about what's going to happen to you. Or it could be something very much real. What if you told me what it was doing to you, we could figure out which one it is?”

Lex nodded in agreement. He then told Clark everything he had done over the past few days, and how he felt right now.

“My mind feels so clear... I was a fairly intelligent person before... but now I feel like I'm on another level completely.” Lex said.

“That doesn't sound so bad. But why do I get the feeling this disturbs you?” Clark asked.

Lex shook his head. “Think about it. What if I wasn't naturally intelligent to start with? I just don't like the idea that... well...that the only reason why the way I am right now, is because of the meteor shower. I'd like to believe that I would had been this way naturally regardless of the meteor shower. If the universe is telling me otherwise, it just feels so... offensive.”

Clark nodded. “Yeah, that's kind of disturbing alright. But, there's one way to find out isn't there? You could look at your school records, and compare the 'pre-shower you' to the 'you after the shower.'”

Clark made quotation marks as he said the last parts.

Lex blinked. Why the hell hadn't he thought of that in the first place? That was such simple way to check if he had been altered.

“Clark, you're a genius.” Lex said, as he got up.

--40 minutes later, in the Library study room--

Clark and Lex were hunched over together over Lex's Laptop.
Lex looked up his school records from excelsior prep, and had been comparing his past self with hair and without hair. Turns out that the old him with hair had been fairly gifted to start with... his knack for mathematics and the sciences had been more advanced than the other kids his age. That hadn't changed at all when he lost his hair.

Well... the only thing that changed over time was psychical education, aka gym class. Before, thanks to his asthma he had the lowest marks in the class. But after the meteor shower, he was able to keep up with other kids in physical education and therefore got higher marks.

Lex let out an relieved breath. “I would've been fairly intelligent no matter what happened to me. Good to know.”

Clark smiled at his friend. “There you go. Now the only question is, why do you feel like your brain was altered on some level? I mean, what did the meteor shower do to you?”

Lex frowned at this. “It didn't do much. It took away my hair, and I was cured of my asthma problems. I was healthier than I used to be...”

“Maybe that's your meteor mutant power?” Clark wondered.

Lex scoffed. “What, Super-health? Because I have such a healthy body, my mind became super-healthy too....?”

Clark simply nodded. He then couldn't help but snark, “You did say that not all abilities were flashy like super-strength. Congratulations, you got one of the most boring superpowers ever!”

Lex scoffed again. “Why couldn't I gain flying as a superpower instead? That's just too lame for words.”

Clark then grew serious. “Seriously though... we don't know for sure you're even a meteor mutant, okay? I mean, like you said this sort of thing is hard to detect. For all you know, you could just be psyching yourself out because of what's going on around here. It's important to keep your cool.”

Lex nodded. That was sound advice as any. He couldn't help but feel let down however. “To tell you the truth... I was kind of looking forward to having a superpower.”


Lex's face flushed slightly. “Well.. promise you won't tell anybody else?”

Clark nodded.

Minutes later, the two of them were standing inside a vault full of comic books.

“I don't believe it. You even have the first issue of the sliver age Warrior Angel comic book! I heard it's extremely hard to find.” Clark gasped as he looked at the comic which was propped up inside a glass pedestal.

Lex was rather pleased to find out that Clark Kent was just as much of a warrior angel fan like he was... so they were bonding over that right now.

“It was difficult to find, alright. You have no idea how much crap I went though just to snag that for my own collection. In fact that comic book is worth over 1 billion currently, thanks to its' rarity.” Lex couldn't help but brag slightly.
Clark's eyes bugged out at this. “1 billion?! Jeez, Lex. You're much more of a dedicated fan than I am. I'm not sure I would pay that much for an old comic book.”

Lex smirked at this. Clark then walked towards Lex. “So is this the reason why you wanted a superpower of your own? So you could be Warrior Angel?”

Lex shrugged. “Kind of. I mean, I'm not sure I would go out wearing spandex... at least not willingly. The one thing Warrior Angel was always bad at, was his fashion sense. But the rest of it... being a superhero? Heck, yes. To tell you the truth, I've always wanted to be like Warrior Angel ever since I was a kid. Needless to say my inner child is VERY disappointed that we didn't get a cool superpower.”

Clark chuckled at this. “Well, maybe it's for the best? I mean, remember what Chloe said... all the powerful mutants had some drawback to their abilities. Kind of like a monkey paw effect. What if you ended up more like.... umm...”

He thought a moment, and then came up with something. “What if you ended up being like that god-awful version of Warrior Angel from the 80's when Bryan Azeldo was writing him? Everything was depressing as hell. His love interest got killed off the day after their wedding and he got transformed into a demon.... That was the worst story arc ever!”

Lex shuddered slightly, as he remembered that. “Good point.”

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--Weeks later--

Clark Kent wasn't sure if Lex Luthor was a meteor mutant or not... but Lex seemed worried that the mystery men would come for him soon... So he thought the best thing to do, was to stick by Lex's side for now. At least, until the two of them were sure that they wouldn't come for Lex.

So he took to memorizing Lex's schedule and then hanging out with Lex whenever he knew the man was free. That sounded very stalkerish of him, but Lex seemed to enjoy having him around, so that wasn't so bad after all.

Clark wound up hanging around the Talon with Lana and Lex a lot for the next following 2 weeks. Lex also ended up ordering pies and pastries from Martha Kent, so Clark also had the added bonus of using that as an excuse to hang out there. He would deliver the pies and pastries, and then help Lana set them up.

It turned out that Lex had taken on Lana as an part-time counter clerk, despite the fact that Lana had a poor record in working retail.

When Clark discreetly asked Lex about it, Lex had this to say: “It turns out that Lana's very good at handling money. But it seems that she has some anxiety-related problems, so she has a hard time memorizing orders. I figured out that she's good at making coffee as long as you don't make her wait on tables or take everyone's orders. With some time she could overcome her anxiety problem.”

Lex then looked around to see a mostly empty cafe. “Besides, it's not like I have people lined up. It seems like nobody wants to work here right now. So far, Lana's been the only one who volunteered to work here.”

He didn't realize that he was neglecting his other two friends until it was career day at school.

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--Smallville high school--
The gym room was filled with job booths and recruiters looking for any students who would be interested in joining them. Today was Career day, when the high school kids got to look at all the summer jobs that were available to them at their age.

“Is that a familiar face I see? Why, it's Clark Kent! I haven't seen him for so long that I forgot what he looked like!” Chloe said in a very sarcastic tone of voice as she stood next to Pete.

“Uh, hi?” Clark greeted his friends.

“I was starting to think that you were trapped in in the world of Lana-land for so long that you forgot about us.” Pete smirked.

“Lana-land?” Clark raised one eyebrow at this.

Pete shook his head. “Don't deny it, now. We know you've been spending a lot of time with Lana Lang at the Talon. And when you're not doing that, you're chatting it up with your new best friend Lex.”

Chloe scoffed. “You barely spoke to me in the past three weeks, and the only time we did, you were helping me fix my car tire in front of Talon.”

Clark was starting to get the feeling that he screwed up big time. “Oh. I'm so sorry guys. I didn't mean to ignore you two. Honest!”

Chloe and Pete smiled at the apology.

Pete grinned, and couldn't help but tease Clark about Lana. “Apology accepted, man. Did you manage to pave new ground with Lana Lang, at least? Or are you still hopelessly stuck at square one?”

Clark shook his head. “Lana and I are just friends, guys.”

Pete snorted. “Poor Clark. Forever Friend-zoned!”

Clark rolled his eyes at this, and decided to change the subject. “That's a really nice suit, Chloe. Is that new?”

Chloe was wearing a burgundy-colored business suit, the kind that came with a pencil skirt. Her goldenrod button-up shirt underneath complimented the business suit jacket.

Chloe smiled. “Well, I have to look my best if I want to get into the Daily Planet for the summer. After all, there's only four spots open for the Daily planet... and last year there were 500 applications to get in there! Honestly... I might not even get past the interview stage.”

She couldn't help but look nervous at the last part.

Pete then replied: “There's always the Metropolis Inquisitor too? I mean, they write about weird stuff... you do too. It seems like a perfect match?”

Clark nodded. “Yeah. Didn't Lex offer you a spot there?”

Chloe shrugged her shoulders at this. “Ehh... I still have my heart set on Daily Planet. While I do love writing about Smallville, the land of the weird, I don't want to be doing that forever. And I don't care what position I get at the Daily Planet, even if I only make coffee for people in the classified department.”

Pete nodded. “You could still get another shot at the Daily Planet next Saturday. I hear they have
recruiters there too at that journalism student convention.”

Chloe brightened slightly at that. “That’s true.”

Clark realized that he forgot about the convention. He stopped moving, and muttered to himself: “Damn.”

Chloe and Pete stopped walking, and then turned to face Clark.

“What’s wrong?” Chloe wondered. Clark chuckled nervously, knowing that he was going to be in big trouble any second.

“Um, Chloe? About the Journalism Convention....The thing is, I kind of forgot about it...” Clark nervously said.

Chloe’s face fell at this bit of information. “Don’t tell me you forgot to get the tickets... Clark, you were supposed to get them! Now it’s too late to get any more tickets.”

Clark held up his hands helplessly, and shrugged.

Chloe’s disappointed expression quickly turned into an enraged expression. “I can’t believe this! It was bad enough when you treated me like chopped liver for three weeks, but this? This is unforgivable!”

With that she stomped off.

Pete shook his head, and looked at Clark with a disappointed expression of his own. “Man, you really screwed up big time.”

--Torch office--

Chloe was chatting with a old friend of hers named Justin, when Clark came in to apologize.

Justin had been in a hit-and-run car accident that cost him his hands, and from the looks of it, he was still recovering from that. They had been chatting about the school comic he used to do when Clark interrupted them.

Needless to say it was awkward as hell. Clark tried his best to be friendly towards Justin, But Chloe kept on giving him the cold shoulder and rebuffed all his attempts to apologize.

Justin seemed to feel the same way Clark did, as he kept on glancing between the two of them. “Um, maybe I should go now. I need to catch up on other stuff, anyway.”

As he turned around to leave, his portfolio papers spilled out all over the floor.

Clark knelt down to help collect Justin’s things, when he noticed an newspaper clipping with a pretty gruesome headline. “GOING DOWN! DOCTOR LOSES HANDS IN FREAK ACCIDENT!”

Justin Gaines hastily snatched that out of Clark’s hands, like he didn't want Clark to see that. Clark stared up at Justin, wondering what was up with that.

For some reason, his gut instinct told him there was something off about Justin. But he couldn’t quite put his finger on it.

Chloe kept on giving Clark the cold shoulder for the rest of the week.
She was also dating Justin Gaines now, so she was off in her own little world for a while.

So Clark and Pete was left solely to their own devices. Pete couldn't help but chuckle when Clark pointed this out.

“No, not really. It's just... he's weird. I guess it started with that newspaper clipping he had. It was like he didn't want anybody to know he had it, but he keeps on carrying it around in his bag. I can't figure that part out, you know. Why would he have something like that if he doesn't want anybody to know that he's carrying it around?” Clark tried to explain why he felt so strange around Justin.

Pete nodded. “You're right, that is a little weird. But, maybe you're just being paranoid?”

“What do you mean?” Clark wondered.

Pete pointed to his head as he said: “Think about it, dude. It's like... right now there's some kind of conspiracy or something going on in Smallville where some group is apparently experimenting on folks and kidnapping them. Right? Now if you knew that was going on.... wouldn't that put you on edge?
Maybe even make you paranoid enough to see suspicious behavior where there's none?”

Clark shrugged. When put it that way, it did sound reasonable. He then admitted to Pete: “I kind of looked into Justin's background without letting Chloe know. He wasn't here in Smallville when everyone got attacked by the mystery men. In fact, he's been staying in Metropolis for up to six months ever since he had that accident. And it was hard to find records of where he was at during the meteor shower, so he might not have been here in Smallville when that happened.”

Clark smiled at this, feeling slightly foolish for ever having suspected Justin. “I hope you're right.”

Chloe walked over to them with her tray. She then asked in a strange, overly chirpy tone: “Hey, guys! Mind if I sit with you?”

Before the boys could respond, she sat down across from the two of them.

“What's this? Is Chloe finally taking a break from her dating life to hang out with us?” Pete teased.

Chloe smiled. “I can't help it. Justin's just so sweet, you know. Plus, it was nice to have a boyfriend after so long.... I honestly can't remember the last time I dated anybody.”

Clark smiled at this. “I'm happy that you're happy, Chloe.”
Chloe smile's faded, and she couldn't help but look worried about something. “Um.... guys. If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anybody else?”

This grabbed both boys' attention, and they nodded.

“Justin's a sweet boy and he's not the type that would hurt anybody. I want to make that perfectly clear. Um, that said... I found something really weird in his art folder. There was this newspaper clipping about Justin's doctor losing his hands. Which isn't really weird in itself. But, there was also this comic that Justin did, about his doctor. It was a really graphic story about the doctor losing his hands in that elevator accident.” Chloe blurted out.

Clark glanced over at Pete as to say 'I told you so!'. Clark then asked: “What did Justin say when you asked him about it?”

Chloe shook her head. “I haven't said anything to him about it. I was just looking at his artwork when I found that comic. He doesn't know I saw it. He told me about the doctor before...Justin was so angry at that doctor after he found out that the doctor was sued for malpractice five times in the past. He was convinced that the doctor messed up the surgery on purpose.”

Pete looked vaguely disturbed at this. It was obvious that Chloe wanted an reasonable explanation for the creepy comic, so he said: “Maybe he liked the irony of it all, you know? How Karma dealt her hand in such a ironic way...? Besides, how could he rig the elevator to fall like that? Clearly he's innocent... he just does creepy comics as a way to vent his feelings.”

Chloe smiled at Pete's attempt to reassure her, but she wasn't completely convinced. “Yeah, maybe.”

With that she slowly picked up her fork and started eating.

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– Torch office--

There was something that Chloe had been keeping from her friends. Namely, that Justin was a meteor mutant with the power to move things with his mind.

Telekinesis. She found out when she first kissed him, and caused him to lose control of his powers.

At first, it had been wonderful. He was sweet, he was funny... and plus he was really good at kissing. For the first time in Chloe's life, she felt wanted and loved. The fact that the two of them shared an secret like this were only an added bonus.

But... despite the fact that he looked so harmless, he seemed to be obsessed with finding the people who had wronged him.

At first, Chloe had thought nothing of it. After all, If somebody ran you over with a car, wouldn't you want to know who did that? So she had offered to help him look for the person who were responsible.

But now? Chloe couldn't help but wonder what Justin Gaines were going to do with the information if Chloe told him about it.

Was that thing with the doctor really just a fluke accident? Or... did Justin cause that?

Honestly, Chloe didn't want to believe that Justin could be a killer. Not with the way he made her feel. How could somebody who made her feel so loved be evil? There was no way!

“Chloe, you okay?” a voice snapped her out of it, and she looked up at Justin from her desk.
Chloe chuckled weakly. “Sorry, I was lost in thought.”

“What's the matter? You look pale.” Justin wondered, as he walked around the desk towards her.

Chloe looked down at the paper in her hands. “You know how I called the DMV for a favor and had them run the partial plate? Well... they found a match.”

She shakily held up the paper, which Justin took. His eyes widened in shock when he saw Principal Kwan's name on the printed paper. “I don't believe it. The school principal ran me down?”

Chloe took a deep breath, steadying her nerves before speaking. “I know, I couldn't believe it at first when I read it. This is definitely going to cause a huge scandal when everyone finds out!”

Justin shook his head. “I'm going down to his home to confront him.”

Chloe stood up quickly, and grabbed Justin's arms. “Whoa! What are you going to do, exactly? You shouldn't do anything you could regret down the road. Instead, we should be reporting this to the police and then write about it in the newspaper. Let's expose Kwan for who he really is.”

Justin scoffed. “The police was useless to start with. You seriously think they will do anything? Kwan was the one who did this to me.... so he needs to pay!”

He was so angry that all the glass in the room shattered.

Chloe jumped as the light-bulbs above shattered, leaving them in the darkness. She gulped. “A-alright. But I'm coming with you! We need to document what happens.... and let's not do anything too crazy alright...?”

Justin sighed. “Fine.”

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Clark watched as Chloe and Justin left in her car.

Clark's gut instinct told him that there was something going on here.... something wrong. So, He had been following Chloe around all day to make sure that nothing wouldn't happen to her.

He knew he was acting like a creepy stalker again, but he couldn't help it. His instinct to protect everyone around him was flaring up like crazy, and this was the only way he knew of where he could reasonably keep an eye on everyone.

As the car drove off, Clark moved at super-speed and followed it.

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Just as Chloe feared, her plan to interrogate Mr. Kwan peacefully spiraled out of control.

“What are you doing? Stop it!” Chloe yelled, as Justin Gaines pulled up one of the light posts and sent it flying with the power of his mind. The light post pinned the Principal to the garage door.

Clark blurred into sight, and grabbed Justin Gaines before he could do anything else.

“Hey! Where did you come from?” Justin Gaines wondered as he attempted to free himself from Clark's strong grip.

“You didn't tell me he was telekinetic.” Clark said accusingly at Chloe.

“We can talk about that later! Right now we need to stop Justin before he does anything.” Chloe said. She sounded relived as hell to see Clark there.
Clark simply nodded at this, and roughly pulled Justin's arms behind him before pinning the boy to the ground.

Justin's eyes widened at this. “You're betraying me, Chloe?”

Chloe ran over to the Principal before answering, “Sorry, but I don't want to kill anybody. I'm not going to be part of a murder if I can help it.”

With that, she attempted to pull Mr. Kwan down from the garage door.

The glass windows on the car shattered, as Justin's anger grew. The car lifted itself up into the air.... and then it went flying right at Mr. Kwan.

Chloe yelped as she instinctively jumped out of the way.

“Mr. Kwan!” Clark yelled, but it was too late. The guy was already dead the moment the car pinned him against the wall.

“Did you really think you could stop my telekinetic powers by physically restraining me? I'm unstoppable!” Justin couldn't help but gloat as Clark pinned him down.

Clark responded by punching the living daylights out of Justin, and the teenage boy was promptly knocked out. Clark left the unconscious teenage boy on the pavement as he moved to check on Chloe.

Meanwhile Chloe was crying hysterically as she tried to free Mr. Kwan's body from the wreckage. “Oh god... no. This is my fault! I should had gone to the police in the first place!” she sobbed.

Clark pulled the car back, which allowed Chloe to move Kwan's body.

Chloe knelt besides Kwan, and desperately checked for a pulse. Then she started applying her CPR skills to the corpse, because she didn't want to accept that a man was dead because of her.

Clark slowly walked over to Chloe, who were still crying while she was doing CPR. “It's too late for him, Chloe. I'm sorry, but you have to let him go.”

“No!” Chloe snapped, as she grabbed one of Kwan's hands. “This man is dead because of me! There's got to be something I can do... I just can't accept this...”

Chloe's body started to glow a white light, and Clark had to shield his eyes as the light grew brighter. In 20 seconds, the bright light faded away and Clark was able to see again.

Clark's eyes widened in shock as he saw Principal Kwan's wounds start to rapidly heal and close up on their own. The middle-aged man gasped for breath, and he opened his eyes.

Chloe closed her eyes and collapsed to the ground.

Principal Kwan coughed as he got up.

“What's going on?” his voice sounded hoarse as he looked around.

“Call 911!!” Clark yelled as he knelt behind Chloe's lifeless body. “Please, I think Chloe's dying!”

That was when the people in black alien suits appeared out of thin air, and walked over to Justin Gaines, who were still lying on the ground unconscious. They held their hand up, and there was a flash of green light. Justin Gaines disappeared alongside the people in the suits.
Principal Kwan watched this spectacle unfold before his eyes with an confused expression on his face. “Right.” That was all he said as he reached for his phone.

Chapter End Notes

Chloe gets her skill early thanks to the injections she was given.  
http://powerlisting.wikia.com/wiki/Wound_Transferal  
I really liked Principal Kwan, and I was so bummed out when he died in such a brutal fashion. So this was my way of saving him.
Crush's aftermath

Chapter Summary

Chloe deals with the aftermath of what happened to her.

Chapter Notes

I noticed that the show often didn't acknowledge that Chloe went through a lot of traumatic stuff. In fact they seem to like dumping a lot of stuff on her without even giving her breathing room to deal with any of it. She also seemed to want to just bury all her trauma and pretend that nothing happened. In fact in the later seasons when she did become a meteor mutant, she didn't want to deal with that.
So this is just my way of highlighting this, and that Chloe is kind of dealing with it in an unhealthy way.
The fact that people around her is unintentionally insensitive to her feelings probably doesn't help.

Chloe Sullivan was having the worst week of her life. To recap things:

Just when Chloe thought she finally had the perfect boyfriend for the rest of her high school life, it turned out that Justin Gaines was hiding a strong murderous streak under his harmless-looking facade. He ended up killing Principal Kwan.
Which somehow led to her waking up in the morgue. She was forced to spend the entire night trapped in a body freezer, which somehow didn't kill her. She had screamed and banged the doors for half the night, in the hopes that somebody would hear her. But unfortunately for her nobody came to help her until morning. By the time morning finally came, her throat was hoarse from all the screaming. Her fingers were bruised and bloody from all the banging.
It was then that everyone told her that they thought she was dead...hence the reason why she was trapped in an morgue overnight. She was rushed upstairs where the hospital were, so that the doctors could look at her.

Turns out that spending half the night in a body freezer in the hospital's morgue was bound to give you Hypothermia. Gee, who knew?

Her father Gabe was the first to come see her, for which she was grateful. She had never been so happy to see her dad before in her entire life. She ended up sobbing into her father's shoulders as they held each other. It almost felt like that time when she broke her arm at five years old, and her father held her close to him as she cried all the way to the ER room.
She was hurt and crying, but at least her daddy was there to help her.

"It's alright, Cho-bear. You're okay now. You're safe..." Gabe said shakily as he ran his fingers through his daughter's hair. Chloe looked up to see that her father's eyes were completely bloodshot from crying too.

Chloe realized then that her father must had been going though his own hell too. Being told that his
daughter was dead. Then told that they made a mistake and that she was alive. But then he found out that his daughter had spent the night trapped in a morgue, and were suffering from Hypothermia as an result.

Yep, it was a real shitty time for the Sullivan family.

Her friends came in to see her afterwards, and It was the first time she had seen Clark Kent and Pete Ross cry so openly in front of other people. They were just so relived to see that she was alive. Of course, that just set her off into another crying jag. They all wound up holding hands together as the three of them thanked all the deities out there for her miraculous recovery.

It was then afterwards that Clark told her what happened at Kwan's house.

“What do you mean, I traded places with Kwan?” Chloe wondered as Clark finished his tale.

“It’s just as I said... there was this flash of light. Kwan’s wounds started healing up, and you... well it was like you transferred all of his wounds over to your own body somehow. Chloe... you know what this means.” Clark said.

Chloe felt a chill go down her spine, and it wasn't because of the hypothermia. She couldn't believe it... she was a meteor mutant?

Chloe was finally discharged from the hospital, and the school had given her a week off to recover.

Which was just as well, because Chloe didn't feel up to dealing with school just yet. All she wanted to do right now, were to eat a pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream and watch cartoons. Anything to get her mind off her predicament.

And she had told both Pete and Clark just as much. “No offense guys, but I don't feel like talking to anybody right now. Just leave me alone for now, okay? You guys can do your own thing for now, and tell me about it later. Bye.”

They both had came over to tell her that Principal Kwan's son Danny had turned himself in for the hit-and-run. Turns out that Justin Gaines had targeted the wrong guy. But they understood why Chloe didn't want to think about Justin right now, so they left without another word.

Clark looked over at Lex. “What happened, Lex?”

Lex took a sip from his coffee cup. “I don't really want to get into the details... but... let's just say I
regained a old family friend and then lost her again all in the same week. Turns out that she had
terminal cancer and wanted to make amends with me before she went.”

Clark looked sad at this, and he didn't know what to say. “Oh.”

Lex simply nodded. Not much you could say to that anyway. “Yeah.”

They sat there drinking coffee in silence for a while. Lex then finally spoke up.

“Oh, I almost forgot. I wanted to warn you about my father. Turns out that he's very interested in
buying Camdus Labs.” Lex said.

Clark looked up quickly. “What?? Why?”

Lex sighed. “I tried to talk him out of it.... I talked about how utterly incompetent those people were
during that Nicodemus flower incident. But he just talked over me, saying that the labs would do far
better under new management. I hate to say it, but there was times when he made perfect sense. If the
labs were under our management, maybe we could keep a better eye on those men...”

Clark sipped his drink. “I see...”

Lex smiled wryly. “I just thought you should be warned of what my father's up to. Considering
your.... Allergy.”

Clark simply nodded at this.

Lex then continued. “Maybe we can turn this into a positive. For a while now, I've had this hunch
that the mystery men is connected to Camdus labs. I had this feeling that maybe those scientists were
secretly experimenting on the entire town. I could use my father's connections to look at what they're
working on, and see if my suspicions were correct.”

Clark frowned. “So all those attacks, all those injections... Camdus labs is turning everyone into
meteor mutants?”

Lex nodded. “Think about it. They came here around shortly after the meteor shower... the same
time the reports of strange incidents started coming in. Not to mention... if a bunch of meteor rocks
were all it took to mutate people, then why isn't the entire town mutated by now? Those rocks are
literally everywhere in town! No, I think they're working on some kind of serum. Maybe a super-
soldier serum that they sell to the government?”

Clark blinked. That... actually made a lot of sense when he thought about it. Not to mention, Chloe
wasn't even living here when the meteor shower came. So how could she be a meteor mutant? But
she had been injected against her will, and after that she gained that strange new power.

And... this also meant that Clark wasn't directly responsible for those meteor mutants, like he
thought. Yes, those rocks came down with him but they couldn't mutate people on their own. At
least not without a little help.

“Huh. That does make a lot of sense...” Clark frowned. “Maybe Pete and I could--”

“NO!” Lex cut Clark off mid-sentence. “I know what you're thinking, and the answer is no.”

