Summary

Sequel to Tuesday Tribulations. Jonathan gets presents. Oliver gets trouble. The Clex get busy.
Disclamor: I don't own. I toyed with DC Comics' property for the free amusement of fellow fans.
Warnings: MPEG.
Note: This story written for Ender Wiggins. Thanks for all the LJ help, Ender.
"Goodnight, son."

"Goodnight, honey."

Jonathan folds his cellphone closed. He leans back against a pillow propped up against the cedar headboard of their bed. "What do you think?"

Martha adjusts the colorful Navajo blanket spread across their bed. "Clark says that he's fine."

"He's a grown boy I mean, man." Jonathan stares at the miniature Christmas tree tucked into a corner of the room. Bright scarlet and yellow chili peppers hang next to copper Santas and turquoise-hued glass balls. A horse blanket is spread around the foot of the tree. He half-heartedly adds, "Maybe we should step back."

"No reason why we can't step back all the way home."

"That's true." Jonathan glances at the pair of battered suitcases sitting next to the wooden luggage rack shoved against the ranch house wall. "We're already packed for the bus trip into San Antonio."

"I wish we could leave now, but it would cause too much comment."

"We'll have to wait until morning." Jonathan nods his agreement. "The rest of the tour group knows that we have a farm. I can tell them that we got a call about sick cows."

"Sick cows can happen to anyone," Martha taps her pen against her puzzle book as she considers. "And we won't be getting back that early. There's only two more B&Bs on the tour. We can eat breakfast here, then break the sick cows news and make our farewells on bus. The tour guide can help us arrange a flight from San Antonio."

"We wouldn't be the only ones that left the tour; the Taylors decided to stay in Arizona and the Walkers parted company with us in Louisiana." Jonathan picks up the TV remote. He shivers at the sound of a distant howl in the night. Probably only a coyote, but he's lived in Smallville far too long
to be comfortable with eerie noises in the night. "Clark sounded calmer than I expected about this."

"Umm." Martha inks a row of letters across her crossword. "He was with Lex."

"You mean that Lex might have been in the room with him and he couldn't talk freely? Yeah. That might be it. He'd have to sound like he wasn't worried in front of that Luthor."

Martha stares at him, a faintly exasperated gleam in her blue eyes, and then goes back to inking neat letters down the next row. "Clark is always calmer when he's around his friends."

"That psycho is not a friend." Jonathan scowls as he remembers the brightness of Clark's smile when his son talked about Alicia and how wonderful it was to be with someone who knew the truth about him and still wanted to "God damn!"

Martha starts. "Jonathan!"

"Sorry." He clicks the remote and the credits for TV movie begin scrolling across the screen. It's been a weird day and he's thinking crazy stuff. That's all there is to it. It's Lex Luthor Crazy to think that his son and that psycho son of a psychotic might be could be - Jonathan scowls. Just because Alicia and Lex both had season tickets for the Crazy Bus and merely because Clark's face lit up like a Christmas tree for that pair of loons does not NOT mean that his son is interested in Lex in exactly the same way that Clark had liked Alicia.

Oh, hell. Who is he trying to fool? How could Clark resist Crazy With A Castle? His son had been breathing pretty quickly, and had been in quite a hurry to get off the phone. Somehow he can't imagine his son being in that big a hurry to go play with Lex's gym equipment. Oh, god. His son and Lex's equipment. Jonathan grabs for the antacid tables on his bedside table and shakes a couple into his palm. He crunches the tablets and washes them down with a swallow of water.

Jonathan glances at his wife as she continues to placidly work her puzzle. Had she not heard that breathless tone in their son's voice? Had she really believed that Clark had been feigning his way through a gym workout like he had in high school? Of course, she did have that soft spot for Luthors. How she could look at Lex and see a poor motherless boy, or look at Lucas and see a neglected child, or look at Lionel and see a regretful, reformed man, instead of clutch of coiled vipers, is beyond him.

He kicks the sound up a notch as the move music fades and Martha sets her puzzle aside as the Late
Nite Lite News logo flashes on the screen. A polished blond anchor smiles at the camera, "Good evening. I'm Carver James, bringing you weather, sports, and news from across the nation."

The cool brunette beside him leans forward and smiles brightly. "And I'm Jennifer Hills. Welcome to Late Nite Lite! Here's our weather reporter, Candi to tell you what's happening with the weather."

"Thanks, Jennifer and Carver." Candi gives the camera a soulful stare from big blue eyes and begins a breathy monologue on cloud patterns while posing in front of a colorful map.

Jonathan shakes his head as he listens to a scandalously superficial forecast. "God help any poor farmer who's depending on that to make a decision."

"No one watches this show for the weather reports and you know it."

"Don't know that I'd go so far as to say that." Jonathan eyes the mike clipped precariously to Candi's wobbling cleavage. He feels certain that there are any number of men watching the weather forecast with rapt attention. He starts as his wife smacks him with her puzzles. "Hey! What was that for?"

Martha gives him a look. "You know perfectly well what that was for."

"Your's are prettier." Jonathan grins at her.

"You're going to have to do better than that if you want to get lucky tonight, mister."

Jonathan reaches out and takes her hand, threading his fingers through hers. "I'm already the luckiest guy on the face of the earth. I've got you for my wife."

"I'm the lucky one." Martha snuggles closer to him as they continue to watch the TV.

"Huh," Jonathan murmurs fifteen minutes later. The sports reporter has finished his tally of which major teams had won and the anchors are still chattering away about celebrities and new movies. "Still no mention of alien invasions. Not on the national news, not on the local news, and not even on this show. Do you think the government is covering it up?"
Martha shakes her head. "How could they? Chloe emailed us her article and the photograph. She said that the Daily Planet's special edition was already on the second printing. Their server crashed from all the hits. And it sounded like a sizable portion of Metropolis saw the rescue."

"So why isn't it on the news?"

A shampoo commercial finishes playing and then the screen shows the Late Nite Lite set; a desk decked with green garlands that had been sprayed with fake snow. The two glossy anchors sit behind the desk, framed by the weather girl on one end and the sports reporter on the other. Carver James smiles warmly at the camera. "And now for our Capes In The News. Metropolis, Kansas has acquired it's very own official cape today. The city's first cape ever, I might add."

Jennifer flicks her bob back. "Can the city's first supervillain be far behind?"

Candi snorts. "And what's he going to be called the Purple-Black AntiBlur?"

Sid, the sports reporter nods. "Maybe they'll get another cape instead. Who wants to be the Red-Blue Blur's nemesis anyway? Like any villain's going to get respect for that."

Carver addresses the camera in a confiding tone, "Now those of you who follow the superhero news, have been asking us, 'What about the Green Arrow? What's up with him?' Unfortunately, I was not able to get in touch with the GA and put that question to him."

"As it happens," Jennifer smirks, "I have an answer for our viewers. I spoke the Green Arrow's publicist, and she asked me to assure everyone that there is absolutely no truth to the rumor that the Green Arrow has abandoned Star City to move to Metropolis. He is still a Star City cape."

"The Green Arrow has a publicist?" Martha shakes her head. "I guess he needs some way for people to get in touch with him. I wonder if they all have publicists? I can see Wonder Woman with one; she is a diplomat as well as a superhero."

"God knows." Jonathan murmurs back, "Can you imagine Batman with a publicist? Or interviewing publicists?"
"That's wonderfully productive of you, Jenny," Carver James holds his smile as he turns to his co-anchor. "I'm sure our viewers appreciate your industriousness on their behalf. I know I do."

She dusts her finger tips over the name plate in front of her that reads 'Jennifer Hills'. "You're welcome Carvie."

Carver flushes and turns his rigid smile back on the camera. "I'm sure that's a load off the minds of Star City citizens. I can see how they would be concerned, given the sheer number of recent Green Arrow sightings in Metropolis and environs. Did his publicist say why the Green Arrow has been seen so often in Metropolis, Jen?"

"Well, Car, she said that he was on vacation."

Sid snorts. "In Kansas?"

"And visiting friends," Jennifer adds with a brilliant smile.

"Friends, hmmm, I wonder what that means for Metropolis' very own Red-Blue Blur?" Carver muses. "Is the Green Arrow getting in a spot of superhero mentoring? Or is he checking out this newest addition to the caped community? Are they buds? Did the publicist have anything to say on that point, J?"

Jennifer frowns briefly. "No, C, the Red-Blue Blur wasn't mentioned during our conversation."

Carver gives her a condescending smile. "Didn't think to ask, hmmm? That's too bad, because I'm certain that our viewers want to know. Now those of you who have been following the Red-Blue Blur story will be happy to know that he came out today."

Jonathan sits upright. "Clark did what?! With who?"

"I think he means as a superhero, sweetheart." Martha pats her husband's bicep. "You relax now. Mind your heart."