“Why?” Clark wondered, with an annoyed expression on his face.

“Surely, you haven't forgotten what happened to you last time? There is no way I'm letting you walk
into dangerous situations again.” Lex Luthor answered.

Clark huffed at this. “I was just caught off guard last time. Now that I know what I'm getting in, I know how to avoid the rocks.”

Lex shook his head. “The answer is still no. I can’t call myself a responsible adult while letting you walk right into a deadly trap.”

“I'm not a little kid!” Clark said as he slammed his plastic coffee cup down on the table. The coffee went flying everywhere. He got up as he added: “despite what you think, I can take care of myself!”

With that he stormed out.

Lex rolled his eyes, and sighed. “Teenagers.” He muttered to himself.

---The next day, at Smallville high school---

“I never thought I’d be saying this, but Lex Luthor is right.” Pete said, as the two of them walked down the school hallway. “I mean... we're just kids, man. What are we going to do up against some shadowy organization who's armed with stuff that can kill you? You may be bulletproof, but you're not unkillable!”

“Not you too, Pete...” Clark sighed.

Pete smiled. “Well... this is kinda like the third story window incident all over again isn't it? Are you sure you're not doing this because you felt helpless over what happened to Chloe?”

Clark paused at this. “Well.... kind of.”

Pete shook his head. “I knew it. Look... let's wait until Chloe feels better. Then all of us can get together to come up with something. Hell, we can even get Lex to back us up then if you want. Okay? We seriously need to come at them with a plan of our own. We can't just do things half-cocked.”

“Why did you have act so reasonable?” Clark grumbled slightly.

Pete smirked at this. “Well, I have to be, with you two acting impulsively and getting into trouble all the time. I swear, you and Chloe wouldn't know what to do without me.”

Clark narrowed his eyes. “You make me sound like some kind of troublemaker. Come on, I'm not that bad!”

“Sure, you're not...” Pete snickered. “Expect for all those times where you went looking for trouble. Remember that time in third grade with Mrs. Kleinman? Or the cornfield incident? Or....”

Clark groaned as Pete rattled off all the times he got into trouble. All of times for Pete to have a spotless, excellent memory... why now?

The Kents were just about to call it a night when Chloe called.

“I'll go straight to bed after this. Chloe might need something.” Clark promised his parents.

“Alright, but don't take too long.” Martha said as she handed the landline phone over to her son.
With that they went upstairs.

“What’s up?” Clark wondered as he leaned against the wall.

Chloe sniffled, before asking: “This is going to sound weird, but... how do you do it?” she sounded like she had been crying.

“Do what? Are you alright?” Clark couldn’t help but be worried. He wondered if he should be putting on his coat and shoes right now. She might need him over there right now.

“Relax, I’m fine. That's just... I was thinking about the fact that I'm a mutant now. I haven't told my dad or anybody else. You're the only one who knows. And I thought about the fact that I'm supposed to go back to school pretty soon. I don't know if I can pretend that I'm fine.... that I'm normal. Then I thought about you... you've been pretty strong since you were a baby, yet nobody ever would guess by looking at you. And to be honest, you act so normally most of the time that I forget that you're bulletproof sometimes.” Chloe rambled. Once she started, it was like all of her feelings poured out and she couldn't stop it.

Clark relaxed slightly. Now this sort of thing he was very familiar with. “You're going though the same thing I went though when I first found out how different I really was compared to the people in town.”

“But you've had your abilities ever since you were a baby?” Chloe sounded puzzled over the phone. Clark chuckled. “Yes but that doesn't mean that I understood what I was from day one. For a long while, I didn't understand why my parents kept on telling me to run slower, and why they told me that I had to hide what I could do. The day I finally understood what I really was...”

He sighed, as he recalled that day. It was the worst day of his life.

“Let me guess. You felt all alone, like you couldn't really talk to anybody about it. You started wondering if people were going to know instantly the minute they looked at you.” Chloe filled in the details. That was how she felt at the moment.

“Exactly. Even now I still worry that I'm going to slip up one day and reveal my freakish side. Or that I'm gonna mutate into a green-skinned monster with tentacles.” Clark was only half-joking when he said the last part.

“Wow. I never knew... you acted so normal, like there wasn't anything bothering you. You're a great actor.” Chloe sounded awed.

Clark snuffled his feet bashfully. “Um, not really that a good actor. It just helps that we live in Smallville. You know, people only want to see what they want around here. So I wouldn't really stress about it if I were you. I mean, all you have to do is stay away from dead people so you don't switch places with them again...That should be easy, right?”

Chloe thought back to the night when she woke up in the morgue. She shivered. “Yeah... No way I'm going back to the morgue again if I can help it. Doing that once was traumatic enough.”

The two of them lapsed into silence for a few seconds. Finally Chloe spoke. “Thanks for talking with me. I feel a lot better now.”

Clark smiled at the other end. “No problem. If you have anything more you want to talk to me about, you can come to me. After all, I've had years to deal with this sort of thing. The least I could do is put that experience to good use.”
Chloe chuckles. “Right. I'll see you at school tomorrow.”

With that, she hung up.
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---The next day at Smallville high school--

Chloe was starting to wish she had stayed home instead of going to school today. It felt as if everyone was staring at her.

She overheard some murmurs about how Chloe had survived all-night in a morgue's freezer. So that was one reason why they were staring at her.... but she couldn't shake the paranoid feeling that the entire school somehow knew she was a meteor freak now.

A goth girl approached her, and asked with unbridled glee, “Is it true that you were mistaken for dead and were left in a morgue overnight?”

Chloe chuckled nervously. “Um, yeah?”

The goth student gasped. “That is so cool! I would love to spend overnight in a morgue too... what was it like?”

Chloe felt one of her eyelids twitch at this. What the hell was with this werido? She was treating the whole thing like it was a game.. like Chloe had willingly spent the night there on a dare or something.

Her mind flashed back to that night. The growing panic she felt as she realized she was trapped somewhere unfamiliar and cold. The way she screamed for help, but nobody heard her. The way her hands kept on banging against the metal door until her fingers started bleeding....

Chloe was snapped out of her dark thoughts when Pete came to her rescue.

“Yo, why are you bothering her?” Pete Ross demanded to know as he stood between Chloe and the goth student in an protective stance. “You're acting like a insensitive bitch, don't you know? I mean think about it... her boyfriend tried to kill her, she was mistaken for dead and she woke up in a morgue with no idea what was going on. You think that's fun and games?? God!”

Pete couldn't help but grow angry by the minute as he ranted to the goth student.

The goth girl chuckled nervously as the milling students around them murmured at Pete's words. “Hey... I didn't mean anything by it... I was just curious about what it was like.... that's all...” She tried to defend her own actions.

Pete raised his eyebrows at this. “Well, you could had worded it better. You acted like she were there on a dare or something. When we all know it wasn't like that.”

The goth girl simply nodded, and nervously walked away. She was fully conscious of all the eyes that was on her now.

Chloe sighed. Well, that was going to be all over the school by noon. Still, Pete meant well... “Thanks, Pete.” Chloe said.

Pete just smiled at her. “No matter what, I have your back. If you need me to field everyone's questions for you then I'll do it. This way they won't bother you.” He said.
That did sound nice. So Chloe simply nodded and said, “That would be nice. Thanks.”

The rest of the day went smoothly... well, mostly.

Around noon she was pulled into the school counselor's office.

Much to her dismay, they wanted to talk about what happened between her and Justin Gaines.

Why didn't anybody understand that she didn't want to talk about it? Honestly, she just wanted to bury it deep down and forget about what happened to her.

So she was stupid enough to fall into the same trap that other women out there did... thinking that they could change a man with the power of love. Justin had been nice most of the time, so Chloe kept on convincing herself that a nice boy like that didn't deserve to be questioned by the police. That she could just change that one aspect of Justin's behavior, and everything would end up peachy keen. After all, he was funny and charismatic... so what if he had a murderous streak? Nothing like love to change that, right? Yeah, right.

Look where that got her. She actually ended up in the morgue. Thankfully it wasn't permanent. She wondered if this was how all abused women started out... with good intentions like that.

“Whatever! I'm so over him already.” Chloe grumbled when the female school counselor mentioned Justin's name.

The counselor raised one eyebrow. “From what I hear, the two of you were pretty serious.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “We dated for a whole week. It's not like we were in a long-term relationship.”

“Still, you can't deny that he had an impact on you.” The school shrink probed.

“The only impact he has on me... is that next time I'm gonna listen to my gut instinct instead of ignoring it. Honestly, I felt so stupid for ignoring all those alarms that went off in my head just because he was nice and sweet to me. But that's a good lesson to learn, isn't it?” Chloe replied, still acting as if what happened to her wasn't traumatic at all.

Just bury it deep down and forget that it ever happened...act as if it never happened.

The older woman frowned at the blonde teenager girl in front of her. “That's a pretty harsh lesson for anybody to learn, don't you think? You were battered so badly that people thought you were dead. People shouldn't have to learn lessons like that at all... you certainly didn't deserve that.”

Chloe shrugged this, and flippantly said: “What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Right?”

Chloe then excused herself, saying it was lunch time and that she would like to eat before going back to class.

The school therapist watched her go with a slightly worried look on her face. Chloe was exhibiting the classic signs of self-blame that many abuse victims went though when they first entered an abusive relationship.

The fact that Chloe had only dated the boy for a week was a good sign, as seeing that mean she could recover quickly than most people did. But the problem is that Justin Gaines were still missing, which meant he was still out there somewhere. So Chloe could run into him one day, and who knows what could happen then?
Then there was the fact that she had been trapped inside a morgue's freezer all night, before somebody found her and realized that she wasn't dead. That had to be traumatic in itself.

So regardless of what Chloe Sullivan said, this therapist was putting her on the “kids at risk” watch-list.

“You know what you need? You need to get out of Smallville for a short while, just get away from it for a little bit.” Clark said. “I still have those tickets for the Student Journalism convention in Metropolis.”

Chloe smiled. She had been bitching about how she felt all day, to Clark. And Clark just seemed to understand her perfectly.

“God, yes. That would be great.” Chloe sighed. Wallowing at home only seemed to make her mood worse. So a vacation from Smallville did sound good about right now. And she still wanted to land that summer job at the Daily Planet.

That was just the thing she needed to feel normal again.

Chloe looked up at Clark. “Listen... I'm sorry for treating you like shit last week. I was just so angry at you... but I shouldn't had treated you like that...”

Clark shook his head. “No. It really was my fault to start with. You see, Lex was worried that he was going to be kidnapped... so to reassure him I was hanging out with him a lot. To show him that I had his back.” He sighed ruefully. “I guess I got so caught up in that, and forgot that I also had two friends who needed protecting too.”

Chloe raised her eyebrows. “Somehow I doubt that Lex thinks he needs any help being protected. He seems to take care of himself just fine.”

Clark looked sheepish at this. “Well, he was taking some self-defense classes from some guy in the army. So you could be right.”

“Huh. Interesting.” Chloe mentally filed this away in her head. Maybe she should take self-defense classes too.

Clark then reached out to take one of her hands. “So... I guess this means you forgive me?”

Chloe smiled widely at this. “Yep, you're forgiven.”
Before the tempest

Chapter Summary

Lex wins the first battle in the war for his Independence.
Set around the Smallville episode "Tempest".

Gabe Sullivan and the other co-managers from the Fertilizer factory walked into Lex's office-slash-library.
The men looked around the expensive office, wondering why they were called here.
Lex walked in with another man behind him... and Gabe couldn't help but note that this visitor was the sort of man that her daughter would had gone nuts for.
The man was exactly his daughter's type-- Tall and dark-haired, very similar to Clark Kent in build. But he supposed that was where the similarities to Clark Kent ended. This mysterious man had dark blue eyes that seemed to study everything around him as if they were a mystery to be solved.

“Gentlemen, I would like you to meet my friend Bruce Wayne.” Lex introduced his friend to the group, “I brought you here because I thought you would like to know that Bruce Wayne is interested in buying out the factory....”

--The Talon Cafe--
Pete and Clark was hanging out at the Talon cafe, and had ordered a pair of french coffee lattes.

“So, the dance's coming up.” Pete said, “I have no idea who I want to ask as my date there. How about you?”

Clark simply shrugged. He really wanted to go to this dance though. Last time he missed out on the homecoming dance, and it was because he had been strung up in the field by Whitney Fordman. So he really wanted a pleasant school memory this time around.

But like Pete, he had no idea who he could ask to be his date. It wasn't like he had any feelings or any attraction towards any of the girls in school.

He sometimes worried if this was because he was an alien. After all... he didn't seem to feel the same sexual drive and the urges that Pete Ross and the other human men did. He really enjoyed the idea of dating, though. Holding hands, going out with somebody and enjoying time together.... Sex on the other hand... that was where he was different from other guys. He didn't seem to need or want sex that much.

Maybe his species had very low sex drives? With his luck his race was probably like the vulcans, only mating every 7 years once they reached maturity.

Pete glanced over at Lana, who were busy ringing up a customer at the counter. He grinned as he said, “Well, Lana's not dating anybody. And I don't think she has a date to the dance yet... this could be your chance.”
Clark pondered this. He was tired of the fact that everyone still thought that Clark had a crush on Lana... it felt like a overdone joke that overstayed its' welcome. But on the other hand, It did sound like a good idea to take Lana Lang.

He became pretty good friends with her, and he knew that she wasn't really looking for a relationship herself. So he wouldn't feel pressured to become her boyfriend afterwards.

It would be better to take a platonic friend to the dance than to take somebody who might want a relationship with him. He knew that some teenagers liked to hook up after the dance was over. They did that after the homecoming dance, after all.

“Well, I suppose it wouldn't hurt to ask her.” Clark thought out loud.

Pete cheered. “Atta boy! Man up and go get her!”

As Clark walked towards the counter, Chloe came into the building.

Chloe rushed over to Pete with a huge grin on her face. “Guess what??”

Pete lit up. “You got that summer job at the Daily planet??”

Chloe nodded, and then sat down. “For a while there it looked like I wasn't gonna get in... but they called me today and gave me an interview over the phone. I still can't believe it... over 500 applicants alone, and I managed to get in? I feel like I just won the lottery.”

She looked over at Clark, who were chatting with Lana. “What's going on with Clark?”

Pete told her, and she groaned. “Damnit, I forgot about the dance.”

“You haven't asked anybody out yet?” Pete wondered.

Chloe shook her head. “I was thinking about asking Clark to be my date, but he's interested in Lana. I don't really want to go with some random guy... I've had enough of romance for a while.”

She thought about Justin, and sighed. She didn't want a repeat of that. Also, there was the fact that she was still coping with the fact that she was a meteor mutant now. She now had a new fear... that anybody she got romantically tangled with would reject her after they found out that she was a meteor mutant.

So right now she just wanted to go with a friend. Clark was very understanding so far every time she went to him with her new problems, so she thought that he would make a great date to the dance. But, Lana Lang was a free agent and everyone knew how he felt about the girl.

Pete nodded. “I haven't asked out anybody yet neither. I can't figure out who I want to go with.”

Chloe looked at Pete speculatively, as she had a idea. “Hmm. Why don't we go together? You could be my date.”

Pete looked surprised. “Really?”

Chloe nodded. “Last time, we went without dates to the homecoming dance. but we ended up dancing together and I had a lot of fun with you. So why not go as each other's dates this time?”

Pete looked mildly pleased at this. “Yeah, that would be great.”

Meanwhile, Clark was chatting with Lana.
“It just sucks, you know? All of a sudden, Whitney's running off to join the army. And Joanna is going to join some internship program at a law firm over the summer. I had no idea that they were interested in doing that sort of thing...” Lana Lang sighed. “But I guess that's what happens when your friends are older than you are. They get to run off and do things that you can't do yet because you're too young.”

Clark nodded. “On the bright side.... you have me. We're friends now, aren't we? It's like that saying that my dad sometimes use, you know? When one door closes, another one opens up for you...”

Lana smiled at this. “Yeah. But I've known Whitney and Joanne for most of my life, you know? They were always around when I was growing up. It feels weird knowing that they won't be around much anymore.”

Clark nodded again. “Yeah.”

Lana shrugged. “Joanne's been pushing me into being more social lately. I think she's worried about the fact that I might not have any friends to do things with after she's gone.”

Clark saw this as his chance. “Like going to the dance?”

Lana nodded. “Yeah. I know this sounds weird... but... I've never really been interested in dating anybody. So I haven't really asked anybody out yet.”

Clark replied, “I know what you mean! I have the same exact problem myself. I mean, I lead a pretty busy life and I'm perfectly fine without a girlfriend. But I want to go to the dance with a date too. You know?”

Lana smiled. “Is this your way of asking me if I'd like to go to the dance with you?”

Clark shrugged. “I guess. We could go as friends?”

Lana giggled. “Alright. I'll go with you to the dance.”

--underground base--

“I don't believe it! Lionel Luthor wants to buy Camadus labs??” Macy practically screamed in shock as she heard the news.

The others nodded glumly.

“But how can the higher ups even consider working with Lionel? After all, he was the one who sold us out to Darkseid.” Macy sat down with a look of disbelief on her face.

In the future, it was generally believed by everyone that Lionel Luthor had gone down the path of redemption, and were a good guy. Even more so when you took into account that he was apparently the emissary of Jor-el, and acted on Jor-el's behalf. Anybody who was the spokesman for Superman's biological father had to be a super-good guy, right??

That was why it was such a huge shock to everyone that Lionel allied himself with Darkseid after Superman died. Everyone felt betrayed by this, especially when Lionel Luthor stood by and let Darkseid kill his son Lex Luthor.

It was the cruelest form of irony imaginable. Before the war, everyone thought that Lex Luthor was Superman's enemy and that Lionel Luthor was a good man who were trying to redeem himself over
his own dark past.

Nobody believed Lex Luthor at all when he kept on telling everyone that Lionel Luthor hadn't changed at all. Lex had told Superman that Lionel was simply disguising himself as a good guy for his own purposes... that Lionel was only allying himself with the strongest group out there so that he could profit from it.

Later on, the Camadus group would discover that Superman actually hadn't trusted Lionel Luthor that much. Apparently, the only reason why Superman even accepted Lionel Luthor as Jor-El's emissary was because Lionel Luthor knew Superman's secret. Not to mention there was a few fragmented accounts of Lionel Luthor backsliding into his usual scummy behavior. Like the time Lionel imprisoned Clark in a kryptonite cage and claimed that it was for Clark's safety. Which sounded pretty shady in itself.

So, it turns out that all the signs were there from the beginning but nobody was willing to see what Lex saw at the time. It turned out that Lex was right. Lionel had only pretended to be a good guy so that he could profit from being on the winning side. And when Superman's side lost, he very quickly switched to the other side. With Superman gone, Lionel Luthor found himself free of Jor-El's control and could do whatever he wanted again.

Nobody was willing to listen to Lex Luthor at the time, because they thought that Lex was nothing but a evil bastard who wanted to kill Superman. And that had cost them greatly. Despite all this, Lex Luthor still came to everyone's rescue after Superman died, and wound up being a knight in green armor.

The remaining survivors learned two harsh lessons that day. The first lesson being: Niceness does not equal goodness. Being good did not mean that you had to be nice and soft all the time. People could act like a complete bastard but still have a heart of gold. The metaphorical gold might be a little tarnished and worn down from years of trauma and abuse, but it was still gold.

Lex was anything but a nice guy and he had a sharp, dangerous edge to his personality if you pissed him off. Yes, he had that feud with Superman but he was still a hero deep down, far as the Camadus group was concerned.

The second lesson they learned thanks to Lionel Luthor: evil beings could take on appearances that was designed to please your eyes. They act like saints, but in the end all of it was designed to trick and hurt you. Put simply, appearances weren't everything.... if you let yourself be fooled by appearances, then you were bound to get hurt in the end.

Everyone was quiet as they remembered the past... or rather, what they thought of as THEIR own past. Sometimes it was hard to remember that any of that hadn't even happened yet. And that it might not even happen at all if they did their job correctly.

--Camadus Labs--

“Like father, like son...” Marty Munn muttered under his breath as Lionel was studying the wall display case full of multi-colored meteor rocks.

Like Lex, Lionel was completely interested in the idea that the meteor rocks had different properties according to their colors. Marty wasn't as forthcoming with the older Luthor like he had been with the youngest. He only gave Lionel information on the rocks that he felt would do the least harm against Superman, and completely clammed up whenever Lionel asked about the more dangerous ones.
“We have a long way to go before we can truly unlock the mysteries of the rocks. So far, we’ve discovered that the green rocks tend to speed up the growth of cancer. Come on, I’ll give you the rest of the tour.” Marty said.

Lionel nodded. “Lead the way.”

Marty wondered if they all pretended to be as incompetent as Lex thought them to be, would Lionel Luthor lose interest and leave them alone?

But, the higher ups thought that they should keep an eye on Lionel by keeping him close. He mentally sighed at that. He really didn't want to do anything with Lionel Luthor.

The men walked out of Luthor's mansion with a thoughtful expression on their faces, and moved towards their trucks.

Bruce and Lex stood at the entrance as they watched the men leave.

“You know, I was surprised when you called me for a favor.” Bruce said.

The two of them had gone to excelsior prep together, but they hadn't been friends to start with. It wasn't that they hated each other. Put simply, Bruce and Lex's relationship back then were that of polite indifference. They politely ignored each other whenever the two of them were in the same room, and didn't tattle on each other if they saw the other one doing something they shouldn't had been doing.

It was like a unspoken agreement between the two of them-- stay out of my business and I'll stay out of yours.

Lex smirked. “You want to know why I'm doing this, don't you?”

Bruce nodded. “From what I've seen, you typically don't like to give away things that could had been yours to start with.”

Lex laughed. “That's true.”

Bruce raised one eyebrow. “Well? Aren't you going to tell me or not.”

Lex answered, “Put simply, I'm in the middle of a war for my own independence. My father....in the past, if he wanted to keep me under his control, he would typically threaten the people around me to keep me obedient.”

Bruce narrowed his eyes. “You think that your father would had put the workers here out of a job just to have you back in Metropolis?”

“I just don't think it, I know it. Stick around, and you'll see that I'm right.” Lex replied.

Lionel Luthor surveyed all of Smallville as he flew overhead in his helicopter.

He smirked to himself, feeling somewhat pleased with himself. He entered into a promising partnership with Camadus Labs, and now he was going to teach his son a very important lesson.

His helicopter landed on the helipad just outside of the Luthor-corp fertilizer factory, where his son Lex was waiting for him.
He smiled at his son as he stepped out. “It's a beautiful day, isn't it?”

Lex nodded. “Yes. But they say there's a storm coming soon.”

Lionel replied, “That's the heartland for you. Some things can change in an instant. Is everyone here?”

“Yes, but it wasn't easy. Twenty-four hours isn't a lot of notice. Are you going to tell me what your speech is about?” Lex wondered.

“Ah, it's just one of my customary motivational speeches that you've heard hundreds of times.” Lionel Luthor lied as they moved up the stairs.

Lex raised one eyebrow at this, as if he knew his father was lying.

Gabe Sullivan and the other co-managers were waiting right by the stairs, and they greeted the senior Luthor warmly. They moved to walk behind the two Luthors, as Lex started talking to his father.

“The plant made a large profit this quarter for the first time in two years. My people are expecting a pat on the back and they deserve to get it.” He told his father.

Lionel flashed a shark-like grin as he stepped into the platform. “I'll try not to disappoint them.”

With that, he waved at the crowd.

The crowd cheered as Lionel Luthor walked towards the podium. Lionel Luthor basked in the attention as he waved again. “Thank you.”

He began his little speech. “You all have worked extremely hard this past year and you all should be proud of yourselves.”

Everyone clapped at this, and Lionel made a quieting gesture with his hand before he went on with the rest of his speech.

“Just as a ship can only follow the course set by it's captain, Any business is only good as its leadership. Due to management failures beyond your control, the plant will be closing...effective imendiently. Good luck to you all.” Lionel Luthor said, and he was secretly pleased to see that this had the desired effect as all the workers started making outraged comments at this.

He turned around expecting to see a expression of shock on his son's face, but instead he found his son smirking at him, as if he had expected this to happen. Lionel frowned. His son was up to something, but what?

Lex walked over to the podium and pushed his father aside. He spoke into the mic, “Calm down, everyone. I was going to share the good news with you later this week, but I suppose I have to share it now that my father has laid down his cards. Contrary to what my father believes, the plant will not be closing. Instead, this factory is now under new management. Gabe Sullivan here knows all the details, so he will debrief you on it now. Gabe?”

Lex then gestured to Gabe, who nodded and walked over to the podium.

Lex then walked over to his father with a faint smile on his face. Lionel hissed at his son, “Just what do you think you're doing?”

Lex shook his head. “You're very transparent, did you know that? I knew you were going to do this, so I made several backup plans in case this happened. I have to say, you move quickly... I thought
you weren't going to do this until next week. It's a good thing I already spoke to Gabe Sullivan and the other shareholders about this, otherwise this would had been a complete disaster.”

Lionel narrowed his eyes at his son. “What are you talking about?”

Lex flashed his best shark-like grin at his father. “Bruce Wayne brought this factory from all of the main stockholders.... he now owns 80% of the factory, so starting today he controls the factory. I own the other 20%, of course. Really, father... you should had been paying attention to the factory's stocks. Then you would had known the minute that the stocks started changing hands, and you wouldn't had embarrassed yourself in front of everyone like this.”

Lex smirked. He had made sure that his father was distracted by other things before he started moving the stocks around, and had Bruce Wayne quietly buy everything from under his father's nose.

The truth was, Gabe and the other Smallville citizens had been reluctant to give up their stock... but Lionel's little speech today sealed the deal for them. They now would sell all of their stock to Bruce and Lex in return for keeping their jobs. Lionel Luthor had unwittingly sealed his own fate, and helped Lex win the first battle.

The Smallville citizens would know by now that Lionel Luthor wanted to close down the factory, and tried to blame it on his own son. And not only that, they would know Lex did his best to prevent that from happening, even if it meant giving up ownership of the factory. No matter what, Lex looked good in front of his peers while Lionel now had egg on his face.

Bruce Wayne walked up the steps to the platform, and nodded at Lex. He had heard everything Lex's father said, and were more willing to help Lex out now.

Gabe noticed Bruce's entrance just as he was done explaining everything to the workers. “Here's the new owner of the factory. Let me introduce Bruce Wayne!”

Bruce walked over to the podium and waved to the crowd. “Mind if I take over here? I want to reassure my new workers that nothing here will change, save their new increased paychecks...”

Lionel's face became purple with rage as he realized what was going on. Put simply, his plan to bring Lex back to metropolis and back under his controlling thumb had failed. He hissed at his son, “This is over, Lex. We will talk about this later!”

With that, he stomped off towards his helicopter. It was just as well, because Bruce had started saying some rather unflattering things about Lionel Luthor just soon as he left.

Lex had a huge smirk on his face as Bruce spoke of how Lex approached him, and how worried Lex had been about the workers' future if they continued being under Lionel Luthor's control.

He thought that Bruce was laying it on a little thick when he made Lex out to be the good guy here, but he would take any good press... he had a feeling that Lionel Luthor was going to start up a smear campaign against him soon.

The war for his independence was far from over, but it felt good winning the first battle.
The Beginning of the Tempest

Chapter Summary

A few things happen in this chapter: Clark finds out that Lex Luthor's an closeted Bisexual, Clark meets Bruce Wayne and a new meteor mutant plans to blow the lid off Cadmus's secret plan to find out what they're up to.

Edit: changed this chapter completely. No more meteor freak of the week here... just Lionel Luthor. I still kept some stuff from the older version of this chapter though.

---Smallville High school---

Clark and Lana was busy making plans for the upcoming dance next week.

“I was thinking of asking Lex if we could borrow the limousine again like we did last time. But if that's too much for you I can take us in my truck?”

“I'm fine with the truck. Honestly, I prefer to keep things simple.” Lana replied. She had already picked out this plain-looking red dress that she regularly wore to church... she wasn't the type of girl who liked to spend money on expensive new dresses that she was only going to wear once or twice. She couldn't help it, she was a country girl and practical at heart.

Clark nodded. “The truck it is. Now the next question is... should I go with the red bow-tie or the black?”

Lana snorted in amusement. “Well, the red would match the dress I picked out.”

Clark grinned. “Well in that case... Red it is then!”

Pete couldn't help but overhear the last part of their conversation as he walked over. “Great, Clark. Now I have to change the color of my bowtie. I wouldn't want us to look like twins.”

Clark laughed at this. There was no way the two of them could be mistaken for twins.

Chloe walked over with a shocked expression on her face. “Guys! You'll never believe this.... “

Once she had everyone's attention, she told them that her father just told her that the fertilizer factory was now under new management.

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----After school, at the Kent farms---

Jonathan and Martha was reading the latest edition of the Smallville Ledger newspaper, when Clark came in.

“They rushed the special edition out early in the morning. They haven't done that ever since the meteor shower.” Martha commented, as they both looked at the newspaper's headline.

The headline read: “Luthorcorp plant under new management.”
Jonathan shook his head as he read the article. “I hope this Bruce Wayne is good at what he does. I would hate for 2,500 people to be out of a job if he fails. I'm no fan of Lex Luthor, but he seemed to be doing a good job with the factory. I can't imagine what possessed him to hand it over to some stranger.”

Clark walked over. “Chloe was pretty nervous about it. She has no idea how this will affect her father and his job.”

Jonathan nodded. “I spoke to her father. He was in shock, it all happened so fast.”

Martha sighed. “I don’t blame him. If Mr. Wayne does poorly, then this is going to have a domino effect on everyone in Smallville. After all that plant is the biggest employer in Smallville.”

Clark tried for levity. “Well, you should be happy, dad. You always hated how the Luthors had control of everything in Smallville. Now they don’t.”

Jonathan thought about this. “True. But I don’t know anything about what this Wayne is like. You know what they say--- Better the devil you know than the devil that you don’t. He could end up being worse than the Luthors... and I wouldn't wish that on anybody.”

Clark mentally sighed at this. He couldn't understand why his dad distrusted billionaires in general. Lionel Luthor he could understand, because Jonathan had bad experiences dealing with Lionel. but his dad knew nothing about Bruce Wayne yet he was already passing judgment on the guy. He wondered if there was a word for hating the rich the same way there was a word for racism.

Martha met Clark's eyes and they both nodded at each other, understanding all too well how the other one felt about Jonathan's prejudices.

They both loved Jonathan dearly, and he was a very good man most of the time. But he had this really unfortunate character flaw when it came to the rich... and there was nothing they could do about it. At least Jonathan wasn't racist or anything like that.

---The Luthor Mansion---

Clark dropped off the groceries in the kitchen.

Technically, he wasn't supposed to deliver his farm's produce until the next day but he couldn't pass up the chance to use that as an excuse to visit Lex today.

He wanted to get the scoop on what was happening behind the scenes. He was really curious about Bruce Wayne and his plans for the plant, after all.

He mumbled an excuse to the current chef in the kitchen, and headed towards Lex's office.

As he walked closer, he could hear the Luthors argue.

“I own the bank here in Smallville, Lex. I will not hesitate to foreclose on every one of the plant's employees if they miss a single payment. Do you really want that on your conscience, Lex?” Lionel snarled.

Lex shook his head. “Wow. It was bad enough that you wanted to close the plant without any warning, but now this? Are you going out of your way to make yourself the most hated man in town? You should be thankful that I realized what you were planning and had Bruce buy out the
plant, father. It's far better PR than costing 2500 people their jobs just because you wanted me back in Metropolis. Why are you so desperate, dad? Why go to the trouble of threatening people in an attempt to make me obey your wishes?”

“And I don’t understand why you want to stay here, Lex. Smallville was supposed to be your training ground, nothing more. Now that you’ve proven yourself, there's no need for you to be here.” Lionel said.

Lex shrugged. “What can I say, dad? Smallville's just so charming that I fell in love with the town and wanted to stay here.”

Lionel narrowed his eyes. “It wouldn't have anything to do with that Kent boy, would it?”

Lex made a disgusted noise at this. “How many times do I have to tell you, dad? I don't fuck underage kids. The fact that you think I would says a lot more about you than it does me. Honestly, just because I'm bisexual doesn't mean that I'm out to fuck everyone I see. I have standards.”

Lionel raised an eyebrow. “I never said anything about sex, Lex. I was simply referring to your... friendship with the young boy. Although the way you're so defensive about your relationship with him makes me wonder....”

Lex flushed at this.

Clark was so preoccupied in eavesdropping on this conversation outside the office’s door that he didn't see or hear Bruce Wayne sneak up behind him.

He yelped when a hand landed firmly on his shoulders, and a gravely voice said behind him: “Haven't you heard that eavesdropping is bad for your health?”

Clark spun around to see a tall, black-haired man staring down at him with dark blue eyes. “Uh, hi?” That was all Clark could say, he was too surprised to say anything else.

The dark-haired man smirked. “The name's Bruce Wayne. And you are...?”

Clark recovered, and held out an hand. “Nice to meet you, Bruce. I'm Clark Kent.”

Bruce returned the gesture, and shook the young boy’s hand. “Likewise. Why are you here?”

“I was here to see my friend Lex, but he seems to be busy?” Clark chuckled weakly.

“Well, I happen to know that Lex is never too busy for a friend. Let's go in, shall we?” Bruce said as he firmly guided Clark into the office.

Clark thought about protesting, but thought the better of it and let himself be pushed instead.

The argument between father and son was cut short as the two men entered the office.

“Look who I caught lurking outside the office doors. Maybe we have a spy on our hands?” Bruce cheerfully said, sounding as if he was joking. But there was an undercurrent of suspicion there.

Lex smiled at Clark. “Clark. Nice to see a friendly face after the trying day I've had today.”

Clark smiled uncomfortably. “Um, I heard about the changes at the plant. I came over here to see how you were doing... I wondered if you were upset by the changes going on, and if you needed the support of a friend.”
Lex smiled warmly. “That's nice of you, but your concern was unfounded. Bruce Wayne is a friend of mine from Excelsior Prep school, and I asked him to buy the factory from me. I had to, you see... my father was actually considering shutting down the entire factory instead of doing the sensible thing by selling it to somebody else.”

Clark raised his eyebrows. He then glanced over at Lionel Luthor. “Yeah, that seems excessive. The factory is the number one employer in Smallville, and the entire economy here practically revolves around it. Good thing you thought of a better alternative, I bet that would had been a real PR nightmare for the two of you.”

Lionel Luthor scowled at the slight against him. He huffed, and then said: “Well, I'll be going now. But this discussion is not over.”

With that he stalked out.

Lex sighed. “Thank god you two come along. I was starting to have a headache listening to my father go on and on....”

He got up from the sofa. “Let me properly introduce you to each other. Bruce, This is Clark Kent.... he saved my life and so now he is my friend for life. Clark Kent, this is Bruce Wayne. As mentioned before, he's a old classmate of mine from school.”

Bruce Wayne relaxed slightly now that he was sure that Clark wasn't some sort of spy for Lionel. He simply nodded at the young boy in front of him.

Clark nodded back.

Lex eyed the young man in front of him. “Bruce said you were listening outside the door. Just how much did you hear?”

Clark blushed slightly. “Um...well. I caught the tail end of the conversation there. Lionel was wondering why you were staying in Smallville, and you assumed that he thought that we were in an inappropriate relationship. You said that you didn't sleep with underage people, despite what he thought about your sexual orientation.”

Lex paled slightly at this. “Oh.”

Clark was quick to reassure Lex. “Um, I just want you to know that I'm still your friend. I don't care if you're gay, straight or whatever. If that's what you're worried about.”

Lex relaxed slightly, and he flashed Clark an genuine smile. “That's good to know. But still... I would prefer if you two would keep this to yourself. It's bad enough being a gay man in Kansas, but it's doubly worse being bisexual. Bisexual people tend to face a lot of discrimination from both gay and straight people. I already have enough on my plate being an Luthor, I don't want the stigma that comes with being bi on top of it. My father was the only one who knew... until now.”

“I don't really care about your sexual orientation neither, but I solemnly swear that nobody will ever hear of this from me.” Bruce replied.

“I won't tell anybody about that,” Clark agreed with Bruce, “But you'd be surprised by how progressive people are nowadays. If you were to come out of the bisexual closet one day, you'd be surprised at how many people wouldn't care, and how many would support you.”

Lex smiled at this. That was a nice thought, actually. “One day I might come out. But not now. I just don't think Kansas is ready for a bisexual Luthor right now. But thank you for agreeing to keep that quiet, and for accepting who I am. You have no idea how much that means to me.”
Clark smiled. “What are friends for?”

---The next day at school---

“Wait a minute, you met Bruce Wayne?? What was he like?” Chloe couldn't help but interrogate Clark the minute he told his friends.

“He was actually nice, in a weird way. He's strangely intense in that quiet way, you know? I spent like an hour chatting with him and Lex. Turns out that the two of them went to school together, and after they graduated Bruce went traveling all over the world. Get this, he's currently training to become a policeman right now. He wants to become a detective.” Clark answered.

Pete snorted. “A billionaire detective? Sounds like some kind of sitcom or something. A bored privileged man going around solving crimes....hmm, that practically writes itself.”

Chloe sighed. “That doesn't really answer my questions. I want to know what he's planning to do with the factory.”

“From what I heard, he isn't going to change anything but the name of the factory. It'll be called the Wayne-tech fertilizer factory, instead of Luthorcorp. Lex is still going to help run the factory, though, because he owns like 20% of it. Oh, and there's going to be increased paychecks for most of the workers there.” Clark dutifully reported.

Chloe looked relived at this. “Oh, really. Gee, that's nice.”

Pete smiled. “Don't tell me you were worried about having to leave Smallville or something.”

Chloe looked slightly sheepish, and nodded at this. “I wondered what was going to happen to my father's job. I wasn't exactly looking forward to being the new girl in an unfamiliar school all over again. It was difficult enough figuring out the social chain of command here before I finally found my niche.”

Clark said. “Well, we would still be your friends even if you left. We would've written you and stuff.”

Chloe snorted. “Long distance relationships of any kind never work. I'm sure that after a few weeks, you two would forget all about me...”

Clark couldn't help but look offended at this. “Chloe! How can you say that?”

Pete looked slightly upset too. “Yeah, we're not like that at all. Besides, you keep things interesting around here. Who else would drag us on those wacky adventures that's straight out of the Scooby Doo cartoon? Not to mention who would keep the school newspaper running? you wouldn't be that easy to replace.”

Clark nodded so vigorously at this this his head very nearly blurred.

Chloe smiled at this. “Thanks, guys. I feel better now.”

Clark dutifully reported all of this to his parents too, once he was back home too. He felt like a big gossip doing this sort of thing, but in a way it was important that everyone knew this sort of thing, right?

Jonathan shook his head. “I can't believe that Lionel would do that.... well, actually, yes. I can believe this part. But it just seems so excessive.”
Clark nodded. It did seem kind of crazy how Lionel would use the lives of over 2,500 people in
town as an bargaining chip, and that he would honestly fire them as a power move against his own
son.
But he seemed to recall seeing Lionel and Lex have an actual sword-fight over the fate of the factory
one time before. So maybe it was just a Luthor thing. Lex seemed to act like this sort of thing was
completely normal for his father.

But at least Lex had the foresight to realize that this would negatively affect everyone around his
father, and did something about it.

Martha seemed to realize this, and she was smiling. “At least now we know why Lex gave his
factory to Wayne. We know nothing will happen to the factory now.”

Jonathan gave a curt nod at his wife.

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---At the Luthor Mansion---

“Are you leaving for Gotham already? I thought you'd stick around for another week or so.” Lex
replied as he watched Bruce Wayne pack his things.

“I thought about that, but the way I see it, there's not much here for me to do. I've brought out the
factory from under you as you asked, and it looks like I'm no longer needed.” Bruce said.

Lex nodded. This made sense after all. “I was wondering... why are you interested in becoming a
detective. I mean, you have the company your parents left you.”

Bruce shrugged. “It's a little hard to explain. But I suppose the basic gist of it was that I was inspired
by a very important man in my life. His name's James Gordon, and he's a detective who were always
there for me during a very tough time in my childhood. He's one of the two men who made the
biggest impact on my life after my parents died.”

One of Lex's servants came into the room, and said: “There's a high school student here to see you.
Chloe Sullivan. She said it had to do with your investigation into the random attacks on the
Smallville citizens.”

Lex looked interested in this. “Show her to the office. I'll meet her there.”
Chloe found out something? Well that should be interesting.

“What's this about random attacks on citizens?” Bruce wondered, as parts of the conversation had
sparked his curiosity.

Lex briefly explained about what had been going on around here, but left out the part with meteor
mutants.

“.... and the mystery men seem to act like Ninjas, vanishing into thin air after they finish injecting
their intended targets with a serum. As an result the police haven't been able to catch them. And
nobody knows what's in the serum, much less why they're doing it.” Lex replied.

He turned to leave. Bruce paused in his packing as he said: “Actually, you've got me interested in
this mystery now. Mind if I tag along?”

Lex just shrugged and smiled. With that the two men went downstairs to the library/office room,
where Chloe was waiting.
Chloe was sitting on one of the black sofas with a folder in her hand. It was full of evidence that she had gathered against the Camdus people. She had been exchanging information with Lex for a while now, and they both wanted the same thing—to stop the group behind the attacks and bring them to justice. Camdus was the most likely suspect at this time.

Besides, Chloe was still upset over the fact that they gave her this power against her will. She never asked to be a meteor freak at all. She also wanted to know what Camdus was up to, and why they did this to the entire town.

Chloe stood up when Lex walked into the room, but her attention was quickly diverted away from Lex when Bruce walked into the room.

'Woof!' Chloe couldn't help but think as her eyes took in the handsome man before her. The dark-haired man was exactly her type. He looked a little bit like Clark, but his hair was pitch black and his eyes were darker than Clark's. A navy blue color so deep that it almost looked black compared to Clark's Hazel blue eyes. Unlike Clark though, He had an aura of maturity and confidence that served to make him so much more hotter in Chloe's eyes.

Chloe pasted an smile on her face, because she didn't really want to be caught drooling over some guy. That would be so embarrassing! “You must be Bruce Wayne.”

The man smiled at her pleasantly, and simply nodded. “Lex told me about what was going on in Smallville. There's been attacks on people at random?”

Chloe nodded. “Yes. I was one of the people who got attacked, actually. I've been working together with Lex Luthor here to investigate the group behind it all.”

Bruce Wayne looked thoughtful. “Nobody knows who this group is, and why they're doing this?”

Chloe's smile widened. “Are you going to help us investigate?”

She certainly wouldn't mind it at all if she got to spend some time with this hottie.

Lex gave her an amused look, almost like he knew what she was thinking. “Unfortunately, Bruce is planning to leave here soon. He's run out of things to do in Smallville, and feels that he is no longer needed here.”

'Damn.' Chloe mentally cursed this. She then pouted. “Are you sure? I mean, Bruce's some kind of detective, right? He could really help us out so much!”

Bruce raised his eyebrows. “Where did you hear that from?”

Chloe smiled sheepishly. Was that something she wasn't supposed to know about?

“Um, Clark Kent told me. He said you were training to be an detective. But don't hold it against him, I was basically pumping him for information. I had to, my dad works at the factory and I wanted to know what kind of man brought out the factory.” Chloe answered, and her voice took on an defensive tone.

Bruce chuckled at this. He was quickly learning just what kind of person Chloe Sullivan was. “I see.”

He paused, before speaking. “Well, I guess I could try my hand at solving this little mystery before I
go. Besides, It's not like I have any urgent matters to take care of in Gotham.... I can hold off on leaving for a few days.”

Lex noticed how Chloe's eyes lit up at this, and he snorted quietly in amusement. It looked as if Chloe had developed a new crush on Bruce Wayne.

--Meanwhile, in another part of Smallville---

Lionel Luthor's limo drove down the road leading to Eddie Cole's farm house.

According to his sources, Eddie Cole made a living as an dust cropper most of the time but he had a very small acre of farmland that he often used as his personal garden.

The reason why he was here? because he had seen an very unusual flower pattern shaped like a crop circle when he flew over this area in his helicopter a while back. Normally he wouldn't had paid it any attention, but the flower crop circle formed very familiar symbols that he hadn't seen in years.

Nobody knew this, but Lionel Luthor had once been a part of an group called Veritas. This group studied the stars, and had inside knowledge that an alien would one day come to earth. They even had an genuine space transmission that a member of the group translated for everyone. It informed them that “A son of Krypton” would come to Earth one day, and this same message pleaded them to watch over their son “Kal-El” like he was their own son.

It was actually the real reason why he had been in Smallville all those years ago during the meteor shower. The coordinates in that transmission had led him to Smallville, and so he had naturally assumed this was where the alien was going to land. But, the meteor shower happened instead, and so nothing came out of it. It wasn't a total loss, however... as he did manage to acquire a factory instead.

But now those same symbols from the alien transmission was in a flower crop circle in Smallville. That just happened to be on Eddie Cole's land.

Lionel Luthor would never admit it, but he always believed that there was aliens amongst us. And seeing something like that brought back memories of the veritas group.

So he couldn't resist coming in person to check it out. And who knows, maybe he would finally find out what happened to this “Kal-El” Alien.

Eddie Cole stepped out of his farmhouse to meet Lionel Luthor. He was a very scruffy-looking man, the kind that looked like he was an sterotypical alcoholic.

Lionel pasted on his best charming smile, and introduced himself to the man.

An hour later, Lionel Luthor's Limo was driving away. In the back seat, Lionel was staring thoughtfully at an octagonal disc that had alien symbols engraved into it.

Eddie Cole had told him a very interesting tale. Apparently, he had seen an alien spaceship land in Miller's field during the meteor shower. When Eddie went over there, he didn't find anything expect this octagonal disk.

Eddie Cole then had planted flowers that would take on the symbols on the octagonal disk if seen
from the air. Eddie's reasoning is that if he did this, then the alien would know that he had something of theirs.

“I don't know, it just made sense at the time. Looking back, it just seems so silly now. It's been many years and they still haven't come for this thing. Anyway, I've got no use for this thing anymore... it's yours if you can offer me a good price for it.” Eddie had said.

Lionel had offered him a few million dollars for it, which Eddie readily accepted.

So, Lionel now had what was most likely a key component from an alien spaceship. His heart started beating quickly, as he excitedly thought about the implications.

Of course, the meteor shower had to be an cover for the landing... Otherwise, the American Government would had known about an alien landing on their soil. And the Alien needed to be safe from any person who would do it harm...

It made so much sense. Virgil Swann's prediction that this alien would land in Smallville wasn't wrong after all like he initially thought. Now the question was-- was the Alien still in Smallville or did it go elsewhere?

Lionel Luthor smiled wickedly. He was going to find out one way or the other.
The eye of the tempest

Chapter Summary

Lionel Luthor has a run-in with the Camdus "aliens".

Chapter Notes

I admit it, not much happens here but it's a set up for the next chapter... where Lex Luthor gets to live with clark. Woot.

A wild-eyed, dark-skinned man frantically ran into the shadowy office where the leaders of Camdus often held their meetings. There wasn't a meeting this time, but there was still a few of his superior officers sitting at the C-shaped table.

“It... It's bad! Lionel Luthor's got his hands on something that he shouldn't have!” He panted, as he started to catch his breath.

“Calm down, Liam. What are you talking about?” His superior officer asked.

So Liam laid the whole story out for the people in the room.

Lionel at this point in time couldn't possibly interfere with Camdus's plans to create a new future in which Superman never died. But at the same time Camdus didn't really trust Lionel Luthor, and wanted to make sure that Lionel Luthor wouldn't be able to do anything that could jeopardize their whole operation. Better safe than sorry, and all that jazz.

So because of this Liam was in charge of tailing Lionel Luthor.

Liam had tailed Lionel all the way to Eddie Cole's house, where he saw Lionel Luthor acquire a piece of the spaceship that Clark Kent had came in. Liam knew this was a really bad sign, as seeing this meant that Lionel Luthor might find out about Clark Kent.

It turned out that Camdus's paranoia was well-founded, because THAT would certainly screw up their plans.

So, he had rushed all the way back to Camdus to report this.

Thankfully his superior officer seemed to realize the ramifications of this too. Her face paled at this bit of news, and she ran over to the intercom system to call everyone for an emergency meeting.

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--the next day, on Saturday--

It was now the day of the school dance, and all the students were dressed up in their finest clothes as they milled into the school building.
Clark and Lana met up with Chloe at the front entrance.

“Oh, you look so lovely!” Lana couldn't help but gush over Chloe's pink dress. Chloe grinned at this. “Thanks! Your dress is really nice too.”

Pete came over, saying: “Hey, Chloe. They have a photo booth down the hall there. I was wondering if you wanted a picture...?”

Chloe smiled again, and nodded. She then said to Lana and Clark: “I think he wants proof that this night actually happened.”

with that she ran off with Pete.

It was at that moment that both Joanne and Whitney showed up. They were holding each other as they walked down the hallway. They looked like they knew they wouldn't see each other for a long time and were trying to milk the moment forever.

Joanne grinned when she saw Lana. “Oh! You look so beautiful tonight. I wish I had my camera with me.”

Whitney shifted away from Joanna awkwardly as he asked: “Um... do you girls mind if I have a moment alone with Clark? I want to ask him something.”

Lana and Joanne looked at the two boys quizzically, but they simply nodded. “I wanted to talk to Lana before we left, anyway.” Joanna said as she pulled Lana aside.

They walked away, leaving Whitney and Clark all alone in the hallway. They stared at each other awkwardly, waiting for the other one to talk.

Finally, Whitney spoke. “First of all... I just want to say I'm sorry for all the things that I've done or said to you over the past years.”

Clark's eyebrows raised even higher at the redneck comment, and he honestly didn't know what to say to that. This was quite possibly the worst apology he's gotten so far in his life time. You just didn't insult somebody you were trying to apologize to... right?

“Anyway, I'm sure you know I won't be around to watch over Lana and Joanne anymore. So I was wondering... if you would watch over Lana for me? I would feel better knowing that there was somebody here in Smallville doing that for me.” Whitney asked.

Clark's eyebrows returned to their normal position, as he smiled at the blond jock wryly. “You don't even need to ask me that. I would had done that anyway. After all, Lana's one of my friends now, and I always watch out for my friends.”

Whitney smiled awkwardly at this. “Right. Thanks.”

Joanne walked over at that moment, and he simply waved at Clark as they walked out the door.
--Hours later--

Clark quickly forgot about the awkward man-to-man moment he had with Whitney, and was having the time of his life dancing with Lana. He often swapped with Pete so that he could dance with Chloe too, but the boys paid special attention to their own dates so that the girls wouldn't feel left out.

Clark sighed happily. This was what he had missed out on last time when Whitney strung him up in the field.

He was so happy that nothing happened this time, and that he could go to a high school dance like everyone else did for once. It was nice pretending that he was just a normal teenage boy like everyone else here.

He was now standing around the punch bowl with Pete, and he couldn't help but comment on how great everything was going.

“It's so awesome, you know? I'm so glad nothing happened this time and I can finally enjoy this sort of thing.” Clark gushed, before downing his cup of punch.

“This time? What do you mean?” Pete wondered.

Clark gave Pete an 'duh!' look, and said, “Remember the last dance I was supposed to go to? I ended up being the scarecrow instead.”

Pete's face cleared up as he recalled that. “Yeah, the universe owed you this one then.”

Clark simply nodded at this like that was the most obvious thing in the entire world.

He threw the empty plastic cup into a trashcan, and were about to ask Lana for another dance when the school intercom came on.

“Attention, please. I have some urgent news I need to share with all of you.” Principal Kwan's voice boomed over the intercom.

The music stopped, and all the students stopped dancing to listen to what he had to say.

“I've received word that the National Weather Service has issued a tornado warning. Three funnels have been spotted south of town, and no one will be allowed to leave the gym. If things become worse, then everyone needs to go to the school basement, okay?” Principal Kwan's voice boomed, and with that the intercom switched off.