"My heart's fine." Jonathan clutches the remote tighter as he remembers the sounds of Lex's voice
mingling with his son's heavy breathing. He allows his wife to ease him back against his pillow.

"Earlier today, the Red-Blue Blur rescued a bus of children who were returning from the mall after seeing Santa. He then went public by granting a personal interview to Chloe Sullivan, a Daily Planet reporter. The newspaper published a special edition." Carver glances offstage. "I believe we have a copy of there it is."

Jonathan inhales sharply as the front page of the Planet fills the TV screen. His spandexed son is standing in front of a yellow school bus with a little girl. The bold headline reads, 'The Red-Blue Blur Revealed!'

Carver's assured voice continues as the camera refocuses on his face, "There seems to be some disagreement over what the new Cape said his name was Superguy, Superman, or Supergay."

The camera zooms in on Jennifer's tight smile next, "According to Miss Sullivan's interview, his name is Superman. Since she's the only reporter that he's spoken to, I believe we should go with Superman instead of some of the other reports."

"I'll say," mutters Sid's voice, "there's a whole lotta man packaged into those tighty redies."

"Sid!" Jennifer hisses as the camera zooms back out. "Your mike it's still on!"

"Sound like Sid's voting for the Supergay category, J." Carver smirks. "We've posted a link on our website to the Daily Planet's article. Go read it and then vote in our Red-Blue Blur poll Superguy, Supergay, or Superman? You decide."
It's A Red K Christmas! (2/62)

Chapter Summary

Kara wakes

What was that? Kara clutches her pillow to her pink flannel pajamas and sits up. One by one, she slowly identifies the still alien sounds. The soft tick-tick-ticks of the various clocks. The creaky-creak-creaks that Clark had told her was the sound of the old wooden house adjusting to temperature variations. The fsssh-sssh-wwwoossh of the heat pump kicking off. The whip-snap of wind around the corners of the house and the sharp whistle as it sailed under the eaves.

The squeak of the rooster weather vane turning on the barn. Further out were the muttered cranky cluck of the odd wakeful hen. The rustle and stomp of the cows. The slowing beat of their hearts as they slept. The raspy rattle of the tattered scarecrow watching over the dormant field. Beyond that, she can hear the small cries and noises of strange predators and their prey. Past the borders of the farm, there's the sound of car tires and the static crackle of the patrol car's radio. Then there's the town with more people noises, beating hearts, voices, TVs, and radios.

And not a second's comfort to be had from any of it, because it was all subtly, constantly wrong. The words felt wrong in her mouth. The food wrong on her tongue. The multitude of languages and music wrong in her ear. The smells in her nose. The colors, the clothes, the culture. All wrong. All of it. Is it worth the trade – the strength, the powers? She holds out her hand and flexes it.

She looks no different from a human girl, and yet with this one hand – Kara opens her hand and stares at it, So strong. So amazingly strong. Strong enough to do incredible things. She had been thrilled at the idea of possessing those powers when her father had sealed her into her ship. Thrilled to think that when she woke, she would be in an exotic world. Less thrilled at the idea of more baby-sitting, of raising her infant cousin.

It had all turned out so different from those long ago dinner table discussions with her Uncle and Aunt. And those separate discussions – Kara closes her hand and lets it drop back to her knees – in the privacy of her own mind, she might as well call it by the right word, 'debriefings' with her dear, dear father. What she wouldn't have given to have been Clark's sister, to have had Lara and Jor El as her parents. Clark had been lucky twice over in his parents. The Kents were good people, even if they had no real idea what to do with her. How to treat a second, older alien cuckoo who had crash landed in their tidy nest.

They tried and she tried and Clark tried, but she isn't certain that all the trying in the universe can fix
this. She aches to hear her own words again. To taste her favorite quajchix fruit again or roasted tjuacovix. All that she had grown up with gone in eye-blink. And waking to discover that little Kal El towered over her and was years older. He was the one teaching and protecting her instead of the other way around. Will she ever fit in here? Ever call this alien place 'home' and mean it?

She looks at the scribbled list resting beneath her pink cellphone. Clark had left her the numbers for everyone from the Sheriff’s department to Lex Luthor’s private number. She could call some of the friends that she had made at school. She could call Jimmy. She could call Lois. She could even call Clark if she really needed him; he had promised to listen for her voice and the sound of his name. But what would she tell them? "It's midnight and I'm lonely." Or "It's dark and strange here. And despite being the strongest girl in the world, I'm secretly scared?"
He may have miscalculated a trifle. Lex leans his towel wrapped hip against the edge of a black granite counter and watches his lover moving around the borders of the big sunken tub. He had expected his carefully timed declaration, whispered into his cell phone, to set Clark off like a rocket. He had expected that his ass would have a prominent place in Clark's thoughts all day. But he had forgotten about Clark's mile wide streak of romanticism.

Still, there's nothing to complain about as far as the view on offer. Lex lifts the glass of scotch that his lover had poured for him and drinks. Clark really should wear dark plum more often. The rich depth of the color brings out the ivory-gold skin and the blackness of the other man's wet hair. Lex's gaze traces the path of a water droplet sliding down the brunette's nape and along the channel of spine until it soaks into the plum towel that rode low on his lover's hips. "If you add any more candles, we may have to call the fire department to control the blaze."

"I certainly hope to set something on fire tonight." Clark arranges his armful of candles around the tiles surrounding the sunken tub. He places a blue pillar next to a tall red candle and clusters a trio of short round yellows behind a short square of festively glittering silver. He adds a dark green Christmas tree candle to the group and then stands back to compare the grouping to the candle arrangement on the opposite side of the bath tub.

"Not my ass, I trust." Lex eyes the disturbingly large bottle of lube that Clark plunks down next to another row of white, lavender, and silver candles. He takes a larger sip of his drink.

"Don't worry." Clark turns on the taps and tests the water flowing into the large black tub. He grins over his shoulder. "Your ass will be very well taken care of. I promise."

Is that a Santa next to the tray holding the bottle of scotch and Clark's barely touched glass? Lex walks closer. He reaches over the Santa candle and foursome of snowmen to pour more scotch in his glass. His reflection catches his eye as he straightens. He frowns as his gaze lingers on the towel wrapped around his waist. The distant echoes of crowing laughter and the scent of steam hit him and he takes a deep breath, dismissing the memories. This is his bathroom, full of slick black surfaces and gray textured accents. There's absolutely nothing here to bring back memories of that white-tiled locker room. He tosses back his drink and pours another. "Good."
Clark watches him, green eyes soft and concerned. "Lex is there anything you want to tell me?"

Lex glances sidelong at his Xcite; the fat red sides gleam dully beneath the slick covering of condom. He had enjoyed playing with his toy that morning, and teasing himself in the shower while waiting for Clark to get off the phone, but letting Clark fuck his ass that's going to be completely different from experimenting with a toy that's under his full control. "Such as?"

"I don't know." Clark frowns. "Anything. Something."

"No." He dips a toe in the water, testing the temperature. Perfect.

"Is it me?"

Lex frowns. "What?"

"Is it me?" Clark asks again. "Because I'm stronger than most guys?"

"I wasn't thinking about our relative ratios of physical strength. Not until now." Lex sighs as he watches dismay fill the green eyes. "Clark, I know that you snapped my iron bedpost in two."

"I tripped I didn't mean to I tried to fix it."

"The salient point here is that I was highly motivated to track your sexy ass down. You do remember what happened next?"

Clark grins. "You blew me away."

"So you do remember. Good. And did I seem concerned about it out there?" Lex tilts his head toward the bedroom.

"No." Clark's grin widens. "Are you telling me that it turns you on? That my abilities get you hot?"
"You get me hot."

"You get me hot too, Lex."

Lex glances at the massive erection tenting Clark's towel. He takes another drink as he contemplates where he'd agreed to allow Clark to park it. Despite his teasing earlier, he hadn't expected Clark to appear in his shower, and be fully loaded for bear so to speak. Not as many times as the brunette had cum earlier. It is, of course, quite flattering that his ass is apparently able to inspire Clark to that extent, but he's beginning to feel ever so slightly concerned. "I noticed."

"Lex?"

"Umm?"

Clark pulls his towel loose and drops it on the floor. "I was wondering."

"About?"

"You said that you'd never done this before."

Lex smirks. "I think Big Red over there would disagree."

Clark glances at the butt plug and then back at his lover. "With a person."

"So?" Lex watches as the brunette steps into the tub and spreads out, leaning back against the gleaming blackness of the granite.

"Why didn't you and Oliver do it?"

Lex grimaces at the mere idea of giving so much as a paperclip, much less his ass, to that cretinous himbo. "Does it matter?"
"It might." Clark stares up at him. "Tell me why, Lex."

Lex shrugs. "It never happened."

"Why not?"

"We never got around to trying it."