Everyone started murmuring at this.

Clark sighed. Just when he thought that things were finally going his way for once. But of course there always had to be something going on whenever he wanted to enjoy life like a normal teenager!

The music started back up, as everyone attempted to keep their spirits up. After all, it couldn't be THAT bad like Kwan said, right?

Lana rushed over to Chloe with a worried look on her face. “Do you have a cellphone? I want to make sure that Joanne and Whitney is okay. They're supposed to be at the bus stop right now.” She said.
Lionel walked into Lex's office. He intended to find out why his son was staying in Smallville.

Despite his earlier comments about the Kent boy, Lionel knew that Clark Kent alone couldn't possibly keep Lex Luthor here in Smallville forever. Clark Kent was certainly his son's type, but he also knew that Lex wasn't stupid enough to let his sex drive dictate who he slept with. Lex Luthor spoke the truth when he said he didn't sleep with under-aged people, and so far he had been clever enough to be discreet whenever he slept with people of the same sex. Because of this, the gossip rags and the paparazzi had never been able to find evidence of Lex Luthor's bisexuality.

Lionel Luthor had been keeping very close tabs on his son while he was here in Smallville, so he knew that Lex Luthor hadn't been sleeping with anybody in Smallville.

Lex Luthor just handed the factory over to that Wayne boy, so it wasn't the factory that kept him here.

So, what was it that was keeping Lex here? He frowned as something occurred to him.

Did Lex find out about the Alien Traveler landing here somehow?

Lionel fingered the disk in his pocket, and then he quietly scoffed to himself. His son wasn't like him, he never believed in aliens in the first place.... so that couldn't be what held Lex Luthor here.

Lionel Luthor suddenly felt frustrated. He didn't like the fact that he was losing control of his own son, and also didn't like not knowing what was going on with his son. This situation needed to be back under his control otherwise he was going to do something drastic.

Lex Luthor walked into the room and scowled slightly when he saw his father.

“Let me guess, you're here to talk me into returning to Metropolis.” Lex said in an resigned tone of voice, as he walked over to the bar.

Lionel simply shrugged. “I'm just trying to understand you, son. What is it about Smallville that interests you so? After all it's just tiny town without hardly anything to do.”

Lex smirked. “You haven't really been paying attention at all, have you? Otherwise you would know that there's more to Smallville than meets the eye.”

Lionel frowned at this, as he fingered the alien disc in his pocket again. Lex couldn't know all about his obsession with that alien traveler, could he...?

He suddenly had this terrible thought that maybe his son was trying to beat him to the punch, so to speak. If Lex Luthor got to the alien creature before he did, then Lex would have a strong advantage over Lionel! He would never be able to exert any control over his son ever again if Lex got to the alien before he did.

But he was getting ahead of himself. He didn't know for sure this was what Lex was talking about.

He had to make sure first.

“Care to elaborate on that?” Lionel asked.

Lex was about to speak, when the windows suddenly exploded.

Strong gusts of wind blew into the room, and Lionel found himself being flung against an bookcase. Lex was knocked off his feet, and he tumbled across the room.
The bookcase toppled down on Lionel, knocking the wind out of him. As Lionel looked up, one of the supporting columns came loose and came crashing down on Lex's body!

As Lionel crawled from under the bookcase, he saw the ceiling cave slightly just over where his son was.

“Dad! Help me please!” Lex screamed, as he struggled to free himself from the heavy column that pinned him down.

Lionel stood up and slowly moved towards Lex, but then he looked up at the ceiling. It was coming down... Lionel knew that he didn't have time to free his son... it was him or his son.

Lionel made his choice, and ran for it instead.

He could hear his son screaming for him but he just kept on running towards the exit.

Lana Lang was talking to Joanne on Chloe's cellphone.

“Okay. I'm just glad you're alright. Drive safely.” She said, before hanging up.

Lana Lang sighed in relief as she handed Chloe her phone back. She then informed the group, “Joanne were already driving towards Metropolis after dropping off Whitney at the bus stop. She wasn't anywhere close the tornadoes when they started.”

Chloe smiled. “That's good.”

Pete then scoffed. “Worst school dance, huh?”

Clark sighed, and nodded.

The four of them were huddling in the school basement with the rest of the students. It was school rules to always head for a underground shelter in the event of an tornado, regardless of how far away the tornado were.

The students wanted to keep on partying, but the school staff overrode any objections they had and forced everyone down to the basement.

Apparently the three funnels had somehow merged together and created an F-5 tornado. For those who didn't know, tornadoes were graded on the level of destruction they caused. A F-0 tornado didn't do much damage, just broken trees. F-5 was the far end of the scale, where they utterly destroyed everything in their path and could throw automobiles over 100 meters. They could even level houses a mile away.

In the cases of F-4's and F-5's, it was mandatory for everyone to evacuate to underground shelters even if they didn't think that the tornado would move towards them. There was the possibility that even if the tornado didn't move this way, it could still throw cars and other heavy objects all the way over to the school.

Clark frowned. He thought of his parents, and Lex. He said out loud, “I hope everyone else is doing okay in this storm.”

Lionel Luthor drove like an madman away from the castle, and up the road to Metropolis.

Dammit, why did an tornado have to appear now? He needed to find a safe place, because the castle obviously couldn't stand up to it.
A large wood pole in the ground was yanked up by the strong winds, and it went flying straight for the car that Lionel Luthor stole from his son's garage. It went through the windows in the back seat, and the force was enough to topple the car over.

“Arrgh!” Lionel screamed as the car toppled off the road and right into a ditch. The car was on its side now, and unfortunately for Lionel he couldn't undo his seat belt. He was trapped.

Damnit. Was this how he was going to die?

Suddenly, his car was engulfed in a bright light. The car seemed to lift itself into the air, and promptly moved upright. It hovered sideways, before finally landing on the road.

Lionel blinked, before looking outside to make sure that his senses hadn't deceived him.

There was a group of alien beings standing in a circle all around the car, and each one had glowing eyes. Lionel noticed that each one of them had those glowing circles on the palms of their hands, due to the fact that they had their hands outstretched towards the car.

Lionel slowly realized something else... it was too quiet. It was as if everything just stopped. He quickly looked all around, and looked in the rear-view mirror. It was then he realized that the tornado was right behind him, but it seemed to be frozen in time.

He desperately tried to undo his seat belt, but he was still stuck.

The alien beings moved closer and closer, until they were right at the sides of the car. The car doors opened on their own, and Lionel shivered slightly.

“Stay away!” He screamed. He always wanted to get in contact with aliens, but not like this. He would have preferred to be in complete control of the situation.

“Give us the key.” They spoke to him in loud booming tones. The voices seemed mechanical, like they were using a voice filter.

“What key? I don't know what you're.......Oh!” Lionel trailed off. He had been puzzled at first, until he realized that they meant the octagonal disc in his jacket pocket.

His hands automatically reached into his jacket pocket and pulled it out.

One of the aliens moved closer into the car with one of his hands out. “Yes. Give it to me.”

Lionel then shoved it back into his jacket. He wouldn't give away something for free, no matter who the other person was. “Why should I give it to you? I might gain more from keeping this thing than giving it to you.”

The alien tilted his head, and he said very coldly: “You have two choices now. Give us the key, and you shall be transported to Metropolis. Don't give us the key, and you shall be killed by the Tornado. After that we take the key from you anyway. Choose wisely.”

Lionel mulled this over. He glanced back at the frozen tornado, and noticed that there was a few panicked birds in the air that was also frozen in time.

So, those aliens had power over time? Interesting. He had no doubt that they meant what they said... that they would get the key regardless of what he choose. And well.... he wasn't stupid enough to think that he could defy such a powerful group who could control time and get away with it.
Resigned to his fate, he pulled out the octagonal disc and handed it over.

There was a bright flash of light, and he blinked.

His battered car was now sitting in front of the Luthorcorp office building in Metropolis.

He patted at his pockets, and found them empty. So... that just happened.

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Hours passed, and the tornado finally died out. It left behind a long trail of destruction but most of the important buildings were still standing somehow.

Everyone was free to go home, so Clark rushed all the way home to check on his parents.

When he got home, he noticed that the roof of the barn had been ripped clean off, and that there was a very large hole on the side of the farmhouse.

“Mom? Dad!!” He called out, wondering if they had gotten to the storm cellar in time.

To his relief both his parents walked out of the farmhouse.

“We're fine, Clark.” Martha said.
“We got all the animals to safety, so our livestock is okay. Can't say the same about the barn and the house though.” Jonathan sighed as he looked around.

Clark smiled slightly. “I'm just glad you guys are okay.”

Martha looked at Clark. “The school came out of it okay?”

Clark nodded. “A few broken windows, but everyone's safe. Honestly, I think everyone's bummed out that a Tornado ruined our school dance. I know I am. One of the times when I finally get to be normal, and this happens?”

Martha looked at Clark sympathetically and hugged him. “Oh, Clark.”

Clark hugged back, and looked at Jonathan. His father was still surveying the damage that the storm left behind.

Finally, Jonathan said: “I wonder how the other neighbors fared. I might need to call on them for help.”

Clark realized that he could use this as an excuse to check on Lex, and said: “I could look around for you... see how everyone else is doing.”

Before his parents could respond, Clark blurred away into the distance.

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Clark got to the Mansion at the same exact moment that Bruce just pulled into the driveway. Bruce looked worried, which put Clark on edge immediately. He hadn't known Bruce for very long but he already knew that it took a lot to make Bruce look that worried.

“Hey, Mr. Wayne! What's wrong?” Clark called out as he jogged over.
Bruce got out of his car before answering: “I called Lex to see if he was okay. He picked up, but it sounded like he was in pain. I couldn't make out what he was saying, it sounded like his phone was broken. Then it cut off and I couldn't reach him anymore when I tried dialing his number again.”
Clark frowned. Yeah, that didn't sound good. “Well, I came over here to check on Lex.”

The two of them walked into the mansion and what they saw only served to deepen their worries. Everything was a total wreck, and all of the windows were broken on their way in.

Clark ran ahead of Bruce towards the office, where he knew that Lex usually spent most of his time. He threw open the doors, and gasped at the sight before him. There was a massive hole in the wall on the other side of the room where the stained glass windows used to be, and the ceiling was completely caved in.

“Lex...” He said the name in a worried tone as he looked around the room. He heard a noise from underneath the rubble, and he started X-raying the area.

He gasped when he saw that there was a body under there under all the rubble, and to make things worse it looked like there was a large wooden pole stuck though the person's skull. How was that person still alive?? He could hear the person's heart beating like crazy.

Clark moved quickly, trying his best to clear away the rubble without causing another cave-in.

Bruce Wayne walked into the room just then. “What are you doing?”

“Lex's under here! I can hear him... and he's hurt!” Clark cried out.

Bruce's mouth tightened at this, as he pulled out his cellphone. “I'll call 911.”

It took Clark 10 minutes before Lex was finally uncovered. Bruce and Clark couldn't help but recoil in horror once they saw how bad off Lex was.

There was a large wood pole that had skewered itself right though Lex's skull, and part of it was sticking out where Lex's right eye used to be. If Lex ever got out of here alive, he might suffer from brain damage and lose one eye for good.

“LEX! Hang on!” Clark cried out when he noticed that Lex was still conscious somehow. His one existing left eye was staring straight at him, and the man seemed to try to say something, but he couldn't form words at all.

“Yes, he's still alive... but he seems to be losing a lot of blood. No, I don't think we can move him without causing inseparable damage to his body. There's a wooden pole sticking right out of his head. I think he lost one eye...” Bruce was dutifully reporting all of this to the 911 operator on the other end of the line.

Clark kept on clearing away all of the rubble with his hands, and created some makeshift supports on the rest of the ceiling so that the rest of it wouldn't come down when they moved Lex Luthor out of here.

Bruce of course, couldn't help but notice that Clark was unusually strong. He lifted some of the heaviest ceiling beams off Lex with considerable ease, like it was made out of Styrofoam. And Clark didn't look the slightest bit winded as he did it. There was no sweating, no grunting as he kept on pushing the broken ceiling parts away from Lex. He raised one eyebrow when he saw Clark lift up one of the toppled pillars and pushed it upwards towards the remaining ceiling. That pillar had to weight over 200 pounds, a single human man couldn't lift that by himself alone.

Another 10 minutes later, the EMT workers finally arrived and they were in the process of moving Lex onto a stretcher.

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Later, it would finally occur to Clark that he hadn't been exactly discreet in using his strength to clear away the rubble. He had been too panicked over the thought that they could lose Lex, to notice that he wasn't exactly in control of his own strength.

But, Bruce hadn't said anything at all. So maybe Bruce had been too panicked to notice it himself too?

And Lex had been conscious the whole time, and probably saw Clark displaying what he could do with his strength. But, Lex looked like he was in so much pain. So, perhaps Lex wrote it off as an hallucination?

Clark hoped so.

“I'll be honest, I don't know how Lex Luthor is still alive. Over half of his body is completely battered beyond recognition. Broken bones, a ruptured spleen, damaged lungs, half of his brain is damaged, not to mention his missing right eye. If he survives this, he might not be the same person he was before....” The doctor said very solemnly as he looked up at the grief-stricken face of Clark.

Bruce were more stoic than Clark at the moment, but there was still a hint of distress in his eyes.

The doctor sighed. “Unfortunately, there's not much I can do without a signed consent form from his father. If Lionel Luthor doesn't come around here to approve the surgery, I don't think he'll live.”

Bruce nodded. “I'll get in contact with his father.”

Clark moved to sit by Lex. He looked up as Bruce said: “Stay here, I'm going to find out where Lionel went to.”

Clark simply nodded.

Bruce left the room, and Clark looked over at Lex.

He reached out to take one of Lex's hands, and held it gently.

Lex opened his remaining eye, and he let out an strangled laugh. “It's.... useless. Dad not....approve anything.”

Clark stood up slightly so he could look at Lex's face. “Of course he would. Why wouldn't he?”

“Dad....” Lex croaked, “At the castle. with me when it..... happened.”

Clark's eyes widened at this. He hadn't found a second body there at all. “What happened?”

Lex let out another strangled laugh at this. “The column......pinning...... me, I couldn't...move. The ceiling.... coming down. Screamed for help. Dad. He looked.... at me. He ran... out. Didn't see.....since.”

Clark frowned at this. He couldn't just wrap his head around that. So, Lionel just left Lex to die? What kind of father would do that??

Bruce came back in with a frustrated look on his face. He waved his cellphone, saying: “No good. I can't seem to get a hold of Lionel Luthor. Do you have any idea where he could be?”

Clark turned to face Bruce with a troubled expression on his face. “Lex.... he said his dad was with him at the Luthor castle when it happened. That his dad ran out on him when he was screaming for
help.”

Bruce’s eyes narrowed at this. “So Lionel could still be somewhere in the castle? Stay here with him, I’ll go back to the mansion. See if I find out anything.”

Clark simply nodded at this.

Things were moving in a fast blur for Lex Luthor. Half the time he was in too much pain to think, and the other half he was so doped up on painkillers that he couldn't think.

The next three days seemed to pass quickly in the blink of an eye. As a result he had no idea of the drama that was unfolding quickly while he was out of it.

He didn't know the full story, but he knew that the following things happened in this order:

1) Bruce went back to the mansion to look for any signs of Lionel, and had found the security officer's room with all the security footage there. Amazingly enough that part of the castle was still intact, and Bruce was able to rewind the footage from the office security camera all the way back to when the tornado hit. So Bruce ended up having video evidence that Lionel Luthor had left his son there to die. He also ended up with evidence of Clark's supernatural strength when they were rescuing Lex from the rubble, but he felt that should be saved for another time. Bruce then came back to the hospital, and told Clark that he had found evidence that Lionel had abandoned Lex, just like Lex claimed.

2) Chloe Sullivan and The Kents arrived at the hospital just in time to witness an heated argument between Bruce, Clark and the doctor. The doctor kept on insisting that only family members of an patient could authorize the life-saving surgery that Lex needed. Bruce argued that because Lionel Luthor had left his son there to die, that meant Lionel wasn't fit to decide what was best for Lex. Clark was backing Bruce up on this when his parents arrived.

3) Jonathan and the doctor was skeptical about the claim that Lionel had intentionally left his son behind to die, so Bruce ended up showing them the footage he had on an DVD disk... which showed Lex pinned down by a column, and reaching out towards his father. Lionel turned around and ran out the door in the video. Bruce spoke about lawyers then, saying that he would have to call his best lawyer down here if he had to.

4) It turned out that the arguing was for nothing, because all of Lex’s broken bones, his ruptured spleen and lungs mysteriously healed over the three hours since he was brought in. That just left the massive head damage Lex still had. So as a result Lex no longer needed that life-saving surgery for his spleen and lungs. Both Bruce and the doctor was baffled to how that could had happened. Clark and Chloe however seemed to have a good idea of how that happened, and they both looked at each other knowingly.

5) That didn't stop Bruce from calling his lawyers, however. He wanted to be in charge of Lex's hospital stay, and to block Lionel Luthor from having any say over his son's health.

6) Then in the next following days it somehow got out to the general public that Lionel Luthor had abandoned his son during the tornado, and fled town like a compete coward. Clark suspected that Chloe Sullivan had something to do with it. Chloe wasn't the type to gossip, but if she put her mind to it she could easily spread news all over town without using the newspaper at all. At this point most people already knew about the factory incident, and how Lex had gone behind his father's back to save the factory from being shut down. Even if it meant selling the factory to a old friend from school.
That naturally led itself to rumors that Lionel had tried to kill his son and make it look like an accident, and he had done it because he wanted the factory back. That he had done it because his son had made him look like a complete fool in front of everyone in Smallville.

Lex found that kind of funny. Everyone was making his father out to be some evil super-genius, when in reality Lionel Luthor most likely panicked and ran away in the face of danger. Like a total loser who didn't even realize that there was witnesses to his cowardly act.

At any rate, it was a while before he finally could be weaned off the painkillers that had him trapped in a mindless haze. It took him a long time to finally convince the doctors that he didn't need that much now that his body was mostly healthy. And, he was starting to think clearly again... which meant that his brain-matter was regenerated back to full health. The same couldn't be said of his right eye however. But Lex suspected that it was already starting to regrow itself back, considering that his eye socket felt itchy the same way a healing scab did.

Apparently he had a regenerative superpower now... thanks to the mystery men. Not that Lex minded. He couldn't help but get the feeling that things would had been much worse for him if he didn't have that ability to start with. According to the doctors he shouldn't be alive right now due to how severe his injuries had been.

It was a strange feeling... feeling that much gratitude towards somebody who had attacked him and used him as a lab rat in their sick and twisted experiment. It wasn't like those people knew that they would be saving his life by doing that.

It was on the third day of staying in the hospital that he had enough of staying there and decided to pack up.

Clark stormed into the room with an angry look on his face.

“What's this about you leaving? The hospital called me and told me that you weren't being cooperative.” Clark said as he looked at Lex accusingly.

Lex turned around to face his friend, and gestured to himself. “As you can see, I'm perfectly fine now... mostly. I don't need this bed, and I think others need this bed more than I do.”

There was a conspicuous-looking medical eye patch all around Lex’s right eye, which had pinpricks of blood peaking though the white cotton fabric.

Clark sighed. “If you're serious about leaving here, then at least stay with me. I already spoke to my parents about it, and they're okay with letting you stay.”

This caught Lex off guard. “What? I'm not sure I heard you correctly. Your parents want me to stay over there?”

Clark shrugged. “Yeah. Besides, your mansion.... It's not exactly in good condition right now. And you don't have any other places to stay, do you?”

Lex had been thinking of fixing up the second level in the Talon so that it become an apartment, but right now it was full of boxes and not really livable right now. Staying with the Kents on a temporary basis would work for now.

Lex slowly nodded. “Alright.”

Clark smiled.
It was official. Starting today, Lex would come live with him.
Jonathan was starting to have some second thoughts when he watched the purple Lamborghini come down his road. He wondered if it was really a good idea to let Lex stay here until he got his affairs into order. A Luthor was still a Luthor, after all.

But Jonathan couldn't help feel sorry for Lex. After all, Lionel Luthor is clearly the worst father figure anybody would ask for, and he wouldn't wish that on anybody at all. Jonathan also had seen that video footage of Lionel running out on his son when the mansion was crashing down around them, which upset him every-time he replayed that in his mind. What kind of father would do that to his own son? Jonathan wouldn't leave Clark behind like that, even if he knew that Clark could survive anything. Clark was invincible and supernaturally strong, but Jonathan still instinctively worried if he knew his son was doing something dangerous and reckless again. As a father, Jonathan just didn't want his son to be hurt or put himself in dangerous situations.

But it seemed like Lionel Luthor didn't have that kind of instinct that most fathers usually had. What was up with that??

Lex stepped out of the car, and Jonathan couldn't help but notice the bloody medical eyepatch on his right eye. He went over, and Lex turned around to face him with a slight smile on his face.

“Hello, Mr. Kent. Are you really sure about this? I would hate to impose on you on a time like this...” Lex asked, as he looked at the large hole on the side of the house, which was currently covered up with a blue plastic tarp.

Jonathan Kent smirked. “Well, you have to admit my place is a lot more livable than yours is right now. The house will be just fine... just need to patch up this side, and we'll be okay. Can't say the same about your castle, however...”

Lex sighed. “Yes. Might take a month or two to get everything back in working order.”

Jonathan's smile faded at this. Two months of Lex Luthor staying here.... he wasn't sure if he could handle that.

Lex seemed to know what Jonathan was thinking, and he added: “Good thing I have that place over the Talon. It's not ready yet, but I'm going to convert that into a small apartment. Once that's ready I'll be out of your hair for good.”

Jonathan simply nodded at this. “So, do you need help with the bags?”

Lex smiled. “I think I can manage by myself.”

At that moment, another car came down the road, and Lex groaned once he saw who it was.
“Here comes my father.” He said, and Jonathan scowled slightly.

Lionel stepped out of the car and said, “Son, there you are!”

“What do you want, dad?” Lex got right to the point.

“What’s this about a restraining order?” Lionel demanded to know as he held up some papers.

Lex looked puzzled at first, but then his expression cleared up as he smiled. “Ah, that must be Bruce Wayne's doing. He's not convinced that you didn't leave me behind to die on purpose. He can be so overprotective sometimes.”

“But he did leave you behind during the tornado.” Jonathan stated with a slightly confused look on his face. He had seen that footage, after all.

Lex nodded, and explained: “That he did. But that's the thing about my father. If he had really wanted me dead, he would have done it where there would be no witnesses, or a security camera. The other thing about my father...When he's in a dangerous situation, his first instinct is to save his own skin. So that's why he ran out of there... forgetting the fact that there was witnesses to his cowardly act. There was no malice at all in his act... just pure cowardice.”

Jonathan's eyebrows raised at this, and he simply nodded at this. “Makes sense.”

Lionel Luthor was a man without morals, after all... and he was the sort who cared only about himself. So it made sense to Jonathan that Lionel would rather save his own skin than save his son's life.

Jonathan then glared at Lionel Luthor with a very judgmental look on his face.

Lionel Luthor's face flushed at this. He didn't like being called a coward, and he was annoyed at how his son kept on using that word in such a derogatory manner against him.

Lionel didn't know why his son was so angry about it... it looked like Lex had managed to survive the ordeal just fine. Lex was perfectly healthy and able-bodied save for that bloody eyepatch over his right eye. Lionel heard some reports that Lex had been at death's door, but those reports must had been grossly over-exaggerated.

And Lionel was pretty sure that Lex would had done the same thing in his shoes had the roles been reversed. So it was pretty hypocritical of Lex to act so self-righteous.

Besides, Lionel Luthor needed to investigate the aliens that were residing here in Smallville. He intended to get back that alien disk and take control of things here from now on. That would be very difficult to do with that restraining order standing in the way, so that was a problem.

“Let's be reasonable, son. You know that I'm not a danger to you... so you should talk your overprotective friend into dropping this nonsense. Besides, I'm sure you'll be busy with that little cafe of yours... and somebody needs to oversee the mansion while it's being rebuilt.” Lionel Luthor said in his best reasonable-sounding voice.

Lex Luthor simply nodded. “Very well. I'll talk to Bruce Wayne. Is that all?”

Lionel nodded back. “Yes, that's all. Thank you, son.”

With that, the man walked back to his car.

Jonathan just shook his head slightly at this. The Luthors' relationship were something he didn't understand fully, nor did he want to.
What was with Lionel Luthor... he didn't even have the decency to look guilty over leaving his son behind like that, nor did he even pretend to be worried about his son's well-being. Not even a “How's your eye?” question... which would had at least been polite.

And Lex Luthor didn't act like his father abandoned him in a life-threatening situation. Yes, it was clear that Lex Luthor was rightfully pissed at his father... but he didn't act hurt over the fact. Instead, Lex Luthor acted like his father had forgotten to come to one of his parties, and were snubbing him because of it.

The two of them acted like this was business as usual, nothing more. There was none of the emotional drama that Jonathan would had expected. Not even a teary “You abandoned me and left me to die, dad!” from Lex Luthor.

It said a lot when the Luthor family was more alien to Jonathan than his adopted son was. And Clark was friends with one of them.

Jonathan sighed. Yep, this was going to be fun....not.

Chloe was in the middle of an stakeout with Bruce Wayne.

They were hiding out on an large hill overlooking the Cambus building, watching the people who came in and out of it. And she was cheerfully telling Bruce about all the crazy stuff that happened in Smallville so far.

“And believe it or not... but there was this guy who could control bugs and stuff. He was really creepy.” Chloe said.

“Hmm.” Bruce just made some noises to indicate that he was listening as he watched the building through his binoculars.

Chloe frowned. “You don’t seem too surprised or anything. I would had thought you’d be more skeptical about all this stuff I’m telling you.”

Bruce snorted. “you honestly think that your town has a monopoly on unexplained events and bizarre creatures? You should come to Gotham sometimes.”

Chloe laughed and said in an challenging tone of voice, “Oh come on. There's no way Gotham could top Smallville in an weirdness contest.”