"Why not?" Clark persists.

Lex sighs loudly. "Do we really have to talk about Oliver now?"

"I don't know. Do we? It's not like I enjoy thinking about you and him." Clark reaches for his glass, takes a drink, and then sets it back on the tiles.

"Then don't."

"I like doing anything with you, Lex. If you don't want this, we can always do something else."

Lex yanks away his towel and drops it on the floor. He cups his free hand over his swollen cock. "Do I look like I don't want this?"

"Stop trying to distract me and talk to me." Clark's eyes darken with need, but his gaze remains trained steadily on his lover's face. "I don't want to mess this up."

"There's nothing to talk about." Lex sighs with exasperation. "What do you want a notarized statement? A signed consent form?"

"I want you to tell me if there's a problem here. If there's something that I ought to know."

"I'm certain that there are all sorts of things that you should know. But why you should expect me to
keep up with all of them, I can't imagine. Did you know, for example, that while it's commonly believed that the male seahorse "

"Lex! I don't care about the damned seahorse."

"And that sort of attitude is exactly why you don't know so many things that you probably should."

"If you want this so bad, why am I in here and you're still standing out there. Tell me that." Clark stares stubbornly up at the other man. "Lex, did Oliver ever get rough with you?"

Oh, the opportunity being handed to him on a silver platter, but how to play it? Lex steps into the tub and sits down between the inviting spread of his lover's long legs. "Do all the labs and LexCorp property that he's destroyed count?"

"No."

Lex sets his glass down next to the brunette's and then leans back against the warmth of his lover's chest. "What exactly are you asking me, Clark?"

"If the reason that you never did this with Oliver was because of of," Clark wraps protective arms around the other man's waist. He drops a soft kiss on the edge of Lex's shoulder. "I noticed that whenever Lois came back from a date with Oliver that she always seemed bad tempered."

"Lois is bad tempered."

"And kind frustrated. I wondered if Oliver might not be if he's, you know, kind of not so good."

Lex smirks. God, this is priceless. Clark thinks Oliver is a loser in the sack. Definitely a train of thought to be strongly encouraged. He wipes the smirk off his face and adopts a judicious expression. He turns his head and looks at the brunette. "Not everyone is as considerate and generous as you are, Clark."

"Oh."
Lex watches his lover absorb that and then adds, "He lacks your stamina too."

Clark's eyes widen. "Oh?"

He may be shooting himself in the ass here, but it will be worth the soreness to shade Clark's perspective on Oliver's persistent attacks on LexCorp. Lex nods gravely. "Why do you think that he's constantly blowing up my property? Or shooting arrows at it?"

"Whooooaa."

"Have you ever noticed how much Oliver talks about me?" Lex shrugs.

"He does talk about you a lot," Clark mutters.

"And we've talked quite enough about Oliver."

"Lex I need to know. Which one of you called it off?"

"Who do you think? I didn't move to Star City. I don't chase him around like an over-sized Cupid with a quiver full of arrows. I don't blow up Queen Industries' R&D projects. I didn't establish a new branch of LexCorp directly across from the Queen Industries HQ."

Clark frowns and his arms tighten around the older man. "I never thought of it that way."

"People seldom do. It's easier to assume that everything is some evil plot of mine." Lex sighs, soft and sad. He peeks over his shoulder, gloating inwardly at the grim look on his lover's face. He squirms enticingly against the thick line of hot cock nuzzling against him. "Forget Oliver. Who cares about him? When do I get a ride on your rocket?"

Clark nuzzles the edge of his lover's jaw and whispers, "Look at the candles, Lex."

"Pick a candle, Lex."

"Why?" Lex gasps as the brunette's tongue flickers teasingly over his ear. He squirms against the slick warmth of Clark's chest.

"Do you have to argue about everything?"

"Do you have to ask?"

"Jeez, Lex. Just do it. Pick one. Any one."

"I thought that was cards, not candles."

Clark sighs in exasperation. "Pick. One."

"Oh, very well. That purple one."

"Watch."

Lex's eyes widen as the white wick darkens to black at the tip and then flares into flame. "How the hell did you do that?" He turns to stare at his lover and exclaims, "Fuck!" as he discovers gleaming red irises instead of the familiar jade. "Clark?"

Clark grins. "It's all in the eyes."

"But how?"
"I get hot and " Clark shrugs. He looks down and then back up and the red is gone, replaced by the familiar jade.

"It's a voluntary function?"

"Not at first, but I learned to control it. If I hadn't, half of Smallville would be smoking ruins. The heat vision happened when I was a teen, Lex."

"Fuck," Lex kneels up and stares at the tiny golden-red flame. He's got to start fucking Clark all over Queen Industries. Not only would it drive Oliver crazy, but it might even burn down Oliver's office. And he got to have sex with Clark. Lex grins. No down side however he looks at it.

"I have enough control to light a single candle or warm a mug of hot chocolate to the perfect temperature." Clark slides a hand down the tight muscles of the older man's stomach, smiling at the responsive ripple. He kisses the small of his lover's back. His hand closes over Lex's half-hard cock as he murmurs, "I have enough power to burn down Metropolis."

"Fuck!"

Clark smirks as Lex's cock swells bigger against his stroking palm. He leans around his lover and sets a tall white candle burning. "Wanna see how many candles we can light?"

"FUCK, YEAH." Lex arches his head back as he feels teeth closing delicately over his ass cheek. "Do it. Fuck me."

Clark kisses the flushed spot that he had just bitten. He sees a lone starburst of golden freckles on his lover's right cheek and bites the tiny dots. "In a minute."

"Now."

"I want to sure you're ready."
"Hell, yes, I'm ready." Lex thrusts into the hand lazily fondling his cock. "Which part of 'fuck me' are you having difficulty understanding? Ouch!" Lex starts at a sharp nip.

"Smart ass." Clark slicks his tongue soothingly over the bitten constellation of freckles. "Lean forward."

Finally. Lex braces his hands against the foot of the tub. He holds his breath and then releases it in a gasp as he feels Clark's mouth on his cheeks again instead of the probe of a finger. His eyes half-close. God, that mouth feels good. What keeps attracting Clark back again and again to one particular spot on his right cheek? The thought completely flies out of his mind Clark's warm tongue slicks a path down his cleft and back up. It's not the first time that he's been rimmed, but knowing it's Clark doing it that makes it a million times hotter than when Victoria had done it. An embarrassingly needy noise escapes his lips.

"Has Oliver ever tasted you here?" Clark spreads his lover's cheeks apart and kisses Lex's core.

"No. Never." Lex holds his breath at the leisurely circle of the other man's tongue over sensitive skin. With each slow circle, wet heat pushes against him, a little harder, a little deeper until Clark is pressed tight against him. Evening stubble rasping deliciously against tender skin. Wet hot flesh slicking and licking deeper inside. The warm pant of Clark's breath sweeping over his skin. Lex arches desperately back. "Clark! Fuck. Do it. Do it! Fuck me now! NOW!"

Clark withdraws with lingering licks and kisses. "All you had to do was say 'when', Sweetie bear."

"Who's got a smart ass now?"

Clark slaps the muscular arc of his lover's ass. "I do. It's right here."

"You do know that emailing pictures of you sleeping in my bed to your dad is still an option?" Lex shivers as a lube wet finger slides down his cleft.

"Two can play that game. What if I emailed your dad photos of you sleeping in my bed?"

"I don't." Lex inhales involuntarily as a finger pushes gently inside him. He'd allowed Victoria to finger fuck him before, but Clark there's no doubt that this is a man's finger easing in and out instead of one of Victoria's slender fingers. Or even two of her fingers. Lex breathes out slowly. "Think my
"dad would care."

"You okay?" Clark asks softly.

"Yes."

"Ready for more?"

"Bring it." Lex tightens his grip on the slick marble as another finger spreads him wider. Only two fingers. He swallows as he thinks about how big that rosy cock is. Lex exhales as three slick fingers slide inside. Oh, fuck. That feels big. They pushed deeper and he shudders back into full arousal as Clark's fingers curl over his prostrate. Fuck, that feels good. "Fuck, yes!"

"There it is," Clark croons. "There we go."

"More," Lex demands, pushing back as the fingers retreat from him. "Now."

Clark knees the other man's legs further apart. "You tell me if I hurt you."

Lex gasps as the round crown of his lover's cock nudges into place. That feels very, very, very big. He squirms against the heat of it, smirking as row after row of candles flare into light. God, that's so cool. What he could do with that kind of power. Ohhhh, fuck. Lex pants as Clark broaches him, pushing the crown inside and pausing there. Oh, fuck. Fuckfuckfuckfuck. Big. That's fucking damned big. He exhales shakily as more candle blaze.

"Lex?" Clark asks in a strained voice. "Okay?"

He presses ruthlessly back, remembering the bright surge of pleasure that had lit up his insides when Clark's fingers had found his sweet spot. But, damn big. Bigbigbig. Where is it? Where?

"Ohgod. God. You feel incredible. Lex?" Clark strokes a hand beneath his lover's stomach, teasing the softening erection back into full hardness. "God. Lex, say something. Please."
"Fuck me." Lex tries to relax as Clark eases carefully deeper. Closer, closer, closer, and then the crown brushes the magic maker and the length of his lover's cock slides over it. "FUCKYES!"
Clark closes the last kitchen cabinet and sighs. He moves back to the middle one and mournfully contemplates his choices. Three boxes and each one is perfectly designed to supply a maximum of nutrition and a minimum of unhealthy calories. There's probably more tasty goodness in the boxes than in the cereals. He doesn't want wheat, corn, or bran flakes. Nor does he want almonds and blueberries or pecans and cranberries with his flakes. Hold up, there's another box behind those. He reaches past the cereal boxes and discovers...a round container of oatmeal. Damn. He pushes it back into place.

Is the lack of appropriate afterglow munchies a good sign or a bad sign? Maybe Lex does consider this stuff...Clark absently fingers the waistband of his borrowed silk boxers, tracing the monogram. After a moment, he shakes his head. No. Not even a healthnut like Lex would consider that stuff afterglow appropriate. Of course, it wasn't Lex foraging in the kitchen; Lex was deep in slumberland. Out like a blown candle. Clark looks around the kitchen, scanning the cabinets again. Plenty of ingredients and the fixings for all sort of stuff, but he doesn't want to cook. He wants to munch. How can there not be a single box of the good stuff?

That's gotta change. A yellow notepad with a black pen resting across it catches his gaze. Flour. Milk. Honey. Pasta. Chocolate frozen yogurt? Clark frowns and scribbles it out. He writes 'chocolate ice cream' next to black blot. Vanilla yogurt gets the same treatment. Black Cherry sorbet. That can stay. Tomatoes. Onions. Apples. Carrots. Broccoli. Mushrooms. He glances down the rest of the list. Fine, fine, fine. All fruits and veggies get a free pass. Ditto for salt and sugar and other basic ingredients. Clark skips lower, blotting out each discovered yogurt. He writes 'Fruititoots cereal, 3 boxes' in large letters and underlines it three times. After a second, he adds a couple of exclamation points. There are some things that he's willing to negotiate about, but there will be no shortage of his favorite Fruititoots.

Clark turns suspicious eyes on the freezer and stares through to see neat rows of fruit sorbet and frozen yogurt. Not a single lonely container of ice cream. He backtracks to the chocolate and vanilla ice creams that he'd added to the shopping list and swoops circles around the words. Ice cream and Fruititoots were non-negotiable. Hmmm. Ice cream and Fruititoots. Fruititoots and ice cream. He'd never thought of sprinkling the cereal on his ice cream before. Chocolate or vanilla? Which would be best? Oh, heck, he'll try both. Damn, he's inspired tonight. Clark drops the pen back on the notepad. For now, what's on hand will have to do. He opens the freezer and considers the choices. He frowns at the yogurt containers and pushes them behind the sorbet. Clark pulls out a container of lemon sorbet and steps back, allowing the door to shut.

"Kal El."

"What the hell?" Clark jumps back a few feet and almost squishes the sorbet in his surprise. He scowls at the blurry image of a tanned face, surrounded by frost white hair, that is forming on the shiny aluminum surface of the freezer door. "Shit! Would you stop doing that?"

Lara's face blossoms across the fridge door. "Don't talk to your father like that, Kal El."
"He's not my father!" Clark pats the plastic tub back into the square shape that it had held before Jor El had startled him. The top doesn't fit exactly right. He sets the container on the counter and peels the top off. He flexes the lid and twists it slightly. There. That oughta take care of it.

"Yes, he is." Lara huffs. She folds her arms over her chest and leans against the fridge's handle. "What are you going to claim next? That Kal El isn't your name?"

"It's not." Clark drops the lid on the counter. He pulls open a drawer and grabs a spoon.

"Is," Lara insists.

"Who do you think named you?" Jor El asks.

"My parents!"

Lara sniffs. "Exactly so. Glad you finally remembered that."

"I didn't mean you," Clark snaps.

She gives him big tragic eyes and her lower lip quivers. "Kal El. How could you? After all I went through to have you."

"There, there, dear." Jor El slithers down from the freezer to stand beside his wife. He wraps an arm around her and glowers at Clark. "You weren't exactly a small baby, you know. She went through hours and hours and hours of labor."

"Hours and hours and hours," Lara murmurs.

Clark stabs his spoon into the pale yellow sorbet. Why is he arguing with the A.I.? The damned thing does this to him every time. It starts something with him and the next thing he knows, he's arguing with it like...like...it really is an annoying set of bio parents instead of some sort of super computer. Kara had explained to him that they...it...the A.I. had been programed to be interactive, to learn and adapt, and that was why the A.I. seemed like a it was real. She had casually mentioned of 'known issues' with the personality imprinting software, which rather made him worry about unknown issues.

The fact that his parents had been the first to try imprinting a single A.I. with dual personalities hadn't eased that concern. Could an A.I. develop multiple personality disorder? Jor El and Lara had different personalities and always acted like they were two different people instead of projections from the same A.I. Could it really believe that it is Jor El and Lara? Or have some sort of parental instinct? Kara had said that if he and his parents didn't treat it like a person that it wouldn't respond as one, but...Clark sneaks a look at the reproachful faces...he isn't so certain about that.

"Son," Jor El hugs his wife closer, "as pleased as we are to see that you are finally approaching your obligations with the seriousness befitting the last of your race --"

"I'm not the last," Clark scoops up more sorbet. "Not any longer."

Jor El smiles smugly. "No, but you are the eldest now, thanks to my foresight in selecting an appropriate landing site for you. Prior planning was never one of my brother's strongest skills."

"Or our son's," Lara mutters.

"He'll learn," Jor El mutters back to her.
Maybe if he ignores them. If years of treating them like parental units have made them 'real', would ignoring them make them 'disappear'? He stares through the freezer, wondering if Lex would annoyed if the frozen yogurt fell victim to a mysterious fridge malfunction. He blinks away the red hazing the edges of his vision, and eats more sorbet as he watches Jor El and Lara without listening. Kinda of funny really. Like seeing Lex's goldfish...mouths opening and closing without sound.

Ummm. The cold tartness is better than he expected. Better than he's tasted before. Maybe the brand does make a difference. He examines the unfamiliar logo on the side of the carton. He's never seen that one at his grocery store. Clark scoops up another spoonful of sorbet.

Maybe the yogurt didn't mean anything. Maybe Lex liked it, but why did Lex like it? Clark scowls. Maybe he's simply spent too much time watching Oliver huff down the stuff in team meetings. Maybe he's reading too much into the presence of yogurt in Lex's freezer and fridge. Maybe Lex doesn't even know that it's there. Maybe the chef bought it. It's not like anybody could get sentimental over yogurt. Just because the taste of blueberries makes him think of eating waffles at the Waffle King with Lana, or the smell of coffee makes him think of writing articles with Chloe...damn it.

He's gotta break Lex of the yogurt habit. Clark licks his spoon thoughtfully. What should he replace it with? He makes pretty good cupcakes...no, that won't do. Not after Lex had sent those cowboys to Oliver. Who knew what memories the cupcakes had provoked. Oliver could try to play that off all he wanted, but the blond had clearly had a strong reaction to it. No cupcakes. Icing? Whipped cream? Clark grimaces at he thinks of Jimmy waving a can of the stuff in Chloe's doorway. No. No way. Chocolate sauce? Caramel sauce? What could he...

"And that's everything that you need to know about the rodersax," Lara finishes. Tears shimmer in her big eyes. "I know that you will make the right choice. I believe in you, Kal El."

"Chose well, my son." Jor El nods gravely. "There is a small deposit of Red Kryptonite in the cave system. For when the time is right."

Red K? And what the hell is a rodersax? Clark hastily swallows the sorbet, but it's too late. He stares at the fridge's metallic surface, the only image there now is his reflection. "Wait! What? What did you...Jor El? Lara? Shit. What the hell was that about?"
Dr. Hamilton tries to make a deal with Team Teague.

Hamilton leans back against his car, watching the slender woman prowling the border between his darkness and light created by one of the few functioning street lights left on the street. He wonders uneasily how much she knows. The meeting place that she had selected is a nicely deserted section of Star City. Is it pure chance that the spot is only a scant block from the small rusty warehouse that holds his office and lab? He relaxes as he eyes the expensive sheen of bronze fabric and the sparkle of jewelry. No, his instinct are wrong. She's nothing but a spoiled woman determined to have her own way. There's nothing to be concerned about.