Bruce put down his binoculars, and smirked at Chloe. “How's this for starters. Back when I was a young kid, there was this mad scientist by the name Hugo Strange who used an insane asylum as cover for his weird experiments. He ended up giving most of the patients there those strange powers. There was a woman named Fish Mooney who could mind-control people if she touched them. There was a guy who could take on other people's appearances because his face was like literal clay. He could literally sculpt his own face to look like anybody else's. They called him Clayface. And naturally they all escaped. And don't even get me started on the normal criminals...”

Chloe blinked. “What happened to that mad scientist?”

Bruce sighed. “He managed to escape police custody, and he's been on the run ever since. To tell you the truth... This thing with Cadmus? The way they're experimenting on citizens here, and turning them all into super-powered beings... This thing would be right up Hugo Strange's alley, it seems like the sort of thing he'd do. If I see Hugo here, then I'm obligated to report him to the police.”
Chloe nodded. “Makes sense. So that's the only reason why you're staying here in Smallville?”

Bruce frowned. “There is the issue of Lex's safety. I've done my research on his father.... and it seemed that a lot of people who went up against him would often die in mysterious circumstances. Nothing that could be tied back to him, of course. But it leaves me wondering if Lionel didn't leave his son behind to die on purpose.”

Chloe smiled. “You two were pretty close back then as kids, huh?”

Bruce looked puzzled. “What makes you say that?”

Chloe just shrugged. “You've already done so much for Lex. Buying out the factory just because he asked you to, and now you're watching over him.”

Bruce chuckled slightly. “The funny thing is.... we weren't close as kids at all. In Excelsior prep school, it was every boy for himself. Lex and I shared a dorm room, and that was it. The only time I ever interacted with him outside of our dorm room, was when I witnessed a bully go too far. I saved his ass then, but we didn't speak to each other even then.”

Chloe raised one eyebrow. “So, you're doing all of this for a stranger who you barely knew in middle and high school?”

Bruce nodded. “Pretty much.”

Chloe chuckled. “You're really a good guy, you know that?”

Before Bruce could respond there was a bright flash of light down where Camadus Labs were.

Both Chloe and Bruce snapped to attention.

Chloe whipped out her digital camera and started snapping pictures, while Bruce brought up his binoculars.

There was a group of people in alien suits walking up to the building. Marty Munn, the supervisor of Camadus Labs, was walking outside to meet the “aliens”.

Marty seemed nervous as hell with the way he kept on glancing around to make sure nobody saw them.

The leader of the aliens moved towards Marty, and held something out to him. It was a shiny ontological disk with alien-looking runes engraved into it. Marty seemed to take his sweet time taking it, but Chloe didn't mind. It gave her time to zoom in and snap a picture of the disc.

As Marty pocketed the disc, the “aliens” disappeared in a flash of light. The balding supervisor walked back into the building.

“I can't believe this.” Chloe seemed delighted with this turn of events. “We finally have proof that the mystery men are working for Camadus labs. I've got to show Clark and Lex!”

Marty watched Chloe and Bruce leave, and he couldn't help but chuckle.

They needed a way to give the alien key back to Clark Kent without giving the whole game away. If they had given him the key the direct way, they would have been forced to explain everything. Which they couldn't do right now.

When they realized that Chloe and Bruce was watching them, they saw that they could let Clark
know that they had his key by using Chloe. So naturally they had staged everything so that Chloe could snap a few photos of them exchanging the alien key.

Plus, being seen in public with the mysterious “alien invaders” would only cement Camdus's shady reputation.

Clark would know about the key now.

Clark came home to the smell of baked goods, but instead of finding Martha in the kitchen Lex was there.

“Lex? What are you doing?” Clark said as he hung up his jacket.

Lex Luthor was in the process of baking some cookies. Chocolate chip, from the looks of it.

“Well, I wanted to do something to help out around here. Your father wouldn't let me help out around the farm because of my injury. He said it could get infected if I did any dirty farm work. So I went to your mother... and she was making all this food for the people who were badly affected by the tornado. It looked like she needed help with that, so I offered my services. And here I am.” Lex said, as he gestured at everything on the island table, which was overflowing with baked goods and supplies.

Clark smiled at this. “Lex, you didn't need to do anything. You're a guest here, you know.”

Lex smiled back. “I know. But this isn't my first time staying on a farmhouse. There was this place in Montana that my mother used to have when I was a kid. It was a horse ranch, and everyone there had to earn their keep if they wanted to be fed. I loved it. Anyway, I figured that I could do the same here.”

Martha came into the kitchen carrying a box full of gift bags and plastic bags. She saw Clark, and smiled. “Oh good, you're here. You can help me with this.”

She put the box on the edge of the counter-top, and pulled out a few plastic bags. She handed Clark a few, and said: “Here, fill each bag with a dozen cookies. I need enough bags for at least 200 people, okay?”

Clark raised his eyebrows at this. That was a lot of cookies. “Yes, mom.”

He then moved over to the island counter and started filling up the bags with the freshly baked cookies.

Martha thought for a moment. She turned around, and said: “Cookies might not be enough. I think they might need sandwiches too.”

“Why? You have enough cookies here to feed the entire village.” Lex said, as he pulled out a pan full of fresh cookies out of the oven.

Martha nodded. “That's true. But those people are going to be so busy rebuilding that I don't think they'll have the time to eat something healthy. Cookies are good for tiding you over until supper, but they're not exactly healthy.”

“Then in that case... why not do a packed lunch box for each person? Put in a sandwich, a few cookies and some cooked vegetables.” Lex suggested.

Martha perked up at that. “That's actually a good idea. I wonder if we have enough plastic
Tupperware boxes here...”

As Martha started planning the lunch boxes for everyone, the boys looked at each other and smiled.

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Clark and Lex was packing up all the boxed lunches on the back of the truck. Martha planned to drive the truck to the local community center where emergency services were still being held for the victims of the tornado.

At that moment Bruce’s black car came down the road, and stopped a few feet away from the truck. As Clark and Lex looked on, Chloe stepped out of the car with an excited look on her face. “Guys, guess what!!” Chloe practically yelled at the top of her lungs as she ran over to them.

“Whoa, hold on. What's got you so excited?” Clark asked as Chloe skid to an stop in front of him.

Chloe showed him a sideshow of photos on her digital camera while she spoke. “Bruce and I decided to do a little stakeout today. We figured that we would watch the Camadus building, see who went in and out. But we never expected this...!”

Lex looked over Clark's shoulder with a interested look on his face, and to his surprise he saw dozens of photos, all depicting the “aliens” that he had seen in the past. The last photos was zoomed in, and they clearly showed one of the “aliens” holding some kind of metal disc. Which they handed over to Marty Munn, the man who had given him the tour of Camdus.

“That's strong evidence alright. If we took this to the authorities, and explained to them that the people in alien suits were the ones who were attacking the citizens at random....” Lex thought out loud, “Then they would have to investigate Camdus.”

“Just like this, our worries are finally over. The police can finally step in now.” Chloe happily replied.

Clark didn't seem so pleased for some reason, and instead looked vaguely worried. His eyes kept on lingering on the final digital photo of Marty Munn holding the alien disc.

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“So let me get this straight.... Camdus was behind all those attacks on the people in town, and might had been responsible for giving everyone those powers all along. You also think they have a piece of your spaceship?” Jonathan summarized up everything that Clark had been telling them so far.

Lex and Chloe left with Bruce so that all three of them could go to the police with the photos. Clark ended up staying behind, making some lame excuse that he needed to help his parents out on the farm.

Soon as they left, Clark went straight to his parents and told them everything.

“Clark... are you sure they have a piece of your spaceship?” Martha asked with a worried expression on her face.

Clark nodded. “Last time I looked at that ship, I noticed that it had this part where something was supposed to go into it. And that disc thing this guy was holding, fit that shape perfectly. If that doesn't convince you, there's some alien engravings on the ship too, and the disc had the exact same engraving. I'm pretty sure that it's the key to the ship.”

Jonathan took a deep breath. “Great. I don't know how we can take that back without exposing
ourselves, Clark.”

Clark then suggested, “Chloe and the others are going to head up to Cadmus later. I could go with them... I've been helping Chloe investigate Cadmus, so it wouldn't look too weird if I went with her.”

“NO! It's too dangerous.” Jonathan couldn't help but say, once he realized what had happened last time Clark went into that building. There was no way he was going to let his son go into a building that was full of meteor rocks.

Clark started to scowl slightly. “Great. You're starting to sound like Lex Luthor now.”

At Jonathan's slightly surprised expression, Clark then explained. “He keeps on saying I should stay out of the Cadmus investigation, because it was too dangerous for me. He even forbade me from going anywhere near the building even though he's not my father! I mean, I'm not a little kid anymore and I can take care of myself just fine.”

Jonathan's eyebrows raised slightly at this. “Well... for once I actually agree with Lex Luthor on something. That building is really too dangerous for you.”

Martha nodded. “It might be best that you stay out of it this time, honey.”

“But... the key!” Clark couldn't help but whine slightly.

Jonathan smiled. “Maybe it'll all work out. You said that Lex's getting the police to look into Cadmus right now. So...if the police does their job, that building might eventually become safe for you to enter. Or, the key might end up in the evidence locker at the police station. The police station's a safer place than Cadmus.”

Clark didn't think of it that way. He calmed down as he thought about all the ways that the police could end up helping him without knowing it. “Oh. Yeah, okay.”

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“What do you mean, you're not going to do anything right now?” Chloe demanded to know, as she stared down the policeman across the desk.

The policeman at his desk sighed. “Contrary to popular belief, we actually don't do things like what they show on TV. We don't storm a place without a warrant, or without hard evidence. The pictures you showed me? It's very interesting, but it's simply not enough evidence to arrest that Cadmus group. I will however write it down as a possible lead on this case.”

“Calm down, Chloe. He's right, he needs to follow the procedures otherwise this case gets thrown out. Do you want the suspects to go free just because this man failed to follow the proper procedures?” Bruce said in a calm tone of voice.

Lex gave the policeman his best disarming smile. “You'll have to forgive Chloe. She was one of the people who were attacked... so she's been trying to find the men who did this to her. But will you follow this lead? I think she'll calm down if she knows that you'll investigate this group.”

The policeman's face relaxed slightly. He nodded. “Oh, for sure. It's been frustrating as hell, not being able to find any leads on that case. The detectives on that case might take a look at Cadmus, because this is actually the only lead we've been given so far.”

“Might take a look?... as in they might not.” Chloe groaned, “So much for the police!” With that she turned around and stormed out of the building.
Lex chuckled weakly. “Teenagers.”

the policeman just nodded at this with a wry expression on his face.

The two billionaires turned around, and left.

“Chloe, wait up.” Bruce called out as the two of them followed her out of the police headquarters.

Chloe spun around and started ranting. “Just when I thought this was finally over. Seriously, it's been almost a year now ever since all of this started! I'm so sick and tired of this... I'm sick and tired of watching over my shoulder, wondering when those guys are going to strike again. I just want them caught now. I want to know why they're doing this.”

Lex put an calming hand on her shoulder as he replied: “I know how you feel. Trust me, I want those guys caught too. I want to know why they're doing all of this too. But justice often takes time... so just have some patience, okay?”

Chloe sighed, and nodded. “Yeah. It's just frustrating, you know? I finally caught those guys on camera, and the police doesn't even do anything... all they had to say about it was, 'Oh, that's a nice photo you have there!'... Ugh.”

Lex smirked. “I get the feeling that you're going to help speed up things anyway. After all, your newspaper has a tendency to light fires under people and get them going.”

Chloe blinked at this, and then she started chuckling. “I was so upset for a minute there that I forgot I ran a newspaper... can you believe that? But you're right. Even if the police end up doing nothing, I can still warn the town about Camdus at least...”

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--A few days later--

Abby Peterson was just your average high school girl... actually, she wished to be one. The truth was, she was something of a freak. In dark rooms, her blood veins glowed and lit up in different colors depending on her mood. In the dark, she looked like one of those bio-luminescent jellyfishes that glowed in the deep dark waters.

It was just a weird ability that she always had ever since the meteor shower.

Only a few select people knew about her freakish side... her parents and her best friend Darla. Darla was the greatest person ever, far as Abby was concerned. Darla made her feel normal every time they hung out, and she actually thought Abby's ability was kind of cool.

At first, it wasn't so bad. The glowing veins weren't visible in a well-lit room or outside under the sun which made it easy for her to hide it. Wearing clothes that covered up most of her body also helped. Also, she noticed that she had the ability to absorb the energy light for some reason. That part she didn't mind too much... because if she ever felt tired or needed a quick pick-me-up all she had to do was stand outside in the sun for a few minutes. It was better than any caffeinated drink.

All of that changed the day she got attacked by those strange men in black. They injected something into her that day that made her sick every time she stepped out into the sun.

It wasn't like she was suddenly allergic to the sun... far from it. But it was like her body was an overcharged battery, with nowhere for all of that energy to go. Overcharged batteries often overheated...or exploded. Her body overheated every time she stepped out into the sun, even if she only stood in the sun for a second. It left her feeling dizzy and made her feel like she needed to throw up. And if she tried to
endure it, the heat in her body seemed to build up so much that she felt like exploding. It frightened her, so she started to avoid sunny areas much as possible.

Of course that was completely intolerable...After all, it wasn't like she could stop going to school or stop having an social life without people asking a few questions. It also made her parents really worried about her, despite her feeble attempts at convincing them that she was “fine”.

She wondered what she ever did to make them do something so awful to her. It wasn't fair at all! She felt another sudden urge to throw up, but nothing came up.

She was in the school bathroom, hiding out in one of the stalls. She heard footsteps coming her way.

“Firefly? You okay?” the voice sounded worried. It was Darla, her best friend. Darla came up with that nickname for her when they were little kids, and it became a inside joke for the two of them.

“Over here. I'm fine.” Abby called out.
Darla's feet could be seen now as she stood in front of the closed toilet stall where Abby was.

“You keep on saying that, but I don't think you're fine at all. I'm starting to agree with your parents, you know. you need to go to a hospital.” Darla replied.

“No hospitals. I don't want anybody to find out about me.” Abby said.

Darla sighed. “Not that again. I honestly think you're not alone... that there's others like you out there. I mean, Chloe Sullivan writes about them all the time...So it couldn't hurt to be more open about who you are.”

Abby scoffed. “That conspiracy theorist? No offense, but if I were you I would take everything she writes with a grain of salt...especially because everything she writes sounds like it belongs in the Metropolis Inquisitor than in a school newspaper.”

“I don't know. She does sound crazy sometimes, but there seems to be a lot of truth in what she says. You know what they say, the truth is crazier than fiction.” Darla said, “And check this out! She just came out with a news article claiming that she found out who were behind the attacks on everyone.”

Okay, that part did sound interesting. “Okay. Let me see it.”

With that Abby opened the bathroom stall and came over as Darla opened up the school newspaper she was holding.

Darla explained the article as she showed Abby the pictures that Chloe took. “Chloe claims that some group of scientists running a laboratory just outside of Smallville is behind the attacks. She goes on and on about the history of the Cadmus building, so it gets a little boring in some parts. But the basic gist is that they've been here ever since the day of the meteor shower, and claims to have been studying the meteor stones for over 10 years now.”

Darla then pointed out the photos of alien-looking beings dressed in black. “See those guys? Chloe says that they pretty much fit the description of the guys who attacked everyone in town. Apparently, Chloe now has this theory that Cadmus was not only behind the attacks, but that they've been secretly experimenting on everyone in town to produce people with strange abilities.”

Abby scoffed. “I think I would remember being experimented on by a bunch of creeps growing up. There's no way that part is true.”

Darla looked thoughtful. “Why don't we go talk to Chloe? We could get some more information out
of her, and figure out which part is true and what isn't.”

Abby was taken aback by this. Actually speak to Chloe??
She had never really spoken to the blonde girl in person before, and what she knew of her came from
rumors and speculation. Chloe Sullivan was known as the local weirdo who ran the school
newspaper. She was kind of famous around those parts, actually. Whenever something weird or big
happened in town, you just knew Chloe was somehow involved... or were about to be once she
found out what was happening. Everyone then knew that a news article on said weirdness was going
to come soon.

So Abby didn't exactly have a positive impression of that person... so she was somewhat unsure
about actually meeting Chloe for real and getting to know her.

Her best friend seemed to pick up on her trepidation, and said: “Come on, I'm sure she's not that bad
like you think she is. Besides, she might have some information on what was in that injection that
those mystery men gave you. If we know what it is, then we could make you better again.”

Abby was sick and tired of being... well, sick. Every damn time she stepped into a sun-lit room. So
that last part convinced her.
“Alright. Let's go see her, then.”

Chloe was busy planning the next week' edition of the Torch newspaper, when a dark-haired senior
girl and her blonde friend quietly came in.

She looked around the office, and did a double take when she saw a human-sized statue of Bigfoot
standing by the filing cabinets. It was wearing the Smallville high school jacket and a pair of
sunglasses.

“Why do you have Bigfoot wearing the school letter jacket and a pair of sunglasses? Why is it even
here, for that matter.” The senior girl wondered out loud.

Chloe nearly jumped out of her seat. She hadn't noticed the girls come in at all, and so it had came as
an big surprise when the quiet girl spoke up.

“Oh jeez. You two scared me. What's up?” Chloe chuckled, as she looked up at the two senior girls.

Darla spoke up. “We had some questions about that latest newspaper article you wrote. The one
about Camdus being behind all the attacks?”

Chloe simply nodded. “What do you want to know?”

Abby chuckled slightly. “Um,we were wondering if you....” her words trailed off as she suddenly
felt sick again. The room started spinning, and she found herself falling to the floor.

Darla caught her in time. “Abby! Are you alright?”

Chloe got up from her desk and walked around it towards the two of them.
“She doesn't look so hot... is she alright?” Chloe asked with a worried expression on her face.

“I'm just fine... it's just a head cold I have...” Abby murmured.

“There's a chair over here.” Chloe said, as she helped Darla move Abby over to the chair.

Chloe's concern for the girl triggered her “empathic healing” ability, and she started transferring
Abby's “illness” over to herself. Chloe didn't even realize what was happening until it was too late, when she started to feel super energetic all of a sudden. It was like she suddenly transformed into a super-charged battery.... but the energy just kept on coming and coming.... until she felt sick from having too much energy.

Chloe felt the sudden need to vomit, and she quickly reached for a wastebasket before it got all over the floor.

Abbey noticed it first before Chloe did.... She was aware of the moment that she suddenly felt so much better, and it happened when Chloe had touched her arm. It was the strangest feeling... it was like she actually felt her energy being sucked out of her body. And now her body felt like it was back to it's old self, with the right amount of energy. Plus, Chloe started acting sick all of a sudden.

Darla looked confused as she looked over at Chloe. “Are you alright?”

Abby spoke up. “I feel so much better now....I actually feel like my old self again.”

Chloe's mind was reeling with the implications of this. So it wasn't just dead people she needed to stay away from. She needed to stay away from alive people too now? That was just great. She sighed mentally at this. She wished that she had control over her healing abilities, then she wouldn't need to worry about things like that. There was just no way she was willing to become a total recluse!

Chloe was so caught up in her worries that she didn't notice the way Abby was looking at her speculatively.

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The shadowy leaders of Camdus sat around the U shaped table as they looked up at the projector wall. The projector was showing slide-shows of Chloe Sullivan's latest article. Chloe Sullivan was pointing the finger at them, claiming that they were the villains who were behind every strange event in Smallville.

Everyone had been waiting for this forever, and now it was finally here. Thanks to this, Lex and Clark would look their way, and eventually confront them for everything they did so far.

“We have to plan this out very carefully. A lot of things could go very wrong. We need a way to convince them that an hostile alien is coming here in the future. That what we're doing here is for the sake of the future.” the third leader said.

The rest agreed to this. Still, everyone couldn't help but feel excited. Clark Kent and Lex Luthor were coming to confront them at last... it was the day when everything would finally be revealed.

Now that Chloe Sullivan pointed the finger at them, it was only a matter of time.
The buildup to the confrontation

Chapter Summary

A lot of buildup to the confrontation, basically.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lionel Luthor was at the Beanery getting some coffee.

Normally he wouldn't be here, but right now he was feeling coffee-deprived. And he needed some coffee first, before ordering his staff to organize the cleanup at the castle. His aide should be the one who was fetching coffee for him, but it would take his aide two hours to arrive here in Smallville and Lionel couldn't wait that long. So here he was.

Needless to say it was something of an uncomfortable experience for him. Everyone seemed to be giving him dirty looks, and were clearly whispering about him. He could hear some of what they were saying as he stood in line for his coffee.

“He wanted to shut down the factory but his son stopped him....”
“I heard he abandoned his son when...”
“What is that asshole doing here...?”
“I feel sorry for his son, having to deal with....”

Lionel tuned the voices out, and mentally scoffed. Those small-time folks seemed to get it into their heads that he was a villainous creep, and that his son was some kind of pious hero trying to atone for his father's actions. And naturally his son was also spinning his latest mishap to his advantage too. Being abandoned by his villainous father in his time of need was sure to tug on the heartstrings, and make people feel sorry for Lex. A clever move... but Lionel had to wonder what Lex was getting out of it using such a move.

“I don't know... it just seems so far-fetched to me.” The man in front of Lionel was chatting with his teenage-aged son.
“But you have to admit it makes sense. I know folks around here like to blame the fertilizer factory for mutating people and animals... but all of the strange stuff started when the factory was still a canned corn factory. So it couldn't be the factory doing it. Those Cadmus folk came around at the same time the weird stuff started happening. Everything lines up.” The boy was saying, as he gestured to a newspaper he was holding.

Lionel Luthor didn't care about whatever they were talking about, but the photo the teenage boy was gesturing at caught his eye. The photo showed a group of very familiar-looking aliens handing something over to a human man. The same aliens who had taken the disc from him and instantly transported him to Metropolis.

“Pardon me. Can I have that?” Lionel Luthor said to the teenage boy, and the teenage boy turned around to look at him.

“The hell you can. I paid for this newspaper, and I'm keeping it.” The teenage boy said rudely.
Lionel wanted to roll his eyes at this, but he didn't. Instead he said: "I'll give you 20 dollars for it."

The teenage boy considered this. He had paid three dollars for the school newspaper... "Alright, deal."

Lionel exchanged a 20 dollar bill and got the newspaper in return. The man and his son grabbed their coffee and left.

After some minutes, Lionel was out the door himself with a cup of coffee in one hand and a newspaper in the other one. He got into the backseat of his limo, and commanded his driver to take him to the castle. With that, he opened up the school newspaper and started reading Chloe Sullivan's article.

He skimmed though the article, but it was enough to get the general gist of everything that was going on lately. 10 minutes later, he was staring at the picture of the aliens and Marty Munn with a furious look on his expression.

He just realized that he had been played by this Cadmus group, and he didn't like it at all. They had posed as a bunch of scary aliens and stole the disc away from him!

And they had been doing this all around Smallville too... experimenting on the citizens and whatnot.

A part of him wondered if the alien traveler had arrived and created the Cadmus group. Or did the Cadmus group manage to get to this alien traveler before he did, and start up a laboratory after they captured the alien traveler. Or were they just a group of humans who were collecting every alien artifact, and hadn't gotten to the alien traveler yet??

None of this made sense. But Lionel did know one thing... That toad who called himself Marty Munn had the disc now, and Lionel was going to get it back no matter what it took.

He sat back in his seat, and sipped his coffee while he plotted a way to get what he wanted.

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--A few days later--

Lionel Luthor stepped out of his limo in front of the Camdus building, and to his surprise some other people were here too as well.

Chloe Sullivan just got out of her car, and scoffed as she saw the other people here. She said out loud: "Looks like everyone else here had the same idea I had."
She was here to confront the Camdus men and hopefully write an follow up to her article.

Sheriff Ethan Miller and his partner Nancy Adams just stepped out of their police car, and were looking around speculatively. Obviously, they were here to investigate the allegations that Cadmus was behind all the attacks on the people of Smallville.

Jonathan Kent was here with a truck full of what appeared to be fresh groceries from the Kent Farm.

Ethan Miller nodded at Jonathan as the farmer was lifting a large box of produce out the back of the truck. "Hello, Jonathan. What are you doing here?"

Jonathan chuckled uneasily. "Cadmus buys all of their produce from my farm. I'm just here to deliver it."
This was technically the truth. But what everyone else didn't know was the fact that Cadmus always sent an guy to collect the produce from the Kent Farm. The Kent family never delivered to the building directly... until now.

Jonathan couldn't help but feel twitchy every time he thought about a group of shady guys having the key to his son's spaceship. What if having the key led them to his son? That was the sort of thing that kept him up late at night. Despite what he told Clark, he felt like he couldn't leave it up to the police to solve that particular problem for him.
So when he saw the latest invoice from Cadmus asking for more vegetables... well that was when he had the idea to deliver the farm produce directly.

He would use this as an excuse to get into the Camdus building. He just hoped that he would be able to find the key without getting caught. He was going to have some difficulty explaining himself to the police and Camdus if he got caught. He wasn't good at this whole undercover work like Chloe and his son Clark was.

He glanced over at Chloe Sullivan and smiled slightly. Chloe was here though, no doubt to follow up on her latest article. Maybe she could help him out if he ever got caught.

Chloe saw Jonathan look her way, and nodded in greeting. She wondered what Jonathan was doing here. She knew that the Kents had a lot of customers, and that Camdus was probably one of them. But clearly there was more to Jonathan's visit here today. At least, that was what her gut told her.

Her attention turned towards Lionel, and she frowned. She walked over to him, and asked outright: “So, why are you here? I get why the others are here.... but you?”

Lionel looked down at the blonde teenager, and smiled. “I’m here because of your article. I’m actually one of Camdus’s investors. Naturally, I’m going to be concerned if it turns out that Camdus have been abusing my money for their ill-gotten ends. I’m here to see if there’s any truth to what you wrote.... and withdraw my financial support if it turns out to be the case. Does this satisfy your curiosity, my dear?”

Chloe was writing down everything he said, and she nodded. “Yes. Do you mind if I quote you? I might do a follow-up on my last article, you know.”