He's got the goods and she's got the price. He admires the way the her suit molds the firm curves of her body and sets off her dark honey hair. From the back, she looks as trim any young girl. It's only when she turns away from the dark and into the lamplight that her mature beauty is highlighted. Her golden brown eyes are as sharp and pitiless as a hawk's as she stares at him. Her son leans against the trunk of a maroon car parked behind his mother.

"Are you interested or not?" Hamilton resists the urge to squirm under the Teagues' calculating stares. He still can't believe that he's been reduced to selling his carefully harvested and nurtured pollen like some common thug. He'd rather not take the risk of selling to someone new, but his steadiest customer hasn't contacted him for months. Should he have looked into that? Could Star have found another source? He frowns. No, he's not going to take time away from his work to track down some silly hippie girl. His experiments are too important. Look how quickly he'd found someone else who was willing to pay even more than Star had for his pollen. "Ms. Teague?"

The son stirs restively behind her. "No names."

Hamilton directs a pointed look around the empty street. "What? You think someone is listening?"

"While we are tossing names into the night, Dr. Hamilton," Mrs. Teague purrs, "how long since you've heard the name 'Luthor'?"

"I got better things to do than keep up with Luthors," Hamilton jerks against his car. How had they known his name? He huddles deeper into his worn coat and glares.

Jason taunts softly, "What if the Luthors keep up with you?"

"Why should they? They think I'm dead."

"Do they? Are you quite certain of that?" Jason flashes his teeth in a hard smile.

"Enough about the Luthors. I'm not worried about them. Or you." Hamilton scowls at Jason, before turning his stare on Genevieve. "Did you bring the money?"

"Did you bring what my mother requested?" Jason asks. He straightens and unlocks the trunk. He pulls out a briefcase and opens it. "Your turn at show and tell, Hamilton."
Hamilton walks over and looks at the rows of bills filling the briefcase. He lifts the first stack and checks behind the first twenty to make sure that the rest isn't blank paper.

"Well?" Jason demands.

"Here." Hamilton opens his left hand to reveal a glass vial.

Genevieve takes it. She turns, holding it up to the light, and tilts the vial, watching as the fine red grains drifts this way and that. "How do we know that this is Nicodemus pollen?"

"Feel free to snort some of it, and find out the hard way." Hamilton closes the briefcase and wraps his hand around the handle. Finally, he can get some new supplies.

Jason takes a step closer, his gaze darkening ominously. "Maybe we should make you test it."

"Jason," Genevieve warns softly. She turns a smile on Hamilton. "Tell me more about this pollen. Do the Luthors know about it?"

Hamilton shrugs. The middle of his first sell to the Teagues is not the place to admit that he had been trying to play Daddy Luthor against Baby Luthor. No point in giving them any ideas. He picks up the briefcase and takes a step back. "They know about the original pollen and the Nicodemus Green. They found out about those after the second outbreak."

"And how did the second outbreak occur?" Jason asks. "A little experiment gone awry?"

"Someone stole one of my plants."

Genevieve frowns. "Someone else knows? Who?"

"Does it matter?" Hamilton shrugs. "Probably someone who died before the cure was synthesized. That smug Luthor bastard actually thought I was going to tamely go off to work for him after he destroyed my plants and work, but I had taken the precaution of growing another crop of seedlings in a secret location."

Genevieve asks, "What about the cure? The original outbreak was fatal, wasn't it? All the settlers died according to my information."

"You don't need to worry about that. Pollen from the Nicodemus Red plants is perfectly safe."

"Safe?" Genevieve holds the vial out over the stained and broken pavement. "So if I dropped it"

"No!" Hamilton moves back toward his waiting car. Crazy bitch. "Don't smash the vial!"

"No?" She smirks at him. "But you said it was safe?"

"It won't kill you, but after the drug wears off, you might wish that it had. The red pollen is nonfatal, but its other effects are enhanced. Under its influence, you might do anything."

Genevieve frowns at the pollen. "This isn't very much. Are you sure it's enough?"

Hamilton shifts uneasily on his feet, inching closer to his car. "Exactly how many people are you planning on using this on?"

"As many as I need to."

"And what exactly are these other effects?" Jason shivers and slides his hands beneath his long brown coat.
"Those exposed to Nicodemus Red exhibit impulsive, violent, and libidinal behavior. Their inhibitions are drastically lowered. I would recommend wearing masks and gloves while handling and dispensing Nicodemus." Hamilton frowns. "I thought that you wanted it to try to use this as some sort of truth serum. What are you planning to do with it?"

Mother and son trade a considering stare and then Genevieve closes her hand around the vial. She smiles at him. "Why so curious, Dr. Hamilton? I thought all that mattered to you was the money."

"If you are planning on selling it"

"Don't worry. We won't be cutting into your market." Jason grins and pulls a gun from beneath his coat. "We're gonna give it away."

"Wait! Don't!" Hamilton holds the briefcase in front of him. "Don't! I"

Genevieve pulls a handkerchief out of her pocket and wipes a splatter of blood from her cheek. "Really, Jason. Do strive to be a bit neater."

"Sorry." Jason lowers his gun and leans over Dr. Hamilton's body to pick up the briefcase.
Clark discovers that Lex likes to paint a specific subject.

Clark stretches luxuriously across the bed as he listens to quiet sounds of Lex moving around. It's as big as the one at the castle. He can stretch as far and wide as he wants and not so much as a toe goes over the side. It's almost like Lex had selected the beds with him in mind. And wouldn't he like to believe that. Clark signs against the dark purple flat sheet. He pulls his pillow back under his head, resolutely putting all thoughts of the others who'd probably shared this bed with Lex out of his head. He's not going to think about it.

Not going to wonder if Oliver had ever been in this bed he presses his nose deeper into the softness of Lex's pillow. He's got nothing to worry about there. And yet, he can't help thinking that Oliver would always know which of a bazillion forks was the correct one for every occasion. Or that Oliver is the only other guy that Lex has been with. No matter how much Lex dissed Oliver, the other man had something that had attracted Lex at one time.

He stretches out again and his fingertips graze something soft and fuzzy. What the hell? Clark jerks his hand away and sits up. There's a Santa hat perching perkily on the bed beside him. He twists around to find a battered, paint-stained wooden easel set up at the foot of the bed. On the wall behind it is a single watercolor, framed in chrome. That hadn't been there last night. It hadn't. His eyes widen. Oh, god. Could that be the painting that Lex had agreed to hold back from the auction?

Oh, god. It's him in a Santa outfit. Well, half a Santa costume. At first glance the painting isn't too bad, but the longer he stares at it, the more disturbing details he finds. How had Lex managed to make all those fat gold and red balls on the Christmas tree look so suggestive? 'Cause the longer he looks at that tree, the less he's thinking ornaments and the more he's thinking of balls.

Santa Clark is sitting in a green wingchair, lit by the glow from the fireplace and the tree lights. The hats it tilted askew on his head and his bare chest gleams golden. And he's got nipples tight, erect nipples on Santa! That's wrong. He's never thought about it, but he's quite certain that if he had, that he would've felt that Santa did not have nipples, let alone those kind of nipples. His shocked stare moves over Santa's tight six-pack to the big black belt and Santa's got wood!

He stares at the outline of round balls and rigid of thick cock against the red velvet fabric, mercilessly exposed by the wide spread legs as Santa slouches in the chair. That's wrong. Really, really, really wrong. Santa does not he simply doesn't. Clark focuses on the plate of half-eaten cookies at Santa's elbow chocolate chip, his favorite. Santa is holding a glass of milk in one hand and the other Clark takes an outraged breath as he stares at the decidedly lewd way that Santa is licking cookie crumbs from his fingers. "Lex!"

Lex appears at the doorway. Gray tie loose over his half-fastened white shirt. "Yes?"

"Santa porn, Lex? How could you?!"

"I was inspired."
"Tell me that that," Clark points at the framed painting, "was not seen at the auction preview."

Lex tucks the tails of his shirt into his gray trousers. "Clark, how could you think that I would auction that one off."

Clark relaxes. He supposes that if the painting is only for Lex's private amusement and no one else sees it, he can live with it. But Santa porn jeez. Is that like a year round affliction or does Lex save it for the holiday season? "Good."

"It's my favorite so far."

Wait what? Clark clenches his fists around the crumpled sheets. He glances uneasily from the Santa hat on the bed to the easel. "Are you telling me that there are more?"

"Santa porn is like cookies." Lex fastens a leather belt around his slim waist. "You can never stop with only one."

Oh, god. Clark rolls out of bed and moves to stand in front of easel. He looks from the big bed to the edge of bed showing in the watercolor. It's the same except the sheets are ivory with a large border of red and gold. A chandelier with mistletoe dripping from it is hanging over his prone form. He's sleeping on Lex's side of the bed, sheet slanted over his half-bared ass, and his arm curled around the big white pillow tucked under his head. On the other pillow there's a Santa hat. Clark takes a deep breath. "Lex, the painting, the one that was auctioned off last night, was it was it like this?"

"It was a Christmas painting."

"Lucas said that there was a Santa hat in it?"

"Now that you mention it, I believe there was."

"Oh, god." Clark groans. Would it be an abuse of his super powers if he found out who bought the painting and stole it? "How bad is it?"

"Bad?" Lex fastens his tie. "I don't do bad paintings, Clark."

"Two words. Santa. Porn." Clark gives him a stern look. "That's very, very bad."

"So. What."

Clark folds his arms over his chest. "Was I in the auctioned painting?"

"Not your face."

"Lex!"
It's A Red K Christmas! 7/62)

Chapter Summary

Clark and Lex eat breakfast at the penthouse. Clex.

Clark studies his breakfast with dismay. There's a bowl of oatmeal, topped with nuts and dried fruit. A plate with two pieces of toasted wheat bread and an egg white omelet and three thin slices of cantaloupe. The only sweet thing on the table is a jar of Kent Farm apple jam...unless he counts the black cherry yogurts. For a second he considers possible 'accidents' that could befall the cartons, but he's already in enough trouble. He sighs and sits down across from his lover.

"Problem?" Lex asks in a tone that says 'there fucking better not be' as he dips a spoon into his oatmeal. He takes a copy of the Cryptic Times from the stack on the table and studies the photo of Superman on the front page.

"No. No problem." Clark grimly picks up a spoon and pokes at the dried fruit. What the hell are the yellow-orangey bits? Mango? Apricot? Orange? The white is probably either bananas or apples. Not so much as a speck of brown sugar. He samples a minuscule scoop of it. It's not Fruititoot good, but it's okay. Be a heck of a lot better with some brown sugar. "Thanks for the new clothes."

"You're welcome."

Clark shoves the yogurt aside and picks up his coffee mug. He peers warily inside the mug and relaxes as he sees that the liquid is pale beige and not black like the brew in Lex's mug. That's a positive sign. If Lex had been really pissed the coffee would've been Luthor black exactly the way that his lover liked it with no accommodation made for his own preference for the sweeter things. He sips cautiously and then takes a larger swallow as he tastes sugar and vanilla. Perfect. Exactly the way he likes it.

He considers the breakfast laid out on the table again. The apple jam is a promising note of sweetness. Next time, no fighting until after he's gotten sex and a decent breakfast. Not that he'd meant to start one this morning. All he'd said was that he'd rather skip visiting the MetroTalon for coffee and photos afterwards. This, Clark spoons up more oatmeal, wasn't what he'd had expected to find on his side of the table. He sniffs sadly as the scent of cooling cinnamon rolls. While he was taking a tragically solitary shower, Lex must have been busily revamping the menu.

He takes the next paper from the stack and stares unseeingly at the three photos lined up along the
edge of the page. He tries to think of something else to say. Something that will result in getting his 
hands on both Lex and cinnamon rolls before it's time to leave. Something that will hopefully defrost 
his lover enough for a little interaction. Preferably a lot of a interaction, but he'll take whatever he can 
get. Clark glances down at the deep purple sleeve of the sweater that had appeared outside the 
bathroom door. "This sweater's really soft."

"Cashmere usually is."

"What do you call this color?"

"Purple." Lex picks up the Daily Planet and unfolds it next to the other paper that he'd been looking 
at. He studies the front pages.

Clark takes a deep breath and forces his voice to stay pleasant and even. "Yes, I noticed that it's 
purple. I thought that it might have one of those fashion names."

Lex looks up. "Fashion name?"

"You know," Clark smiles hopefully, "like 'Royal Lagoon' or 'Great Plum'."

"Evening Dusk." Lex goes back to his paper.

"The jeans are good too. Fit perfectly. Nice and loose, exactly the way that I like them."

"Good."

"Look, I know you're pissed. I got that, okay?"

"Mildly annoyed." Lex finishes his oatmeal and starts on his omelet. "If I was pissed, I would be 
counting my goldfish."

Clark puts his coffee mug down. "So you aren't mad that I refused to go be photographed at the 
coffee shop?"
"I didn't say that."

"So you are mad." Clark sighs. He better help himself to the jam before it gets banished to the kitchen with the cinnamon rolls. His stomach rumbles at the thought of fat golden rolls, flecked with cinnamon, and drenched in vanilla icing. He opens the jar and spreads a thick layer of jam over his toast slices.

"I have...concerns."

"Concerns? Concerns?" Clark repeats in bewilderment. Getting extremely personal with an alien hadn't slowed Lex down for a second, but refusing to do a photo this morning had resulted in a painfully nutritious breakfast and a Lexless shower. "What's there to be concerned about?"

"A lover who refuses to be seen in public with me."

What the hell? Clark frowns. "I'm seen with you all the time. I eat out with you. Drink coffee with you. Go to movies with you. Go to concerts with you. Go to parties with you. Ride in cars with you. Before I got a cell phone, my friends would call the farm first and then the castle when they wanted me. It's not exactly a secret that we're friends, Lex."

"Exactly. Friends. Is that how this is going to be, Clark? Friends in public and lovers in private only?"

"No! I don't care who knows. Hell, I want everyone to know." Clark scowls as he glances at Queen Tower. Especially Oliver. His mouth tightens grimly as he sees the betraying glint of a security camera lens facing their way. His jaw tightens as he wonders how many times Oliver has watched Lex eating breakfast in a robe or nothing but pajama bottoms. He glares at the camera, red sliding across his eyes, and then he blinks the heat back. Wait. Maybe he should allow Oliver to watch one last time and make sure that the blond got a real eyeful. "My dad has a bad heart. You know that."

Lex peels the lid away from his yogurt. "So what are you suggesting? That we hide for a few decades to protect his sensibilities?"

"No." Clark gives his lover an annoyed look. "I don't want my parents to find out about us from some tabloid. I want to tell my parents first. Privately. Tactfully."
"Tactfully." Lex smirks. "That should be interesting. May I watch?"

"Very funny. Why do you eat that crap?"

"It's healthy." Lex looks down at his yogurt and then back at Clark. He raises his eyebrows. "You have some problem with yogurt?"

"I don't like it."

"So?" Lex jabs a spoon into the carton. "Don't eat it."

"How long have you been eating that stuff any way?" Clark slouches down in his chair, crunching through the last corner of his toast. He licks jam from his fingers and blushes as he catches Lex watching him with interest. Great. Has he just inspired a painting of Santa doing something naughty with jam?

Lex stares down at the dark cherry yogurt mounding his spoon like he's never seen it before. After a moment, he shoves the spoon back into the carton. "It was served for breakfast every morning at Excelsior. It became a habit."

"You never talk much about that."

"Yogurt? I wasn't aware that it was an object of such interest for you."


"Because it's even more boring than yogurt." Lex taps his finger against the Cryptic Times photo of Superman zipping across blue sky, red cape swirling colorfully. "Have you considered adding a jockstrap to your costume?"

"What?"
"Your undercarriage is dangling."

Clark chokes on his coffee. He stares at the picture that Lex is holding out to him. "Crap. I thought that the briefs would, you know, control the situation."

"Some things are too big to be contained. Especially if one insists on assuming a prone position and buzzing the Cryptic Times news office. I wonder what the market would be for Red-Blue Blur porn."

Clark narrows his eyes. "Not as big as it would be for Lex porn."

"And when you master the ability to draw a straight line, I'll worry about that."

"Cameras don't care if you can draw or not."

"Hmmmm, I remember the last photos that you sent me. Such lovely images from the inside of your lens cap," Lex picks up his coffee mug and smirks, "it really made me want to be there."

"I don't know why Jimmy didn't say something," Clark grumbles. "He said that he didn't notice, but jeez, I got an F on that assignment for my photojournalism class."

"You should have accepted my offer to send one of my PR staff out with you, instead of asking a guy who resents you to help."

"I told him that I was gay. Chloe's told him that I'm gay. What could he have to worry about?" Clark asks with exasperation.

"You did marry Alicia."

"That was back in high school!" Clark leans closer and lowers his voice. "Besides I was...under the influence."

Lex sets his mug down and leans closer. "The influence of what exactly?"
"I'll tell you if..."

"If?"

"No more yogurt."

"I didn't realize that you had such strong opinions about yogurt. Interesting." Lex stares at Clark. "Did you experience some childhood trauma in which yogurt featured a starring role?"

"No yogurt or no secret. That's non-negotiable."

"No yogurt ever again? I don't know, Clark."

"Oh, alright. Frozen yogurt can stay, but not the other kind."

"My chef has strong feelings about yogurt."

"Tell him to find a substitute," Clark orders. He snags the carton next to Lex's plate and moves it to his side of the table.