Lionel smirked. It was so cute how this teenager fancied herself to be a real reporter, and seemed to think that her little school newspaper could stand up to an real newspaper like the Daily planet. “You may quote me.”
He said, as he humored the young girl.

Chloe grinned. “great.”

All five people moved towards the entrance of the building, where Marty Munn was waiting for them all.

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Marty frowned as he looked at all five people standing there in the parking lot. He had hoped that Lex and Clark would come forth to confront him, but it looked like they wouldn’t be doing that yet.

Chloe was obviously here to confront Camdus, so they could use her.

He was more nervous about Lionel and the police being here, however. He had no idea what they were here for.....
He looked at Jonathan last, and it was at that moment he realized something. Clark had gotten sick from meteor rocks last time he was here... so of course Clark wouldn't come here knowing that it could happen again.
Clark's father on the other hand... obviously he was here in his son's place. Jonathan might be here for the key to Superman's ship.

Marty smirked to himself. Okay... He could work with this. He uses Jonathan to give the key back to Clark, and He also uses Chloe to pass the knowledge of the future alien invasion on to Lex.

Lionel and the Police was something of a hindrance, but he could work around them.

“Welcome to Cadmus. I'm the Supervisor here, and my name is Marty Munn. How can I help you all?” The man said in a pleasant tone of voice, as he greeted everyone.

Sheriff Ethan held up his badge and a piece of paper. “I have a warrant to look around the premises. I'm sure you're aware of the accusations against you?”
With that he looked over at Chloe with a very pointed expression on his face.

Chloe just plastered on her best innocent-yet-smug smile at this. Nancy Adams snorted when she noticed the teenage girl's expression.

Marty chuckled at this. “Yes, I'm aware. And I assume that... Chloe, was it?... Is also here to investigate and do a follow up for her school newspaper. Very well. I shall give you all a tour, and show you that we have nothing to hide here. Whatever Chloe thinks, we are not the villains that she makes us out to be.”

Lionel stepped forward. “As your investor, I'm greatly concerned about those allegations against you. I want some reassurance that you're not using my money for.... well, whatever it is that you're being accused of.”

Marty raised his eyebrows. That smelled like bullshit, but he would find out what Lionel really wanted eventually. He nodded. “Yes, of course. You can come along on the tour.”

He then glanced over at Jonathan. “What are you doing with that box?”

Jonathan fidgeted slightly. “Um, I'm here to deliver the groceries. I know you usually send your men to pick it up, but I thought I would deliver it this time around... if that's okay with you.”

Marty raised his eyebrows at this. As a cover story, that was surprisingly plausible. It also gave him a excellent excuse to split Jonathan up from the rest of the group and give him the alien key.
“Oh yes, I almost forgot about the groceries. I'll have somebody escort you to the kitchens, if that's alright with you.”

“Yes, of course.” Jonathan smiled. He couldn't believe this was actually working! He was so worried that they were going to shut him out because he broke protocol or something.

Marty pressed a wall intercom, and called for somebody to come. Within minutes a large-looking guy in a white jumpsuit came along.

Jonathan gulped slightly. Jonathan always prided himself on being a strong farmhand, but this guy was bulkier and larger than he was. This was his escort around Camdus.... how could he get away from somebody like him?
The gorilla-like man simply grunted at Jonathan. “You got some boxes that need carrying?”

Jonathan nodded. He pointed at the box he had been carrying, and said: “I also got more in the truck. I have to say, this is a lot of food. How many people do you employ here?”

The guy grunted again. “Dunno. Lots of people work here though.”

Jonathan smile became strained. “I …. see. Well, let's get this over with.”

With that the two of them went back to Jonathan's truck for the rest of the groceries.

Marty turned around to face the rest of the group. “Let's get moving, shall we?”

20 minutes later, all the food was being packed away into the large kitchen that seemed to have dozens of refrigerators and stoves. This place looked like it belonged in the back of a busy restaurant, yet it was almost empty save for a few people who were putting away the food that Jonathan had brought for them. It was kind of eerie.

“Um…. can I use the bathroom here? I need to go before I leave.” Jonathan felt lame for using such an obvious excuse, but it was the only thing that came to mind.

The ape-like man nodded. “Yes, of course. You just go down that hall there and take a left. Keep on going until you see the bathroom sign.”

Jonathan nodded his thanks and went into that direction as if he actually had to go.

It looked like they weren't going to escort him there and keep watch while he went to the bathroom. Which was a lucky break for him. If he was caught wandering then he could always claim that he got lost on the way to the bathroom.

Once he was sure that nobody was watching, Jonathan went in the opposite direction and started wandering.

'Now what? You have no idea where they're keeping that key...' Jonathan thought to himself.

– In the security room--

There was dozens of TV monitors on the wall. Some showed Marty giving the four people the tour of Camdus, while others focused on Jonathan.

The security guards were watching Jonathan wander around with no idea of where he was going. One laughed.

“Oh man, this is pitiful. He came here to protect his son from us, but he has no idea where the key is. Looks like we need to herd him after all.”

The other one simply nodded. He then picked up a radio microphone, and spoke into it. “Time to do things like Marty planned, boys. Herd that man into the alien containment area!”

Jonathan heard some loud stomping coming around the corner, and he quickly hid himself. He peeked from his hiding spot, and saw a bunch of security guards walking in what looked like a military formation march. They turned around the corner.

Jonathan couldn't go in that direction after all. He went in the opposite direction, and kept on going until he heard the stomping footsteps again. He quickly opened one of the doors in the hallways and
it turned out to be a broom closet. He hid there until the marching security guards walked by him again.

Jonathan frowned. What was with those security guards marching all over the damn place? Not that he complained, because he could hear them coming and this gave him enough time to hide.

This went on for a while, as he heard them coming and often went in the opposite direction as to avoid the marching guards.

But this ended up being a problem, because he found himself cornered in a long hallway with no doors. Well, there was the one only door at the very end of it...

Jonathan shrugged. He had already looked into all the rooms he came across, so why not that one? He moved towards it.

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“Good job, guys. You can stop herding him now... Jonathan's where he needs to be now.” The security guard said into the radio microphone.

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Jonathan found himself in what looked to be a creepy-looking laboratory room. He stopped in the middle of the room as he looked around with a look of growing horror on his face.

The walls and the white-board was painted with alien-looking pictographs on them, and there was sketches of what looked like his son's spaceship. So those bastards were after his son after all!

There was a few papers stuck to the white board, and seemed to be sighting reports of the spaceship. Apparently a man named Eddie Cole had seen that ship go down in miller's field, where the Kents found Clark.... And had been all too happy to describe the way the ship looked to those men.

Also reports on the key, and what it was made out. That one didn't make sense, it was just scientific words and symbols that Jonathan couldn't understand at all.

Jonathan tried to keep his growing panic under control. This wasn't good. Those men knew what Clark's ship looked like, and they had the key to it. If they ever found the ship they might connect the dots, and realize that Clark was an alien. Clark would be taken away!

“Damn it!” Jonathan spun around and slammed his fist on one of the steel tables. It was then he saw the alien key.

It was inside a display case anchored to the wall. Seeing that was enough to calm Jonathan down and give him a new sense of purpose. If they didn't have the key, then they couldn't find the spaceship. Right?

Jonathan quickly moved towards the display case. He frowned when he saw that it was locked... but brightened up when he realized that it was a glass display. He took off his shirt and wrapped it around one of his hands. He punched though the glass using his covered hand, and quickly grabbed the key with his other hand once he had cleared away the glass.

He ran for it after putting his shirt back on, because he didn't know if that display had an silent alarm
Lionel Luthor was quickly becoming bored. This was the same exact tour he had taken last time, and he had already seen everything before. Plus, he was looking for a chance to be alone with Marty, so that he could talk Marty into giving him what he wanted. He couldn't do this with this group around.

“No offense, but this isn't doing anything to address my concerns that you're involved in illegal activities. This is the same exact tour you gave me last time....” Lionel let his displeasure be known to everyone in the tour group.

Chloe raised her eyebrows. As much as she hated to agree with Lionel Luthor...

“Yeah, this is obviously just for show. Tell us what's really going on here. I find it hard to believe that all you do here is study meteor rocks. Especially when you've been doing it for 10 years. It doesn't take that long to find out what meteor rocks are made out of, right? Surely you have other side projects going on here?”

Marty Munn chuckled. “Well, we do have other projects here... but those are government projects, and is strictly confidential. Sorry, you know how it is... if you all knew, I would have to kill you all. Hahaha.”

Both the police and Chloe raised their eyebrows at Marty's flippant comment.

Needless to say Marty wasn't doing a very good of making Cadmus look innocent. If anything he managed to make them look even more suspicious with that comment.

“Government projects? Like creating super soldiers? Is that why you're testing your crap on the citizens of Smallville??” Chloe pressed for answers, as she trust her recorder into Marty's face.

“No comment.” Marty Munn smirked when he saw Chloe scowl at that answer.

“This is ridiculous.” the policewoman, Nancy Adams, grumbled as she turned to face Sheriff Ethan Miller.

“We should be going around interviewing everyone here and looking for anything suspicious. Not taking a tour and listening to this drivel.”

Chloe latched on to this. “YES! That is exactly what we all should be doing.”

Marty sighed. “If the standard tour won't cut it... I suppose we could work out a compromise? I can guide you though all the floors we have here, but I can't allow you to go into restricted areas. I'll allow you all to talk to any of the people who work here, but they won't tell you anything that requires government clearance. How's that?”

Sheriff Ethan simply nodded at this. “That sounds fine with me.”

Jonathan Kent was speeding home in his truck. At this rate he would be home in record time or the police would pull him over for speeding.

He knew he should slow down, but he couldn't help it. He was still pumped up with adrenaline. A part of him couldn't help but worry that they were going to find the key missing any minute now and come after him.
It was the strangest thing though. The marching guards were suspiciously absent on his way out, like every one of them just decided to go on lunch break. It was almost too easy.

Not that he was one to look the gift horse in the mouth. It had been good timing all around because he really needed to be out of there now that he had the key.

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--20 minutes later--

Marty was normally a timid guy who tended to be way too careful with everything he was doing. But right now? He was honestly having too much fun acting suspicious and creepy.

The new improvised tour had started out normal... but the more floors and rooms they went through, the more deranged it became.

“This is where we study how the meteor rocks affect diseases like cancer. As you can see, the green meteor rocks seems to have an ability to boost cancerous cells, and increasing the likelihood of cancer even in people without a family history of cancer.” Marty said rather cheerfully as he gestured to all the caged lab animals.

The poor animals looked so deformed, that it was hard to recognize what they used to be. There was even a featherless, two-headed chicken with large swollen lumps growing out of it's back.

Both Ethan and Nancy looked ill as they looked at the deformed animals in the cages. Even Lionel looked queasy at having to be in the same room as those diseased animals.

Chloe, on the other hand, was snapping pictures like crazy. If she couldn't nab Camdus for what they did to her... then at the very least she could nail them with animal cruelty charges. Anything to stop Camdus from whatever it was that they were doing here.

Marty then turned to the lab technician. “Why don't you explain why everything you do here is necessary?”

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Lex Luthor was helping Martha peel potatoes in the kitchen, while Clark was outside doing farm chores.

Martha herself was making some sort of chicken dish, with mashed potatoes on the side.

“Just put those into the boiling water when you're done cutting them up.” Martha was instructing Lex as she chopped up the cooked chicken breasts before putting them into some kind of sauce. It looked like she was boiling some pasta too from the looks of it.

Lex simply nodded and did as he was told.

Clark came in just then. He greeted his mom and lex as he wiped his shoes on the mat. He then looked at Lex, and noticed that the bloody medical eye-patch was gone now.

“How's the eye? Is it feeling better now.” Clark asked.

Lex smiled. “It's fine. It's still a little sensitive to light, but it's mostly back to normal now.”

Clark smiled back. “Good, I'm glad.”

He suddenly frowned and turned his head to look at the door.
Lex looked at Clark curiously. “What's wrong?”

“I hear my dad coming down the road in his truck... but it sounds like he's speeding. It's like he's in a hurry or something.” Clark explained.

Martha nervously looked at Lex, and quickly covered for her son in case Lex would find Clark's explanation suspicious somehow. “I hear him too. I wonder what's going on.”

Lex's eyebrows went up slightly at this. He honestly didn't hear anything at all. And it was obvious that Martha was trying to cover up his son's unusual ability. So, Clark had really good hearing too?

Pretty soon Lex could hear the sounds of an old truck stopping in front of the farmhouse, and Lex looked outside just in time to see Jonathan run towards the house like something was chasing him.

Jonathan slammed the door behind him as he entered the house, and then he sat down. He panted for breath, while the three of them stared at him wondering what had happened.

“Dad, are you alright? What happened?” Clark wondered.

Jonathan chuckled. “Um, I know I told you to leave it up to the authorities, Clark. But I couldn't help but become worried about what was going on over there at Cadmus. So I went over there... just to see what it was like there.”

He almost pulled the alien key out to show his son, but stopped himself in time once he realized that Lex Luthor was here. So instead he said: “Looks like I wasn't the only one who had the idea to check it out. Chloe Sullivan and Sheriff Ethan was over there too. Lionel Luthor was there too, for some reason.”

That last part caught Lex Luthor's attention. “My father was over there? What was he doing?”

Jonathan just shrugged. “He mumbled something about being a investor and were worried that Cadmus was using his money for illegal dealings.”

He then snorted, while privately thinking to himself: 'More like he was worried about the bad PR if it came out that he had been backing a bunch of kidnappers and mad scientists with his money.'

Lex paled slightly at this. He had forgotten that Lionel Luthor had chosen to become one of Cadmus's investors after Lex himself had refused to do so on moral grounds. And if his father was over there... there might be a chance that his father was going to find out what Cadmus was up to. Or worse, help cover up everything because it would become a PR disaster for him if it came out that he was backing Cadmus's illegal activity with his money.

Knowing his father, he might actually be interested in the results of Cadmus's mad experiments and end up wanting to fund them directly... Lionel might even want to relocate them somewhere else because of the bad press they were getting in Smallville lately. Then those men at Cadmus would never truly be held accountable for what they did to Smallville.

“Oh no. If my father's over there then that's bad news...”

Lex hadn't realized he thought that out loud, until Clark looked at him and asked, “Why is that bad news?”

Lex then explained to the Kents what he had been thinking just then. He said, “I would like to believe that he's really just there to make sure that they're not doing anything illegal. But... I know my father the best out of anybody else here. He's obviously up to no good.... and he might end up ruining my chances at bringing Cadmus to justice for what they did to this town.”
with that, Lex moved quickly to put on his shoes and jacket. “I have to go over there now and see what my father's up to. I have to make sure that my father isn't doing anything that could mess my plans up.”

Clark moved to his side. “I could come with you, as your backup?”

Lex looked up at Clark with an expression that clearly said no written across his features. “I think you know what my answer to that is, Clark. As long as they have things in there that you're deathly allergic to.... I just don't think it's safe for you.”

Jonathan nodded. With Lex out of here he could show Clark and Martha the key that he had stolen from Cadmus.
“I agree with Lex. Besides, it sounds like he has some personal business to deal with. It's his father after all.”

Clark definitely did not pout at this, but he felt like he was pouting on the inside. He wasn't used to being coddled this way. Hello, he was an super-powerful alien from outer-space who saved people on a regular basis. Strange how his parents kept on forgetting this part.

Lex rushed out the door, and in a few minutes they all could hear Lex's car tear it out of there.

Jonathan finally pulled out the alien key for all to see. Martha's eyes widened as she saw what was in Jonathan's hand. “Dear, is that....?”

Clark gaped when he saw it. “How did you get that??”

Jonathan told his family the full tale of how he had gotten it, starting with using the farm produce as an decoy to get into the building.

“Gosh, that's so cool, dad! It's like you became James Bond.” Clark was staring at his dad like he just became a great hero who saved the world.

Jonathan chuckled bashfully. It had been a long time since his son looked at him with adoration like that.
“Well, I couldn't just stand the thought that somebody out there had the key to your spaceship. So as your father I had to do something about it.”

Martha shook her head. “Oh, Jonathan. You could had been killed! What if those security guards had shot you??”

Jonathan pulled his wife in for an reassuring hug. “Yes. But I'm here aren't I? I didn't get shot, I didn't get caught and I got the key. Everything's fine now. Sheriff Ethan can handle the rest now, I think.”

Martha smiled and shook her head. “Alright. But no more heroics, okay? I don't think my heart could take it.”

Jonathan simply nodded at this.

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Lex Luthor stormed into the Camdus building, daring anybody to stop him. Strangely enough, nobody did. Even though there was several security guards standing around in the hallways who stared at him as he ran past them.

He managed to catch up to the tour group, and for a second there it almost looked like Marty Munn
was delighted to see him. Lex looked at him again, and Marty's expression was perfectly neutral, so he chalked that up to his imagination.

Marty Munn simply nodded at the new comer. “I suppose you're here to make sure that Cadmus isn't up to anything, too?”

Lex simply nodded. “Yes. That, and I wondered what my father was doing here when I heard that he was here.”
With that he glared at his father.

Chloe Sullivan raised an eyebrow at this. If she got an interview from Lex Luthor about his suspicions regarding his own father and compared that with Lionel Luthor's comments from earlier...

Well, she could hold on to that thought until later when she was done exposing Cadmus for who they really were.

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Marty Munn couldn't believe his luck. Lex Luthor came here after all!
But he still had the problem in that he no idea what to do with the cops and Lionel Luthor.

Chloe Sullivan was no longer needed now, now that Lex was here. So he supposed that he could just shove Chloe and the others out the door now.

But Marty needed a way to split up Lex Luthor from the rest of the group somehow, without the rest of them getting suspicious.

Damn it, plans where he had to think quickly on his feet wasn’t one of his strengths. He liked following a plan where all possible outcomes had been thoroughly explored and accounted for. But they never accounted for the fact that the police and Lionel Luthor could come here. They had been so focused on getting Lex Luthor and Clark Kent here that they completely forgot about the cops. And also forgot the nasty fact that Lex’s father liked to disrupt Lex's activities if he felt that his son wasn't being obedient enough.

Here Marty Munn was, literally trying to invent a new plan on the spot. He needed to think of something fast!

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Chloe narrowed her eyes as Marty was inventing some lame-ass excuse to end the tour.

“Well, we can't allow the workers here to be distracted by our tour any longer... So uh... the tour ends here I guess.” Marty said weakly, “But uh, if you still insist on interviewing people or whatever you all can wait in the lobby while I talk to each one of you one-on-one in my office? I can answer any questions you have then.”

The everyone but Chloe simply nodded at this.

Chloe quietly scoffed at this. As if she trusted Marty to be 100% honest with her in an interview! She had evidence of animals being treated inhumanely here, but she really wanted to nail those creeps here for something bigger than animal cruelty charges. Her gut told her something huge was going on here....
And naturally that meant one thing. She was going to have to sneak around and dig up any evidence of wrong-doing.
“Sounds good.” Chloe said in a fake cheerful voice, “But first, can I go to the bathroom? I really need to pee.”

She was guided to where the public bathrooms were, and made a show of going into there as if she actually needed to go. She went into one of the stalls and decided to wait it out until the rest of the tour group went to the lobby.

After that... she would give herself a personal little tour around this place.
She smirked slightly to herself.

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Lex Luthor couldn't help but feel pissed off, although he was doing his best to hide it behind a calm veer.

Lionel Luthor insisted on speaking to Marty first, alone. He also told Lex to wait outside in the lobby, as if Lex was still a little kid who were prohibited from listening in on adult affairs.

It just made Lex wonder what Lionel was trying to hide here, if he didn't want Lex around to hear whatever it was that Lionel wanted to talk to Marty about. Maybe Lex was just being paranoid, but his gut told him that his father was up to no good.

And he couldn't exactly try to eavesdrop with the police watching.

Movement in the hallway caught his eye, and he turned his head to see Chloe sneaking out of the ladies' bathroom before anybody in the lobby could see her. She was obviously planning to look around the facility on her own.

Lex smirked slightly. Well, maybe Chloe had the right idea... if he couldn't find out what his father was doing here directly.... then maybe he could find out what his father was trying to hide here.

Lex casually moved so that he blocked the view from the lobby, so that nobody would be able to see Chloe sneaking away.

Once Chloe was out of sight, he politely excused himself with the same excuse that Chloe had used to get away.
It was kind of lame using the exact excuse that Chloe used to get away, but hey if it worked then it was better to keep on using it no matter how cliché it was.

Once he was sure that the others had lost interest in him, he quickly moved down the hallway in the direction that Chloe had disappeared off to.
Who knew, maybe between the two of them they would be able to expose Cadmus for what they really were.

Chapter End Notes

meant for the real confrontation to happen this chapter, but i had to put all the players into place otherwise it wouldn't make sense.
The confrontation happens next chapter, I promise! expect there to be plenty of drama and stuff. XD
Marty Munn was staring at a newspaper photo of himself standing together with the “aliens”. Lionel Luthor held the Torch newspaper up to Marty’s face, with a look of hostility on his face.

“Please explain this to me. I brought this little metal disc off a man named Eddie Cole, and as I was leaving Smallville a group of so-called aliens stop my car. They threaten me and demand that I give them this metal disc or else I die. I give them the token, and I’m somehow magically transported to Metropolis. But what’s this? It turns out that the aliens might not be aliens after all, and are in fact working for you. There’s a photo of the so-called aliens handing over my metal disc to you.” Lionel was recapping his entire experience for Marty, although he left out the part where he had been fleeing the tornadoes and left his son behind.

Marty chuckled weakly. “I don’t know what you want me to tell you.”

Lionel Luthor threw the offending school newspaper down onto Marty’s desk. “I’m a reasonable man, Marty. All I want is my metal disc back. I did pay for it after all, and I don’t appreciate the fact that your men stole it from me. I’m willing to forgive you for this deception if you just return what’s mine.”

Marty wanted to laugh in Lionel Luthor’s face. That thing the elder Luthor wanted so badly was now far away, and back in the rightful hands of its' owner.

Instead he was his usual meek self, and said: “O-oh dear. This is really awkward. See, I wasn’t really kidding when you needed government clearance to gain access to certain.... classified.... things. I also wasn’t kidding about the fact that you would be killed if you tried to get at it without that clearance. ”

There, if he implied that it was in the hands of the government then Lionel wouldn’t know that Jonathan Kent had it now. And Lionel wouldn't be able to threaten him or any of the Camdus people if he honestly believed that they were working for the government in secret. After all, if you killed a government agent you could be accused of treason against the united states depending on the situation.

Lionel Luthor looked positively murderous at this. It was clear that he had no idea what to do next in light of this information. So he just snarled, “This is not over!” before storming out of the room.

Marty sighed. That was one problem down. Now to deal with the cops....

Chloe practically jumped out of her skin when Lex Luthor appeared next to her.
“What are you doing here??” Chloe demanded to know as she looked around to make sure nobody else followed her.

“The same thing you are. You don’t trust Cadmus to give you a honest interview.... and I don’t trust my father. I’m worried about what he’s up to here....” Lex replied.

Chloe nodded slightly. “So, we work together to find out what they’re hiding here? Fine with me.” She then pointed at an elevator located at the other end of the hallway. “We never got to go that way on the tour. He said it was an classified area...”

Lex smiled slightly. “Lead the way.”

They stepped into the elevator, and Chloe couldn't help but notice something weird.

“Hey.... this thing has up to 20 floors. This building only has three floors and a basement. At least, it seemed that way on the tour.” Chloe pointed out, as she gestured at the buttons in the elevator.

Lex nodded. “The rest are probably underground. If I was running this place, I would put all the important floors underground too. This way nobody would know that I was running secret experiments on people.”

Chloe pressed the very last floor button on the elevator. “Let's start from the ground up. Work our way up... better chances of finding out what it is that they're hiding here.”

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“I can't believe it's almost over.” Tom said as he sat with others at an table eating their lunch.

Macy nodded. “I know. It feels so surreal, knowing it's going to be over for us any minute now. I wonder what will happen to us, once the time-line's finally altered for good. Are we going to be erased out of existence, or....?”

Nyx replied: “Personally, I hope we get snapped back to the time we're supposed to be in with all of our memories intact. You know, the rubber-band theory? That's one time-travel theory that I found the greatest comfort in. The idea that we would get erased and then replaced with a new version of ourselves who had no idea what went on here.... it's just scary.”

James, the blond musclebound jock, just shook his head. “Personally, I don't really care what happens to me. All I care about is that it brings back my family. If we can create a future in which nobody died at all, then it's all worth it. I don't care if I get erased out of time or whatever as long as Darkseid gets what he deserves.”

James' entire family was killed, when Darkseid took over the world after he killed superman. He witnessed his grandparents, his parents, and his older siblings be completely obliterated by Darkseid’s omega beams. He had then been taken to one of Darkseid's “orphanages”, which was actually more like brainwashing camps for children.

Thankfully he was freed by the resistance before he became brainwashed, and after that he joined the resistance against Darkseid. James had been out for revenge ever since then.

Nyx simply nodded at this. “I want my parents back too.”

She used to live in India, until it become utterly destroyed in the war with Darkseid. Her family became refugees who fled to America. But unfortunately for her parents, they soon learned that there was now-where they could run from Darkseid's forces. They had died shielding her from one of the Para-demon's attacks.

Tom sighed. “Everyone here lost everything they had in that old time-line. I guess in the end we
really have nothing to lose here, save our memories of each other. I guess that means we should treasure our memories while they last.”

He had been on a high school field trip to another state when the para-demons started attacking everywhere. He had no idea if his family was still alive, because all forms of technology that allowed him to communicate with everyone had been knocked out. Even the old fashioned landlines and Internet didn't work anymore at the time. He couldn't get back to his own home state to see if they were alright at the time, due to the para-demons flying everywhere. So Tom wound up joining the resistance with no idea of what happened to his family at all. For all he knew, they were probably dead or stuck in a slave camp somewhere in the old time-line.