"What if he resigns? I would have to hire another one. Interviewing applicants can get quite tiresome." Lex shakes his head dubiously, "And then to have to find one willing to focus on non-yogurt cuisines..."

Damn. Clark searches his mind for something else to toss in as a deal sweetener. He blurts, "I'll blow you. Right here, right now."

"On the breakfast table...how kinky, Clark."

"That's me. Full of kink."
"I have a kink too."

"You do? I would be willing to work with that...unless this doesn't involve Santa does it?"

"You tell me what you were influenced by. You blow me and..."

"And?" Clark folds his arms over his chest. "There's an and? It's only yogurt, Lex. It's not like I'm demanding half your kingdom. Jeez."

"That's true. It's only yogurt. You know...the longer I sit here, looking at the carton, the better it looks." Lex reaches across the table.

Clark grabs both containers and moves them further away. He scowls suspiciously. "And what? I swear, Lex, if this involves a Santa costume..."

"Relax. No Santas are involved. I want you to ride down in the elevator with me."

"You want me to escort you to your office?"

"Merely ride down to my private parking level. I have to go to LuthorCorp today."

"Oh. Okay." Clark nods. "Deal. The big secret is that red meteor rock makes me thrill happy and really, really horny. The first time I was exposed to it was in high school. I wanted to rule the world, remember?"

Lex leans back in his chair, a smug smile edging his scarred mouth. "With me. How could I forget that? Then you disappeared on me. What happened?"

"The stone in my school ring had red meteor rock in it; my dad and Pete double-teamed me and got the ring away from me. Afterwards, I didn't know what to tell you. I was so scared that if I admitted to anything, even one small thing, that you would unravel the whole truth. And then there was my promise to my dad."
"Did that red rock have anything to do with Vegas and your sudden marriage?"

"Alicia knew. I don't know how. She gave me a necklace that she'd made for me. I didn't realize what the stone was until she fastened it around my throat." Clark studies the icy gray of the older man's eyes and decides that maybe he shouldn't mention the time that Pete had sent him on a Red K trip by dropping some in his pocket. "She took it off. Otherwise we would've been in Vegas longer."

"Lois?" Lex asks.

"What? Oh. Oh. Lois. You mean the thing at your engagement dinner with Lana?"

"Yes. That. Did Lois drug you?"

"No! Yes. Sorta."

"Which is it?"

"She did, but she didn't mean to. Lois didn't know, Lex. She still doesn't. She'd gotten hold of this aphrodisiac spiked lipstick sample. I guess the red rock was one of the ingredients because Lois kissed me and then I got all..."

"Any port in a storm?" Lex asks dryly.

"No! I didn't...we didn't...I took her over to Oliver's office and we made out a little on his couch, and then I saw the invitation for your engagement dinner so I took her to the castle."

"You seemed to be having quite the time whispering to Chloe."

"I was messing with her. Telling her all the stuff that I knew she wanted to hear. I'm not a nice person when I'm like that." Clark looks down. He draws in an outraged breath as he finally really looks at the three photographs. There's a close up photo of his tummy muffin-topping over blue spandex, and one of Batman's armored waistline, and Aquaman's bared six-pack. All below a
Lex's lips twitch. "Of course, you're not."

"That spandex was too tight," Clark insists. "Large was the biggest size that they had on the shelf."

"Of course, it was."

"It's not funny, Lex."

"It could be worse."

"How?" Clark asks warily.

"They could have been comparing undercarriages. Although I think you would be the winner in that department."

"Oh, god. Why me? Why me?"

Lex grins. "Come ride on the elevator with me, sugar stick, and I'll make you forget all about it."

"Easy for you to say, sweetie bear." Clark glances from the Daily Planet to the Cryptic Times to the tabloid in front of him and the other papers scattered across the table. His photo has made every single one and who knew how many had been uploaded to various websites. "What if...what if someone is sitting at their breakfast table this morning, going, 'You know that picture looks a lot like Clark Kent.' God. What am I going to do?"

"It will be okay."

Clark smiles. Trust Lex to say something like that and make it sound like a direct order to the universe at large. "Lex, we both know that you can't promise that."
"Yes, I can. I will damn well make it okay. It would have been a little easier to do that if you'd been willing to get with the plan this morning."

"The plan?"

"Yes, Clark. The plan. You remember...the one that involved public groping you at the MetroTalon and in front of LexCorp. Who you think half the city will be gossiping about today if we had followed it?"

"You think that people would be more interested in who you're boffing than the alien hiding among them?"

"Yes."

"Wow. Vain much?"

"Let's call it a fine sense of my own worth."

Clark snorts. "Yeah. That sounds so much better."

"Keep in mind that at the moment, very few people believe that there is an alien at large in the populace. Most think that you are a metahuman and that the alien story is just that...a story to make yourself sound more exotic. It's not a bad thing, Clark. Endear yourself to them first, and then later, when you have a firm hold on their hearts and trust, convince them that you are an alien. They can't say that you didn't tell them up front. Not your bad if they didn't believe. In the meantime, if someone is a problem, tell me."

"Lex." Clark studies the frosted silver glint shimmering in the glorious gray of the other man's eyes. "No one gets hurts. Okay?"

"Take all the fun out of it."
"Lex."

"What about Oliver? Can I hurt him?"

Clark frowns. Why is Lex asking that? Why Oliver? Has Oliver refused to accept that he is firmly in Lex's past and not Lex's future? He glances at Queen Tower and the camera focused on Lex's breakfast nook. "Maybe just a little. Is Oliver...being a problem?"

"Oliver doesn't have enough brains to qualify as a problem." Lex sneers. "He ranks somewhere above a papercut and below a stubbed toe."

"So your plan for staging a photo op in front of LexCorp has absolutely nothing to do with being across the street from Queen Industries?"

"Nothing whatsoever." Lex puts his empty coffee mug down. "The main goal was to distract people from Superman while making certain that everyone, not merely Oliver, knows that you are one hundred percent mine."

"Gonna buy me a tee shirt with 'Property of Lex Luthor' stamped on the front and back?" Clark pushes his chair back and strolls around the table.

"And matching boxers printed with 'Trespassers will be annihilated'."

"You do know that Oliver has a camera trained on us right now?" Clark asks as he grabs Lex's chair and shifts chair and man away from the table. He glances over his shoulder, checking the angle of the camera's view.

"Of course." Lex gives Queen Tower a measuring look. "Move me two inches to the left. I assume we are putting on a show?"

"Damn right. Want to know why I'm doing this?" Clark adjusts their position and then steps between his lover's legs. He knees Lex's thighs apart and looks down into smoke gray eyes.

"You're a closet exhibitionist?"
"No." Clark unfastens a slim black leather belt and then dove gray trousers. Oh, god. The boxer briefs beneath are the exact same color as his sweater. Great. Now every time he looks at his sweater, he's gonna think of the sweet shape filling those briefs. He leans down and nuzzles the soft fabric and the hardness beneath.

Lex leans back in his chair, face flushed and eyes darkening. "Fame and glory?"

"Because you're mine." Clark eases briefs and trousers aside. His hand closes greedily around the bared prize. He delicately strokes his thumb over the crown and smirks as Lex gasps.

"Does I mean that when I place my order for shirts and boxers, you will be shopping at the same store?"

"I can't decide between 'Trespassers will be vaporized on sight' or 'Trespassers will have their nougat slagged' to go with the 'Property of Clark Kent' tees."

"Intriguing choices." Lex reaches for his tie, but his lover's hand closes over his. "What?"

"I...I don't want Oliver to see you. I know that he's already...that you and he..." Clark bites his lip. He looks over his shoulder, double checking how much the camera can record. Lex's hand curls around his chin turning him back to face the older man.

"Oliver doesn't matter."

"Maybe not, but I still don't want him to see you undressed."

Lex leans forward and kisses him gently on the mouth. He strokes his lover's dark hair. "Then he won't. We can go into the bedroom."

"No. I want him to know that you're mine. I want him to...know what I'm doing." Clark blushes as he meets the dark gray gaze. "I want him to know that I make you...happy...happier than he ever did."
"Ah." Lex's eyes darken even more. He smiles wickedly as he settles back into his chair. His fingers tighten in the other man's dark hair. He guides Clark's head downwards. "That won't be a problem. You make me happier than anyone ever has. Don't worry, Clark. At this angle, all Oliver will see is your back and my face. I promise, I'll let him see exactly how good this is for me."

Clark grins and lowers his head. He kisses the wide crown, teasing the rim with the tip of his tongue.

"Fuck." Lex's fingers tighten demandingly in the dark curls. "Clark."

He swipes a soft lick up the underside and over the tip. He looks up from beneath his tousled bangs. "Thank you, Lex."

"Trust me, you are extremely fucking welcome." Lex yanks him upwards for a kiss.