Macy chuckled slightly with a sheepish expression on her face. “Well...I didn't really lose much like you guys did. I mean... my mom died of cancer before all of this happened, and I still have my dad here. The only thing we lost was our home and the bookstore my dad ran. Considering how much you guys lost, that just seems so lame by comparison. The only story I can even share with everyone is how Lex Luthor saved our lives. If it wasn't for him, we would had been dead.”

Tom looked interested. “your dad met Lex Luthor in that time-line? No way!”

Macy nodded. “We were running from para-demons who wanted to capture us and put us to work in one of those slave camps. Then Lex Luthor comes out of now-where wearing his infamous green-and-purple armor, and blasts them away. He led us to one of the secret human camps and then left.”

Tom looked slightly awed. “That's so cool.”

Macy smiled. “My dad Marty felt indebted to Lex for saving our lives, so that was the reason why he signed us up for this. That, and he also wanted me to be able to grow up in a time where we didn't have to worry about Darkseid's army murdering everyone.”

Tom nodded. “Understandable. This time period is way much better than being stuck in our time where there's no food or clean water. That was the other reason why I came here too.”

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--Meanwhile, on another level of the Camdus grounds--

John Bythes was underground somewhere where he was currently being trained by the scientists in the usage of his ability. or at least he assumed they were scientists by the lab coats they wore.

He was running around the room as the scientists timed him. They wanted to see how long he could go without tiring out while he was made out of steel from head to toe. So far he had been running for half an hour and he finally stopped to take a breath.

One of the scientists nodded approvingly. “Nice, he can run for a long time without tiring or short of breath while he's in his steel form. He could easily beat the best endurance runners in the record books.”

John pretended to be enthused by this, and smiled winningly as he replied: “Really? That's so cool.”

John was getting used to having powers, now that he figured out how it worked. Apparently, he had the ability to absorb the properties of anything he touched. If he touched steel, then he could will his entire body to become like steel. He wasn't stuck that way however... his body reverted back to it's normal form again after a while. It could be a very useful ability, especially if you wanted to become bulletproof. However it did have a drawback. If he touched plaster for instance... then his body could become fragile. He had to mentally shield himself from subconsciously adsorbing the properties of anything he didn't want to become, which was still difficult for him to control.
John was kind of glad he held off on his escape plans. Oh, he still didn't trust those crazy Cadmus guys far as he could throw them. He was still angry about the fact that they experimented on him against his will and gave him powers that he never asked for, but it was nice to be able to control the strange new ability he had now. He supposed he'd need it to bust out of here when he had the chance.

He was slowly gaining their trust, and he was biding his time until he found the opportunity to get out of this place. He had the feeling that today was the day he escaped from this place, as seeing the scientists all seemed distracted today for some reason.

The intruder alarm went off.

The teenagers looked around in confusion until the underground speakers announced: “Code Lex-188! Lex is in the house...”

Macy let out a excited squeal. “It's finally happening!”

Tom grinned at the others. “Want to put on our alien suits one last time? Might as well as greet them in style... right?”

Nyx looked at the others, before looking back at tom. She smiled. “Why not?”

“Hell yes.” Macy replied, “I want to be part of this too. Come on, let's go!”

with that, they rushed towards the locker room.

Marty startled when the alarm in his office went off.

He was speaking to the local police now, and he couldn't help but curse the alarm for poor timing. He was in the middle of squashing their suspicions and sending them off. He worried that this might raise more questions that he didn't want to answer.

“What is that?” Nancy Adams the policewoman, wondered as she glanced up at the sound of the alarm.

“That? Oh, it's nothing. Somebody must had set off the fire alarm in the kitchen when they were cooking again...” Marty replied, before chuckling nervously. “You know how it is... those fire alarms go off at the slightest bit of smoke even when there's no fire.”

Nancy eyed Marty suspiciously. “Doesn't sound like a fire alarm..”

Marty smiled blandly. “I suppose I should double check just to make sure, then. Now then.... I do have other things to do. If you don't mind I would appreciate if you two showed yourself out.”

Sheriff Ethan simply nodded at this. “We have things to do as well. We'll be seeing you later.”

The police left then, and Marty rushed over to his desk. His computer always logged all alarm incidents, and what caused them. His eyes bugged out slightly when he saw what had triggered the alarm.

Lex Luthor. He must had sneaked into the lower levels of the building when Marty was dealing with Lionel Luthor.
He sighed. This was honestly the worst timing ever... and this sort of thing threw most of his plans out the window.

He had lovingly crafted over 30 pages of scenarios where he guided Lex into making the right choices.

Of course, he hadn't even accounted for Lionel Luthor or the police being here.

It was true what they said about the best laid plans of men...The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

It was times like that he wished that he was still just a simple bookstore owner... it was honestly less stressful to run a store than running an organization dedicated to preventing the end of the world as they knew it.

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Whatever the two of them expected, it certainly hadn't been this. Everything inside the secret levels were weirdly high-tech and futuristic-looking. Even the walls and the floors looked that way... to the point that everything almost looked alien.

There was holographic images and graphs all over the place in some of the laboratories and computer rooms. The few occasional machines laying around looked familiar but were clearly way too advanced technologically compared to what the public had access to. It almost looked like futuristic alien tech to Lex.

“I feel like we accidentally stumbled into a scifi movie set.” Chloe mumbled as she snapped a few pictures.

Lex nodded. He knew what Chloe meant by that.

“This doesn't help in finding out what my father's up to, though. Let's keep on looking.” Lex said. Chloe simply nodded at this.

They moved on, and turned around an corner just as somebody quite literally ran into them. Chloe fell to the floor, but Lex managed to stand his ground as he readied for possible combat.

To their surprise, a guy who looked like T-1000 from the second Terminator movie stood before them. He looked like he was encased completely in metal from head to toe... his blue eyes and his clothes was the only thing about him that seemed human.

Chloe quickly got to her feet next to Lex, and she pulled out her shock baton out of her purse in case there was going to be a fight.

To their surprise, the man of steel only hesitated for a few seconds, before running past them as if he was on a mission to escape this place.

Lex and Chloe looked at each other, and quickly came to an silent agreement. They both ran after the guy. Whoever that guy was, he looked like he could give them the answers they were looking for.

The guy didn't seem to like that however, and he seemed to be trying to lose them as he ran down hallways that twisted and turned. Finally, the metal guy shouted back: “Stop following me! What do you want from me?”

Lex was about to shout something back when all of a sudden the people in the alien suits appeared before all three of them in a flash of light.

The metal guy growled. “Oh damn it. And I thought today would be the day I finally escaped.
Oh. So the guy was a meta-human who were trying to escape. Both Chloe and Lex had just inadvertently alerted everyone here to his escape when they chased him.

“uhh... sorry?” Chloe replied.

Chloe, Lex and John was now being detained inside what looked like a interrogation room. Just like the ones that police had on those CSI TV shows. They even had what looked like to be a one-way mirror on the far end of the room.

The only difference was, they all knew that this place definitely did not belong to the police.

The guy with them were now back to normal. Once he realized he wasn't going to escape any time soon he had given up, and reverted his skin and hair back to normal.

It was then that Lex recognized him as the guy who had been hired to renovate his cafe a while ago. Apparently the guy had disappeared a while back. Chloe then realized that it was the guy in the pickup truck that Clark had told her about.

“I'm really sorry, Mr. Bythes. You just looked like you knew something about what was going on down here...” Chloe apologized once again.

John scoffed. “Are you sure you want to hear this? I mean... I went though it and it just sounds so crazy. Even I don't believe it half the time myself.”

Both Chloe and Lex nodded. So John sighed and told them his tale. “So you both know that I was injected with somethin' strange a while ago, and then kidnapped. So I don't need to get into all of that. It's what happened afterwards that was the weird part. They said they wanted to start trainin’ me in the use of my powers, and turn me into a super soldier for some future intergalactic war.”

“Intergalactic war?” Chloe repeated, her expression growing more doubtful by the minute.

John smirked at her expression. “Yah. Apparently, they have some information that suggests that aliens are gonna come here soon in the future, and utterly destroy the earth. So that's why they did this bullcrap to the entire town... they wanted to create super-soldiers and have them all breed. And they've been doing this for 10 years, at least.”

Lex's face was perfectly blank as he realized something. “Veritas.”

Both Chloe and John looked at Lex with slightly puzzled expressions on their faces.

Lex pinched the bridge on his nose as if he was fighting off a headache, before saying to John: “I'm so sorry. You wound up being caught up in my father's foolishness. I honestly thought he had gotten over that little obsession of his...”

“Lex, what are you talking about?” Chloe asked.

Lex sighed before answering. “The truth is... my father was in a secret cult a while ago, when I was
just a young kid. Lionel thinks that I don't know about it, but I do. This cult in particular, happened to believe in aliens and that they were going to come to earth one day. It was actually the real reason why he was in Smallville all those years ago during the meteor shower. He honestly believed that there was going to be an alien landing here in this town. He never found anything, of course... just a bunch of meteor rocks.”

Chloe instantly connected the dots as Lex knew she would. “So... you're saying that Lionel never got over this alien obsession of his... and was possibly funding Camdus from the very start?”

Lex nodded.

John shook his head at this. “Damn, boy. How did you end up with such a crazy dad?”

Lex smiled at John wryly. “I have no idea. I wish I knew. But at least I know what he's up to here... maybe I can put an end to all of this now.”

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Marty Munn was watching and listening from behind the two-way mirror with an shocked expression on his face.

Lionel Luthor knew about Kal-El somehow, and had been looking for him during the meteor shower all those years ago? That was.... scary. Marty couldn't even fathom what would happen if Lionel did find him somehow back then. That would had certainly screwed with all of their plans.

He spun around towards one of his subordinates, and said in a testy tone of voice: “Find me everything on this Vertias Cult. NOW!”

the subordinate saluted at this, and quickly left.

It was obvious by now that Marty didn't know the backgrounds and the stories of every player on the board like he thought did. No wonder why some of his plans hadn't worked..... there were all those missing variables that he hadn't accounted for. Like the fact that Lionel Luthor had been in a secret cult. That kind of thing was definitely not in the public records.... and it was evident by now that there was a lot about the Luthor family they didn't know about.

He caught his daughter staring at him with an worried look on her face.

“What is it, sweetie?” He asked.

Macy just smiled slightly, although the worry was still lingering in her eyes. She was still dressed in her alien costume, but her mask was off. “Don't worry, dad. You got this thing in the bag. The future will be fixed before you know it.”

Marty smiled at this, and he nodded. “You're right. That's just... you know how much I hate it when things don't go according to plan. It just drives me nuts. I had everything laid out in my head. By now I should have convinced Lex to trust in Clark more... instead he now thinks that I'm working for Lionel Luthor. Or that Cadmus is part of this Vertias cult. I have no idea how to handle things from here now.”

“I bet you're wishing you were still just a simple book store owner, huh?” Macy said, with a wry grin on her face.

Marty let out a bark of laugh at this. He then gave his daughter a side hug as he replied: “I'll say this. Books are definitely easier to deal with than people.”

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It took Marty a while, but he managed to come up with something.

It was actually more of a stalling tactic, unfortunately. But it would give him time to come up with something better.

He decided that Lex, Chloe and John would be given a temporary memory serum that would suppress their memories of today. They would remember what happened here today, but it wouldn't return to them until days later.

The reasons for this? Marty figured that if he made it look like he intentionally tried to mind-wipe them permanently but failed, that it would really sell the idea that Cadmus was in fact an sinister organization with a lot of power behind it. Otherwise they would wonder why Cadmus had let them go.

Of course they could had made them prisoners, but that would had brought too much trouble before they were ready to deal with it. So temporarily suppressing their memories would be the best thing to go about it. Plus, Marty was still looking into this Vertias thing. It sounded like something he could use against Lionel Luthor.

Now that Marty thought of it, this sort of thing would make Lex and Clark distrust Lionel Luthor even more.

He could make it look like Lionel Luthor was supporting Cadmus all along, and give both young men a cause to rally against together.

Hopefully that would make their friendship even stronger, and make them less likely to distrust each other when they grew older. Perhaps Lex and Superman would be standing together against Darkseid when the time came, instead of working separately.

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Lex blinked, as he woke up in his Porsche outside the farmhouse.

He frowned slightly in confusion as he looked around, trying to remember what it was that he was doing before. He saw Clark come out, and Clark seemed surprised to see him there.

“Lex, you're back. I didn't hear you come down the road. Did you find out what your father was up to?” Clark said once Lex stepped out of the car.

Yes. That's why he had been in his Porsche... he was going somewhere today to find out what his father was up to. It looked like he had been gone all day, and that's why it was night-time now. So he had done something today, but.... why couldn't he remember?

Lex didn't like this feeling he had right now.. it was dangerously close to panic. Clark frowned when he noticed the anxious look on Lex's face.

“Lex, are you alright?” he asked worriedly. Whatever Lex found out about his father, it had to be bad if Lex had that expression on his face.

“No. uh... I don't really want to talk about it right now.” Lex said as he walked inside with Clark following closely behind him.

He didn't speak to the rest of the Kents as he came in, and instead went directly to his guest room so that he could lie down on his bed and try to gather his thoughts.

Clark looked up at the stairs where Lex had gone with a worried expression on his face, before
turning to face his father. “Lex wouldn't even tell me what upset him so much. Whatever he found out about his father's activities at Cadmus, it must be bad.”

Jonathan didn't look that surprised at all. “Of course it was going to be bad... We're talking about Lionel Luthor here after all. Come on, it's time for bed. We can deal with whatever is going on in the morning, okay?”

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Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Put simply, Chloe and Lex does their best to regain their memories back without tipping off Cadmus. And meanwhile Marty does his best to to implicate Lionel and make him look suspicious as hell in Lex's eyes.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for not updating as much as I should have. Writer block can be such a difficult hurdle to get over. :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jonathan tried to hide it, but he was just as worried as Clark was. Although it was for different reasons than the one his son had.

He knew that Camdus was actively looking for his son's spaceship, and had the ship's key (until he stole it). If Lionel was connected to that in any way at all.... well. That couldn't be good at all.

It didn't help that his mind kept on coming up with possible worst-case scenarios every time he dwelled on that topic. His worst nightmare consisted of both Lionel and Camdus finding out about Clark's true origins, and then kidnapping him. Camdus said they were here with the government's backing... so they could legally kidnap Clark and there would be nothing Jonathan and his wife could do about it.

His son Clark was the most precious thing to him in the entire world. The farm came a close second, but he couldn't imagine farm life without his son and his wife around.

It was because of this reason that he often became overprotective of his family to the point of ridiculousness. His wife Martha often told him he was overdoing it, but she understood why he behaved the way he did. Because she too shared some of the same fears he had.

Martha was overprotective in her own way too, but she was far more subtle about it than he was.

It was because of this whole situation that he was less inclined to trust Lex Luthor, but it helped that the young Luthor seemed to be equally as freaked out as he was. And the young Luthor was channelling all of his fears and frustrations into farm work, which was something that Jonathan could approve of. So Lex was mostly okay with him...for now. Didn't mean that he wasn't keeping a eye on him though.

Jonathan just couldn't help but wonder what had upset Lex Luthor so much... but he suspected that they all would find out sooner or later, so he had to do something about his son hovering silently in the background.
Jonathan pretty much agreed with Lex that Clark shouldn't have anything to do with what was going on in Cadmus. But he didn't know how to drag his son away from Lex...

He felt the ship's key press against his hip inside his pocket. He then smiled slightly, because he had came up with a solution just now.

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Clark was freaked out. It was a few days already, and Lex was still acting odd... well, more than was normal for him anyways.

Lex absolutely refused to speak to anybody, and the only thing he would say is that he needed time to himself so that he could gather his thoughts. He had taken to busying himself with chores on the farm now that his eye was fully healed. It seemed to help keep Lex calm even though Clark could tell that he was still silently freaking out over something.

Clark tried to get Lex to open up about what was bothering him, only for all of his efforts to be in vain.

Clark wished he knew what had upset Lex so much... without knowledge of what was going on here, he was starting to imagine the worst things imaginable. Lex had found out that his father was.... what?

That Lionel had somehow found a way to prevent the Camdus group from being brought to justice like Lex feared? Actively participating with the experimenting of innocent people? Or Murdering people??

Clark tried his best not to hover around Lex, but he still couldn't help it.

Eventually his dad noticed this, and sighed as he motioned Clark over to him.

“Just let Lex work his problems out on his own. He can take care of it, whatever it is. Besides... you've got other things to do.” Jonathan said, as he patted his left pocket meaningfully. Clark couldn't help but look though the pocket, and saw the disk key to his spaceship.

Clark took a deep breath when he realized what his dad Jonathan was talking about. “You really think it's time for me to learn more about my... biological parents?”

He paused before saying the last part. Clark always thought of Martha and Jonathan as his true parents, so he wasn't quite sure what to call the people who had given birth to him. If human-like aliens could even give birth to start with? For all he knew he might've been hatched from a egg.

Johnathan shrugged. “Well, you're old enough to learn more about your... biological background. Maybe there's a clue in there about why they sent you here.”

Jonathan glanced over at Lex, who was busy shovelling all the horse shit out of the stalls into a wheelbarrow. “But maybe we should do that when he's not here. Just in case.”

Clark simply nodded.

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Two hours later, Lex left the Kent farmhouse to check on the apartment renovation that was going on above the Talon cafe.

So The Kents and Clark found themselves heading down to the cellar, where Jonathan pulled away
the tarp and revealed the ship for Clark to see.

Martha stood by in the background, silently watching this unfold with a slightly worried expression on her face.

Clark was holding the ship's key with an slightly anxious expression on his face. Slowly, he stepped towards the ship and inserted the key into the cavity where it belonged.

The ship lit up, and slowly hovered upwards. It moved around, as if it was trying to find it's bearings. It stopped, pointing directly at the group. A light beam shot out of the ship right at Martha, and moved all over her body as if it was scanning her. It did Jonathan next, and lastly Clark. Finally, it settled it self back on the ground before opening up the secret cavity that was inside.

Clark peered inside the ship, to find glowing Kryptonian writings all over it on the inside. Clark caught himself imagining what it was like to be a baby stuck living in there as they flew though space. It didn't look like a comfortable living space for a baby, after all... it was just so... small.

He voiced this out loud, and Martha couldn't help but smile slightly.

“You're right son. But maybe you were put into stasis? You know, a type of suspended animation that they're always going on in scifi shows... then it wouldn't had mattered that you wouldn't be comfortable in there, because you wouldn't had been aware of it.” Martha suggested.

Clark nodded. That did make sense. His fingers gingerly touched the alien runes that was engraved on the insides of the ship, and he said: “I wonder what those engravings mean.”

All of a sudden the ship's computerized voice boomed in english, answering Clark's question: “On this third planet from this star Sol, you will be a god among men. They are a flawed race. Rule them with strength, my son. That is where your greatness lies.”

Both Clark and Jonathan stared at the ship in surprise for a few moments, before Clark started freaking out.

“I.. I can't believe it. I was meant to conquer Earth?” Clark cried out as he slowly stepped away from the ship, “No... that can't be true!”

“Now, hold on... maybe the ship meant it in a different way... there's no way you'd be a conqueror, son...” Jonathan said as he reached out to his son, but he didn't sound completely convinced.

Clark shrugged off Jonathan's hand and ran out of the cellar.

“Clark!” Jonathan called after his son, and ran out after his son only to find out that Clark had super-sped away.

He sighed and walked back into the cellar to find his wife Martha staring at the ship with a worried expression on her face.

Jonathan moved to stand by her side, and wrapped an arm around her. “Like I said before... there's just no way our son was sent here to conquer the earth. It isn't possible.”

Martha looked up at her husband. “Isn't it? Clark's such a powerful being... he's ten times more powerful than any of the meteor mutants around here. It'd be so easy for him if he really wanted to do it.”

“Well, we didn't raise him to be a conqueror. And you know Clark... he wouldn't hurt even a single
Jonathan replied. "It's just not in him to be some kind of... alien warlord." Martha smiled at this, and nodded. "You're right. Clark's better than this. We taught him to be better than that."

Feeling reassured by her husband's logic, she turned around to embrace him. She didn't see the worried expression on Jonathan's face.

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Clark found himself at school, despite the fact that it wasn't a school day. It was Saturday, and the building was only open to those who had after school activities and football practice.

He was still freaked out, and the ship's words kept on echoing over and over in his head. He shook his head and decided to head for the Torch office. Maybe he could find something to do there to clear his head. He didn't want to stay at the farm, because he knew that his parents would want to talk about that thing in the cellar. He didn't want to deal with the implications of the ship's words just yet.

It turned out that Chloe Sullivan was at the torch office too, but that wasn't such a surprise. She often stayed there on Saturdays or late after school to churn out the latest editions of the Torch school newspaper so that it could be out on Monday.

It was unusual, though, to see her acting so frantic as she went though the place looking like she was looking for something. It looked like she had trashed the place trying to find whatever it was that she was looking for.

"Grr! Damn it, where the hell is my stuff?" Chloe grumbled to herself. She still hadn't noticed that Clark had came into the room a few minutes ago.

"Errr.... need help finding whatever it is that you're looking for?" Clark wondered.

Chloe nearly jumped out of her skin, but relaxed when she saw who it was. "Actually, yeah. Have you seen my recorder and my camera anywhere? I can't find them."

Clark raised one eyebrow slightly. "the ones you always carry around with you? When did you see them last time."

She let out an frustrated cry. "That's the problem, I can't remember! They're not in my car at all... they weren't in my bedroom, and they're not here."

She stomped over to a chair, and then let herself drop backwards into the chair in a highly dramatic way. She then screamed, "I feel like I'm being gas-lighted and it's driving me crazy!"

Clark wasn't sure what to say to that... so he asked: "I would ask you if you were alright, but it's kind of obvious you aren't. So, why do you feel like you're being gaslit...?"

Chloe sighed. "Well.... I feel like somebody's messing around with my memory. For instance, I know I went to Cadmus labs a few days ago to confront those guys and write an article on them. BUT... I have no memory of ever going there."

Clark seemed interested in this. "Huh. And you know that you went there.... how?"

"It started with my father," Chloe answered, "He said something about me coming in late the next morning and not to do it again. I thought that was weird, because I didn't remember staying out late to do anything. But I brushed it off, and thought maybe he was mistaken. But then I noticed that my
car was low on gas, and it showed signs that I had been driving it around. If I never went to Cadmus then my car wouldn't be low on gas already. And then there was Officer Nancy Adams.”

“What did she do?” Clark wondered.

Chloe scoffed. “Nothing. She just asked me when I was going to get that newspaper edition done when I ran into her at the Beanery. I had no idea what she was talking about, but I faked it and said I was still collecting more evidence before I wrote my article. She was honestly impressed that I was actually collecting more evidence against Cadmus before I did anything. She thought I was finally growing up into a mature lady. She said, and I quote: ‘Normally you go off half-cocked and act without thinking things though. It’s nice to see you doing the opposite for a change.’ She also mentioned the fact that she saw me at Cadmus the day before.”

Clark mulled this over thoughtfully. Finally he said: “Well, at this point it's highly obvious that Cadmus has your recorder and your camera. And that they did something to mess around with your memory. After all the crazy stuff that's happened so far it seems to be the only reasonable explanation.”

Chloe took a deep breath at this. “You think so? What if it's not what you think it is?”

Clark shrugged. “Can you think of any thing else that would explain your memory loss? I mean.... you could had found out something big about Cadmus that they didn't want you to know. But they couldn't kill you or kidnap you because that would bring too much attention to them..... especially if your father and the police knew you were going there. They'd have to deal with answering questions they didn't want to answer, so maybe they thought if they erased your memories then they wouldn't have to deal with that. Also, you know they've been experimenting on humans, turning them into mutants....”

Chloe nodded as she put the pieces together, and saw that Clark's explanation made sense. “Yeah, they could have a meteor mutant who erases memories on their payroll.”

She then perked up slightly. “That could also explain why they've been able to operate in Smallville for so long without anybody asking questions. What if people noticed in the past that they were experimenting on people, but they made people forget? That would explain why they flew under the radar for so long.”

Chloe suddenly thought of something else, and she deflated slightly as she slumped in her seat. “But that means I have to go back to Cadmus to find my stuff.... I don't really want to go by myself.”

“I could come with you.” Clark suggested. He was eager to finally have something to do, and get his mind off what that thing in the storm cellar said to him.

Chloe frowned at this. “Didn't your dad and Lex forbid you from ever going over there because of some deadly allergy you had?”

Clark shook his head. “I'll be fine, I think. It caught me off guard last time... but now that I know what to look for I'm sure I can avoid it. And what about Lex Luthor? He went over there a few days ago because he wanted to find out what his father was up to. When he came back, he acted as if he had seen a ghost. He really didn't want to talk about what he found out over there. Whatever it is that he found out, it's definitely something horrible. You could try asking him first before you go over there too.”

Chloe looked interested in that, and she grinned. “Well, looks like I have somebody to interview, then.”
The upstairs apartment renovation managed to get Lex’s mind off things, as he barked orders at the construction crew.

“No, That doesn't go there... that's supposed to go into the kitchen area.” Lex called out.

He then took the time to really look around his apartment above the Talon building. He had gone for a modern Deco look, but it wasn't so fancy as to deter people from renting it in the future. Lex planned to rent the apartment out one day, once they were done rebuilding the castle and he could move back in again.

He heard two pairs of footsteps come up the stairs to his apartment, and he turned around to see both Chloe and Clark come in.

Chloe looked around, and had a slightly impressed look on her expression. “Wow, this place is coming along really nicely. You've got good taste in decor.”

Lex smiled wanly at this. “Thank you. But I get the feeling you didn't come here to compliment me on my decorating skills.”

Chloe simply nodded. “Can I talk to you alone? It's kind of personal.”

Lex suddenly felt wary, but his curiosity won over. He nodded back, and so they went downstairs.

The Talon coffeehouse was open, but was mostly servicing the construction workers who were taking their lunch break. The rest of the Smallville residents stayed away because there was still too much construction going on there. The workers quietly acknowledged their boss as Lex walked by, before getting back to the sandwiches and coffee they were drinking.

Lex, Chloe and Clark sat at one of the booths in the back, where they would have the most privacy.

Chloe paused slightly as she tried to think of the right words. “Umm... I don't know how to say this. But I was at Camdus a few days ago, and I'm pretty sure you were too.”

That got Lex's attention. He really wanted to know what had happened over at Cadmus, but the way Chloe worded that....

“The way you said that, you don't seem so sure.” Lex said as he looked at her with an quizzical expression on his face.

Chloe fidgeted. “The truth is.... I lost my memories from a few days ago. I know I was at Cadmus when it happened, and I was hoping you would fill in the blanks.”

Lex felt an chill go down his back. Lex had considered the idea that maybe somebody had messed around with his memories, but then worried that maybe he was going crazy. After all, That seemed like something that only a paranoid crazy person would think about. But for Chloe to confirm his fear like this....

Lex thought for a while. There was two ways he could go about this. He could pretend to know what was going on here, and not lose face. But that could backfire on him.

The second option was to be honest about the fact that he had lost his memories too. The downside is that he would seem weak and powerless in front of his friends.... but on the other hand they might be more willing to divulge more information in an attempt to help him?

Well, Chloe and Clark had already seen him weak and helpless the day the tornadoes attacked his
castle. And that didn't seem to make them think badly of him. So he had nothing to lose by being honest in the first place.

“I... I lost my memories from that day too.” Lex quietly said.

This seemed to surprise Clark. “You did? But why did you act so scared those past days? I know you were trying to hide it, but you were seriously freaked out by what was going on!”

Lex scoffed. “Of course I was 'freaked out' as you put it. Think about it... the last thing I remembered was driving off to see my father at Cadmus. I remember wanting to find out what he was up to there, and then all of a sudden I'm back at your farmhouse. It's night-time and that means I lost a lot of time. Time doing things I didn't remember at all. You wouldn't be freaked out by that?”

Chloe nodded. “That's how it was for me too. I remember planning to go to Cadmus, to expose them.... But then the next thing I know I'm waking up in the morning and my father's scolding me for staying out so late.”

Chloe then looked at Clark. “Looks like our theory was right.”

Lex looked at them, his eyes alternating between the two of them. “What theory?”

Chloe then briefly outlined the theory about a meteor mutant on Cadmus's payroll, one who could wipe memories out. And that was how Cadmus had flown under the radar for so long without anybody finding out what they were really up to.

When she finished, Lex couldn't help but shake his head. “That's disturbing.... really disturbing. Honestly, that's starting to piss me off.”

Chloe nodded. “I know, right? The thought of somebody just casually rifling though my memories and then messing around with them like that... ugh! How dare they?”

Clark frowned. “Do you think your father knew about this too?”

Lex snorted. “Honestly... I don't know. But I wouldn't put it past him. It does seem like the sort of thing he'd be into. If he could find a way to control memories, he'd be unstoppable.”

Clark couldn't help but look very disturbed by this.

Chloe gasped as she suddenly remembered something. A part of her memory was no longer suppressed by the drug that Cadmus had given her. It was steadily and slowly floating upwards to the surface of her conscious mind.

“My god. I just remembered standing outside of Cadmus! I was interrogating your father about his involvement with the Cadmus group. I think my memory's coming back.” She told the guys.

Lex seemed to light up somewhat at this. “Ah... that means the memory loss isn't permanent. We both could get our memories back.”

Chloe made a 'hmm' sound at this. “When you talked about your father and Cadmus, that seemed to jog something in my brain, and that's when that part of my memory came back. We need to do something that would jog the rest of it back?”

“We could go talk to Lionel, and bring up Cadmus? See how he reacts, and maybe you could remember more things that way? We could also try to force Cadmus into telling us what they did to you two.” Clark suggested.
Lex smirked. “The first part’s doable. We should all go together to see him, but let me do the talking. We wouldn’t want to tip him off and let him know that we’re on to him. You two listen for anything suspicious on your end while I talk to my father.”

Chloe nodded. She was happy to have a plan instead of feeling so helpless for once.

Lionel was in a extremely bad mood, and for good reason. He was stuck in this poor excuse of an office at the castle while the renovation of the castle was still going on, and the noise was giving him an massive headache.

He wanted to be back in his office in Metropolis so badly, but he couldn’t leave Smallville just yet. All because of that damned Camdus group! It tore at his pride to think that somebody out there could actually steal from him and get away with it. And that he wasn’t able to do anything about it... yet. He personally needed to keep an eye on things here otherwise he might miss out on something important.

Right now, he was supposed to be reading the proposals sent to him by his board of directors, and approving the ones that made the most financial sense in the long run. But as the young men nowadays would say, his head was simply not in the game. His thoughts kept on straying back to Camdus, and the possible threat they posed to him.

He could hear the loud sound of nail guns being used in another part of the castle as they quickly put up the walls. The banging of hammers soon followed. His headache started throbbing again at the sound.

He sighed as he tossed the papers back on his desk. He briefly considered taking his work elsewhere, like to the Beanery coffeehouse or even his son’s new coffeehouse. But then he’d have to deal with hostile townsfolk or his son on top of his headache. That wasn’t very appealing.

His aide came in with a slightly nervous look on his face. “Sir? There’s somebody here to see you. He said that his name is Marty Munn, and that you were expecting him? But I didn't see his name in the appointment book.”

Lionel Luthor sneered at the name, but his curiosity was piqued. What did that man from Camdus want from him?

He nodded at his aide as he said: “Let him in.”

Marty Munn looked around as he came in. He chuckled nervously as he spoke to Lionel, “I don't see how you can even work here with all of this racket going on.”

Lionel Luthor wasn't one for beating around the bush... not when it came to somebody he greatly disliked. He narrowed his eyes at Mr. Munn, and asked: “What do you want? You wouldn't have come all the way over here without a good reason.”

Marty Munn smiled an grim smile at this. “Getting to the point, are we? Very well... put simply, I wanted to apologize to you for my behaviour a few days ago.”

Lionel raised one eyebrow at this.

That wasn’t what he had expected at all. what was this pathetic-looking man up to? “Oh?” That was all he said as he leaned back in his seat in an casual manner.

Marty nodded. “Yes. You see, I ran a background check on you after you left. And what turned up... well, needless to say it surprised me very much. I would had never pegged you as the type who
belonged to the Veritas organization.”

Lionel had an inkling of where this was going, but he had to make sure. “I see. Why would this make you apologize to me?”

Marty held his hands out to indicate that he was indeed very sorry. “For one thing, it does give you authorized access to..... certain confidential information. Information that I was keeping from you when we first met. I'm sure that you know that Cadmus was founded by Veritas back in the day, and is being partly funded by the government. We run mostly on the funds left by the Queen family, though. You know who they were?”

Lionel let out an quiet exhale at this.
He fucking knew it. He had an gut feeling all along that this whole thing had to do with Veritas somehow... it had been eating away at him at the back of his mind but he had never been able to confirm it. To hear this being said out loud... it was like a dozen pieces just clicked into place.

He did know the Queen family... Robert Queen and his wife Laura had been part of the Veritas organization for much longer than the Luthors had been. In fact it had been a generational thing for the Queens. They passed in the Veritas organization from father to son, and so as an result they had held a position of power in the organization for the longest time. but then they had gone down in a tragic boating accident, with their youngest son Oliver being the only survivor.

The only other people involved was the Swann family, and the Teague family.

Lionel had never told anybody else this, but years ago he had dug up some dirt on the Queen family. They kept on acting like everyone in the Veritas organization would have access to the alien being once it arrived on earth, but the Queens had been planning to find the Traveller and keep it for themselves. They wanted to exploit the alien's knowledge of the cosmos for all it was worth, and become more powerful than everyone else in the organization. So as an result they had knowingly withheld important information from the rest of the families.

Obviously, every other family also wanted that for themselves but there had been a silent agreement that they would lay off the backstabbing and subterfuge until the traveller was within everyone's grasp. So naturally Lionel Luthor and the Teagues had been pissed off to hear that the Queens had violated this silent agreement. As an result they had arranged for the Queen family to have a.... very unfortunate accident.

And Lionel had taken all the information that the Queen family had collected on the Traveller in order to find out where the alien would land. This information had led him right to Smallville. Naturally, He couldn't risk sharing this information with the others in the chances that they would try to steal the Traveller away from him.... so he hadn't told anybody else in Veritas about this critical piece of information. Instead, he had invented an excuse for why he was going to Smallville, so that nobody would get suspicious.
That stupid fertilizer factory.

Come to think of it, Cadmus had formed as a group at the same time Lionel Luthor arrived in Smallville. Which meant that Robert Queen had planned things out in advance before he had his unfortunate accident.

To think that Robert Queen had been ten steps ahead of him all along. Lionel couldn't help but scowl at the thought.

He suddenly realized that Marty was staring at him expectantly, and he smiled. “I got lost in thought for a moment there. I had no idea that Queen had left Veritas some funds so that the organization
would run things in his absence. It does make sense however... he was always the sort who thought two steps ahead of everyone else.”

Marty nodded. He then replied: “At any rate... the fact that you are a part of Veritas automatically gives you access to classified information. As I said before. So in order to make up for my rudeness, I thought I'd personally come here and answer any questions you had. So... if you have any questions to ask me, now would be the time.”

With that, Marty gave Lionel his best disarming smile.

Lionel raised his eyebrows again. He knew Marty was up to something, and couldn't help but feel suspicious again. Still..., he couldn't turn down this opportunity at all.

“Let's start with the disc your men took from me. Why did you steal it from me?” Lionel asked.

“We took it because we knew it was part of an space ship that we were looking for. To be specific, it was the key to the spaceship.” Marty said, getting right to the point, “A while back, we recently devised of a way to detect foreign metal that was not native to Earth. That would had made our search so much easier... but unfortunately for us the meteor rocks inferred with our search for the spaceship. But when Mr. Cole put up that key for sale, it caught our attention. Unfortunately for us, you brought the key before we could get around to putting in an offer. We knew we had to get that key at all costs if we wanted to find out where that spaceship was hiding.”

That made sense to Lionel. But all the same he just smirked at Marty as if he was a simple-minded fool. “How do you know that the ship is still in Smallville? For all you know, the Traveller could had gone elsewhere after he landed, and taken his ship with him.”

Marty raised one eyebrow. “Well considering that the meteor rocks reside only in Smallville... it'd be pretty easy for us to detect when the ship was moving away from Smallville once it left the range of the meteor rocks. Without the meteor rocks around to confuse our sensors, it would stand out too much. Ergo..., it's still in Smallville.”

Lionel couldn't argue with that logic at all. But before he could ask another question, his son walked right into the room.

“Oh, pardon me. I didn't know you had company.” Lex Luthor drawled, as he stood aside to let Clark Kent and Chloe into the room.

Lionel sighed in annoyance, but didn't say anything as he glared at his son.

Marty Munn turned around to look at the new arrivals, and Lex smirked when he recognized the man.

“Oh, it's you! What a coincidence, my friend Clark and I were just talking about you. This is the man who's in charge of Camdus Labs, Clark. I think you met him once before.” Lex replied, as he gestured at Marty Munn.

Clark nodded at Marty, and then frowned. “I've seen you around a few times. You have a teenage daughter who goes to my school, don't you? I've seen you drop her off at school....”

Marty blinked, but he nodded back. “That's right. Her name's Macy Munn. You know her?”

Clark shrugged. “Not really. I see her around, but I actually don't know her per se...”

Lex raised his eyebrows. “Marty and Macy Munn. Your family seem to suffer from a love of alliterative names the same way my family does. Let me guess, your wife's name also starts with an
Marty wondered where this was going, and it was easy to look confused as he answered: “No, my late wife's name was Laura. Why do you ask?”

“Oh nothing. I was just wondering.” Lex said as he put on his best innocent smile.

“Lex...” Lionel growled slightly. “What are you doing here? And why did you bring along those teenagers?”

At this point Chloe finally spoke up. “Actually I wanted to do a follow up interview with you, Lionel. You're a very hard man to reach, so I had to use all the contacts I had who would allow me to get close to you...”
With that, she gestured at both Clark and Lex.

Lionel raised one eyebrow. “I don't recall ever having an interview with you before.”

Chloe rolled her eyes at that. “Um, you did have a few words with me in front of Camdus labs that day, didn't you? That qualifies as an interview in my book... however brief it was.”

Chloe then smiled wickedly as she pulled out her backup tape recorder. “As I recall... you said that you had nothing to do with whatever was going on at Cadmus. That you're just an innocent man who were concerned over how they were spending your money as an investor. Yet, here you are... having a meeting with the leader of Cadmus in secret. What do you have to say for yourself?”

Lionel was now thoroughly annoyed.
First the loud castle renovations and the headaches, and now this? He wasn't in the mood to deal with a young girl who had delusions about being an legitimate newspaper reporter.

He glanced over at his son Lex, who seemed to be smirking at him. He mentally sighed, and thought to himself: 'so, that's how it is, Lex? Resorting to annoying me like this... Really, how childish can you get.'

Marty glanced all around him, and he was secretly delighted by this turn of events. Really, he couldn't had planned it better.
It was obvious that Chloe and Lex was starting to remember things again, otherwise they wouldn't be here to question Lionel over what happened at Cadmus. Marty just needed to say the right thing that would trigger all of their memories into returning again.

He leaned over the desk to whisper at Lionel, knowing very well that Clark Kent would be able to hear everything he said.

“This seems to be a bad time. Schedule a later meeting with me at Cadmus... we can talk some more about Veritas there without worrying about those... interruptions.”

With that, He stood back up. Lionel simply nodded at him, and Marty took that as his cue to leave.

On his way out, Clark gave him a very curious look... it was obvious that he had overheard that part.

Clark turned to face Lionel, and asked: “What's this Veritas thing?”

“I don't know what you're talking about. Now, I'm a very busy man... I would really appreciate it if you all let yourselves out. Or do I have to call security?” Lionel replied as he gathered up the papers on his desk.
Lex shrugged. “Alright. I was just doing a favour for Chloe. Chloe did you get everything you needed for your article?”

Chloe nodded. “Yeah. I mean, I would've liked to have more material... but it seems like your dad isn't exactly cooperative right now.”

With that, all three of them left the room and walked down the hallways. As they walked out, Lex asked: “Why did you ask that, Clark?”

“Oh... um, I was standing the closest to Lionel and Mr. Munn. So I overheard Marty say something about Veritas. I just wondered what that was.” Clark said as the three of them walked outside.

Lex shook his head as he realized what that meant. “Oh, jeez. I had hoped that Lionel had grown out of that phase all those years ago. I can't believe he's still a part of that.”

Clark looked at Lex. “You know what it is?”

Lex scoffed. “Believe it or not, but my dad was part of some cult back in the day. To be specific, an cult that worshipped aliens.”

Clark was shocked into silence at this. Chloe on the other hand, just laughed.

“As in green little men?” She asked in an disbelieving tone of voice.

Lex rolled his eyes. “Exactly. God, it's so embarrassing to find out that my dad's still into that kind of stuff.”

Chloe frowned. “But what does an alien worshipping cult have to do with Cadmus?”

At that moment, Both Chloe and Lex suddenly stopped walking as their minds were suddenly flooded with memories.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
-- days ago, underground---

The two of them were chatting with John when masked men suddenly burst into the room and started grabbing them all.

They tried to put up a fight, but it was in vain as they found themselves injected with some kind of sedative. John managed to turn himself to steel before they could do the same to him, but they still put those futuristic-looking cuffs on him that prevented him from fighting back. The last they saw of John, he was struggling in vain to break free from his cuffs as they dragged him away.

They found themselves strapped to gurneys, and weakly struggled against the straps that forcibly held them down as the masked men rolled them down the hallway.

The next thing Chloe and Lex knew, they were inside some kind of laboratory where the Cadmus scientists appeared to be creating some kind of chemical.

Marty appeared by Lex with an evil-looking smirk on his face. “Ah, Lex.... you and your little friend there? You're really lucky this time. Truthfully.... killing you two normally would be the first thing I do. But... killing you two would bring too much attention to us this time. Not to mention it would get really awkward with your father if I killed his son. You know what I mean, right?”

Chloe tried to fight the sedatives running though her veins, but in the end the drug won out. She passed out, and thus wasn't around to hear the next part.
“What.... what are you going to do to us?” Lex asked as he struggled against his restraints. It was apparently taking Lex much longer to go under, thanks to his newly enhanced healing abilities.

Marty kept up the evil smirk on his face, even though his face was starting to hurt. “You get to be our new lab rats for an experimental memory drug that we’ve been testing for a while. If everything goes well then you won’t remember anything about Cadmus. I have to admit, this method is so much tidier than just killing you outright. No body to depose of, and nobody comes around asking us awkward questions as to where their loved ones went to. I think we might just stick with this new method from now on.”

“Bastard.” Lex growled, as he tried to free himself again.

Marty looked up at one of the masked men, who were holding up an syringe. He silently nodded, giving the masked man the go-signal.

The second man quickly injected the memory drug into Lex's neck, which finally caused Lex to pass out.

--Present day--

Chloe held her head as her mind was bombarded with large waves of memories. “Oh god. I remember everything now.”

Lex looked slightly unsteady on his feet, but he nodded. “Yeah... me too. Those bastards tied us down and injected us with some kind of memory drug. It was supposed to erase our memories of Cadmus. It didn't work for some reason though? Maybe it conflicted with the sedative they gave us earlier that day?”

Chloe looked mildly disappointed at this. “So there's no meteor mutant with the ability to wipe memories? I was so sure about that part...

Clark looked between the two of them, unsure of what to say. Finally he said, “So.... you both know what they're hiding there, right?”

Chloe chuckled. “Oh yeah. You remember that guy you helped at the Talon? John something... anyways, they kidnapped him. We ran into him when he was trying to escape, and he told us that there was more like him being held captive down there. There's like a dozen secret underground levels under Cadmus, and we saw some of those levels for ourselves before we got caught.”

Lex simply nodded. “It's the truth. I still don't know what experimenting on human beings and turning them into meteor mutants have to do with my dad's alien cult at all. But I suppose we'll find that out down the road.”

Clark felt like he needed time to process all of this. First he found out that he was apparently sent to earth in order to conquer it, and now he found out that Lex's father worshipped people like him? Even worse, they might be experimenting on people because of him? That was just the feeling he got even nobody else reached that conclusion on their own.

Why did everything seem to be always connected to him in some way? He was truly sick and tired of everything being eventually be about his alien heritage. Would it honestly hurt the universe to have random stuff happen, and not even be remotely connected to him in any way at all?

Lex sighed as he thought of something. “we obviously can't go back to Cadmus or they'll know that
we regained our memories. I get the feeling that they'll do something drastic if we alert them to the fact that we remember and that we know what they're up to. We need to play it safe... come up with a plan. Maybe find another good reason for going back to Cadmus, while letting them think that the memory drug of theirs is working. In other words, we need to find a good reason to go back... one that Cadmus wouldn't be suspicious of.”

Chloe frowned at that, while shaking her head at this. “I see where you're coming from... But there's no way you guys can stop me from writing about Cadmus. I mean, the very least I can do is write about how inhumane their animal testing is, and talk about how they're obviously behind the attacks on Smallville citizens. Um, I won't write anything about the underground labs they have there or about the people they kidnapped until I get back my evidence of that. Is that okay?”

Lex nodded. “Fine with me. Just don't go back there without backup, okay?”

Chloe nodded back. Clark looked between the two of them, and was frowning this time.

“That's it? We're not going to do anything else?” Clark wondered.

Lex raised one eyebrow slightly. “Well, unless you have a better idea.... then yes.”

Clark tried to think of something they could do, but couldn't come up with anything. Lex smirked slightly as he replied, “Yeah, that's what I thought. Come on, let's go back to your home. It's getting dark, so your parents must be wondering where you are.”

With that, Lex walked over to his Porsche. Chloe took that as a cue to go back to her own car. Clark sighed as he followed Lex to his car.

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Dinner at the Kent farmhouse was quiet tonight, as everyone ate in silence.

Finally, Jonathan broke the silence after a long while.

“So... I didn't see you around the farm earlier today. Where did you run off to?” He asked his son, as he poured gravy over his mashed potatoes.

“Oh. I... uh.... I was with Chloe. She needed my help with something.” Clark replied, not sure if he should tell his parents the whole story. “And then I went over to the Talon with Chloe to see Lex.”

Jonathan wasn't sure what to say to this. “I see.”

Lex smiled. “Speaking of which... It seems that my apartment will be done in two more days. I'll finally be out of your hair by then.”

Jonathan couldn't help but smile back at this piece of news. Lex was the perfect guest relatively speaking, but Jonathan was relived to learn that he wouldn't need to worry about Lex finding out about Clark the longer he stayed here. A Luthor was still a Luthor, after all.

Lex smirked when he noticed how relived Johnathan seemed to feel. He said, “I know you were used to your privacy, and it must had been very stifling with me around. So for this reason I'm very grateful that you allowed me to stay here in the first place... and doubly so because you had no good reason to let me stay here, given the bad blood between you and my father. If there is anything I can do for you in return... please let me know.”

Jonathan sighed. There it was. While Lex was different from his father in some ways... there were moments where he acted just a little too much like his father Lionel. He tried not to get irritated by
the offer, and instead replied in a very cool tone of voice: “There's no need for that, son. After all, you've earned your keep here. I have to say, I never thought I'd see the day when I actually saw an Luthor do the farm chores around here. That's all the thanks I needed in return.”

Lex sensed that he had crossed a line there somehow, so he simply nodded. “Alright.”

Clark raised his eyebrows at his dad's sudden shift in attitude, and he glanced over at his mother. His mother met his eyes, and she cleared her throat.

“So... anybody want coffee and pie after dinner?” Martha wondered out loud.

Lex glanced down at his plate, which was only halfway empty. “I'm only halfway though this plate of food and already I'm starting to feel full. Thank you though.”

Jonathan nodded. “I'll have that coffee. I need to finish up some chores before heading to bed tonight.”

Clark grinned. “I'll have the pie.”

Lex looked amused by this. “Honestly, I have to wonder where you put away all that food. Must have a hollow leg or something.”

Clark shrugged as he smiled back at Lex. “What can I say? I'm just a growing boy.”

Jonathan swallowed the last of his food on his own plate. He thought of something, and then said: “Lex... I'd like to talk to you in private for a second, if you don't mind. Once you're done eating, of course.”

Lex briefly paused at this, but then nodded. “I'll see you outside, then?”

Jonathan nodded at this. Martha came over with his coffee.

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The two of them at outside on the porch swing, while Jonathan collected his thoughts.

Jonathan really wanted to know what Cadmus was up to, but wasn't sure how to go about it without exposing his family. But he had to do something so that he wouldn't be caught off guard by whatever they were up to. Knowledge is power, after all.

Finally, he spoke. “As you know, I went there that day too... to deliver the groceries that they needed. Umm.... while I was there, I saw some funny stuff. By funny stuff, I mean downright strange. I was hoping you would be able to explain to me what I just saw.”

There. He could play the role of the clueless farmer who was simply concerned about how Cadmus would affect his beloved farming community.

Lex let out an exhale at this, as his mind flash-backed to the secret levels where he had seen all those futuristic-looking tech. He asked, “Could you describe to me the strange things you saw?”

Jonathan answered, “I delivered my groceries, and then on my way out, I peeked in on a few laboratory rooms to see what they were doing there. I saw those diagrams on the walls and sketches of what appeared to be some kind of space ship. If I didn't know better, I'd say they were looking for an alien space ship. But that can't be right, is it? Maybe they’re just working on some spacecraft for NASA or something.”
Lex’s expression grew even more grim at this. It was seeming more likely by the minute that Cadmus and Lionel Luthor was really working together on something, and that Lionel was still obsessed with aliens.

Lex forced an smile into his face when he noticed that Jonathan was looking at him. He then replied: “Ah. That last thing you said... it does seem like a very reasonable explanation for what they're doing there.”

Jonathan narrowed his eyes. “But....? you don't seem convinced that's what they're doing there. Tell me, Lex. What are they really doing up there... and what do they have planned for the entire town?”

Lex scoffed. What did he have to lose by telling Jonathan? The entire town was going to find out anyway if Lex had to bring Lionel to court over this incident. Plus, Clark knew and he got the feeling that Clark was going to tell his father sooner or later. Still, it was just so damn embarrassing.

“The truth is...this is embarrassing for me to admit. But for a while there, my father's always had some.... unusual interests ever since I was a little kid. I had thought... well, hoped, that he had grown out of it because I stopped seeing signs that he was indulging in those interests of his. Only to find out that he simply became better at hiding it.” Lex said.

Jonathan just looked confused at this. “Lex... what are you talking about?”

“My father's in an cult that worships aliens. There, I said it.” Lex said, as he rubbed his forehead.

That caught Jonathan completely off guard. “What? I'm not sure I heard that correctly.”

Lex couldn’t help but laugh at Mr. Kent's reaction. “Yep, you heard me. He worships green little men in ufos. Do you see why I'd be embarrassed to even admit that? In fact I'll tell you something good... you should get a good laugh out of this. Did you know that on the day the meteors came to earth, Lionel was here for another reason? He had intel that told him that an alien creature was going to land here in Smallville... he even had those charts detailing the space ship's trajectory and everything.”

Lex then let out a bitter laugh as he ran one hand over his bald head. “Of course, what he got was a bunch of meteor rocks raining down on him instead. And I got to pay for his foolishness, too. I honestly thought he had given up on this alien obsession of his after that... but I guess not.”

Jonathan felt shell-shocked by this revelation, and he didn't know what to say to that. So he just sat there in silence trying to process all of this. There was also a part of him that was metaphorically shivering in fear at the implications of this. His mind was vividly painting a very nasty picture of what would had happened to his son had Lionel been the one to find him instead.

He felt like throwing up. There was a roaring in his ears, and Jonathan clinically recognized that sound as the blood pumping quickly though his veins, and he could feel his heart beating quickly too.

The information Lex gave him.. it was like some of his worst dreams had came true.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I know the Tegaues were the one who founded Vertias and not the Queens. But this is an AU, so I figured that I'd flip their roles around. Besides, with Oliver Queen
being who he is... I felt that it might be more meaningful if the Queens were connected to the Traveller in some way.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!