Clark opens his mouth to the aggressive thrusting rhythm of his lover's tongue. Oh, yeah. He obediently tilts his head, following the tug of his lover's hands in his hair and widens his mouth even more, yielding to the increasing domination of Lex's kiss. He strokes his tongue along his lover's, silently encouraging the other man to take the kiss to even more more aggressive levels. Oh, god, yes. Feels so good. Clark wonders vaguely what it will look like to Oliver. Will the blond watch it and mourn what was lost? Simmer with jealous longing and scheme to get it back? Clark opens his eyes on a world shaded bronze as his lover's mouth finally lifts away.

"Fuck, that's hot." Lex tilts the brunette's head in the opposite direction as he stares at the bronze-orange eyes. "That's so fucking hot."

"Being free to be myself with you...that's fucking hot." Clark presses a kiss on his lover's sinewy wrist. "Knowing that you know what I am and you still want me...that you aren't afraid of me...that's fucking hot."

Lex's grip tightens. "Mine. You fucking belong to me. Fucking property of Lex Luthor."

"And you belong to me. Fucking property of Clark Kent. Mine." Clark moves downward and rubs his lips against the damp crown. He touches his tongue to his lips as he stares up at Lex. He smiles at the way his lover's fingers knot in his hair.

"Do it."
"Do what?" Clark brushes his lips over the crown again. Delicately mouthing the rim.

Lex arches in his chair. "Fuck! You know fucking what."

"Ummm...would that be saying...how did it go again?" Clark slants a soft lick across the tip. "Lex, you're wonderful? That it?"

"Clark, damn it."

"Clark, damn it," Clark repeats in a questioning tone. He blows a gust of air over his lover's straining cock. "Noo, that doesn't sound right. Wait, wait...it's coming to me."

"If you want anything cumming for you, you fucking tease...you better fucking do it."

"Now, I remember. Lex...you are a god among men."

"Fucking tease...if you don't...FUCKYEAH!"

Clark wraps his mouth around his lover's cock and sucks it down. God, he loves this. Loves the breathy cursing going on over his head. Loves the clench of Lex's hands on his head. The pull of Lex's finger in his hair. The sound of his name in that husky voice. The urgent curl of Lex's body against him. The satisfying width filling his mouth. The salty intimate Lex flavor and the promise of more throbbing against the urging stroke of his tongue.

"Fuck. OHFUCK. Clark. Clark. FuckClarkfuckfuck. FUCKCLARK!" Lex collapses back against the chair. His hands move softly over the brunette's hair.

Clark reluctantly pulls away. He gently tucks his lover back beneath the dark purple boxer briefs and refastens trousers and belt. There. Aside from the pink flush riding the older man's face and the lingering stunned look in the gray eyes, his lover looks ready for business. Clark rubs his cheek against the soft wool covering his lover's lean thigh. He half-closes his eyes as the other man's elegant hands stoke his hair. He can see why Oliver couldn't seem to accept that it's over. Maybe after Oliver sees this, the blond will get with the program and understand that he isn't getting Lex back. "Lex?"
"You won. No more yogurt."

"Good, but that's not what I was going to ask."

"Oh?"

"About that painting."

"Taking advantage of my post coital glow. That's almost Luthorish, Clark. Have I mentioned lately how hot it gets me when you try to go Luthor?"

"What was in it, Lex?"

"I told you. Santa."

Clark sighs loudly. He kneels back and stares up at his lover. "I got that much. And what was Santa doing in the painting?"

"Oh, you know...Santa stuff." Lex stands up and moves around Clark. He walks over to the window and stares at Queen Towers as he adjusts his clothing.

"Santa stuff," Clark repeats. He frowns at the other man's back. "What sort of Santa stuff exactly?"

Lex turns around and walks toward his private elevator. "Forget it. It's only a painting."

"Somethings a guy can't forget...like Santa porn." Clark gets up and follows the older man.

"A man needs his hobbies, Clark."
"Santa porn? Jeez. Can't you paint your goldfish or something?"

Lex pauses in front of the closed metal doors. He gives the brunette a thoughtful look. "You want me to use goldfish in my next painting?"

"Yes."

"Very well, but only for you, Clark. Fish play merry hell as models. Damned things won't sit still for even a second. Which ones do you want me to use? Sid? Sam? Sara?"

"I don't care. Any of them you like. About that auctioned painting..."

"What about it?" Lex asks.

"Tell me that the paintings that I saw...tell me that those are the only porny ones. Tell me that the auction painting was a regular painting."

"Regular painting?" Lex slides his keycard through the slot next to the doors. "Regular painting?"

"Yes! A regular painting. Jeez. Do you have to be so aggravating?" Clark asks as the elevator doors slide open.

"Regular painting, hmm. I don't think I'm familiar that with particular art category." Lex steps into the elevator and waits.

"Lex! Damn it, just tell me. What was in the painting? Wha...whoa!" Clark exclaims as he's yanked inside and shoved against the back. He leans against the metal, cradling his lover against him. "If you aren't going to tell me, I need to check on the farm and Kara."

"I want to fuck you."

"Oh, god." Clark shudders as Lex rubs urgently against him. His hands instinctively clench around the gray wool covering his lover's muscular ass. "But, Lex, the farm."
Lex slaps the buttons on the control panel. "It's not going anywhere."

"Do you have any idea what it did to me...knowing that Oliver will see that. See that you are mine. See you making me cum. See you swallowing me down," Lex whispers fiercely.

Clark glances at the numbers flashing above the door. "Same thing it did to me, but we don't have time to"

"Yes, we do."

"We shouldn't," Clark protests as he busily unfasten the older man's trousers. He slides to his knees on the soft carpeting that lines the floor.

"Trust me." Lex groans as his cock is teased free of his boxers again. "We should."

Clark leans forward and kisses the velvet soft crown. He slides his lips over it and sucks it into his mouth just as a soft chime announces that they have arrived at Lex's private garage level. He reluctantly allows his lover's cock to slide free, but Lex's hand falls on his shoulder, pushing him back down as he begins to stand. "Lex? Aren't we going to"

"Fuck, yes." Lex slaps the controls again and the elevator obediently begins moving upwards, back toward the penthouse.

"In the elevator?"

"It's my elevator. I can fuck in it if I want to," Lex glances at the flashing numbers.

"Elevators." Clark shakes his head. "That's your kink?"

"What's wrong with elevators? It's not like I asked you to wear a Santa costume. Think you can get me off before we go all the way back up?"
"Fuck, yes." Clark grins. "The question is, can you get me off before we reach the garage again?"

Lex smirks down at the brunette. "Of course. I have it on the best authority that I am a god among men."

"If you lose, you have to tell me what's in that painting."

"And if I win?" Lex gives the brunette an evil smile. "You have to wear the costume for me."

"Tell me you mean the spandex."

"Hell, no. Santa."

"Perv." Clark straightens his shoulders. "Fine. You're on."

"Fuck, yes!"
Oliver broods and sees something unexpected.

Oliver opens a second carton of Tequila Lime yogurt as he looks at the icons littering his screen. He needs to fortify himself if he's going to do his daily security cam check. It's like bracing himself for a dip in ice water. He never knows what's going to pop up when he accesses his office cam feeds. Ninety percent of the time, he sees his cleaning crew, or Lex eating breakfast, but there's always that potential ten percent of getting bitch-slapped with something like...oh, say your girlfriend having a snogdown with a gay farmer on your formerly favorite chaise.

Clark had never said word one about that. Not if he didn't count a mumbled, "Sorry about the couch thing. It was an accident." Right. Clark had accidentally frenched Lois. Oliver snorts. He'd been tempted to tell Clark that oddly enough his stats on accidental guy frenching were zero. Somehow he'd managed to get through whole years of not kissing a guy, much less a guy who was dating a team member. Oliver breathes in. He's letting it go, letting it go, breathing in and letting it...oh, hell with it.

He needs more yogurt. How did they get that genuine tequila taste in there? Oliver licks his spoon.

And while it's just him and his yogurt...he'll admit that he's always envied Lex that aura of menace. He could ask anyone and none of them...okay, none except for a few dozen Excelsior students, would say that Oliver Queen was menacing. Only when he was Green Arrow, with his face hidden, his muscles exposed, and his voice altered, did people react with fear and wariness to him.

How had Lex done it? Scrawny, odd-looking, soft-voiced...and yet Lex had been the king of bone-chilling menace. There had been times when the younger boy's 'shall I kill him now or save it for later' stare had scared the crap out of him. And that, of course, had made him feel like he had to come down twice as hard on little Weirdo Angel, which had resulted in more stare downs, which had meant more...it had turned into a real vicious circle crapshoot.

Oliver sighs. He might as well get it over with. Lex probably knows about the Lex cam any way. He'll begin with the Lex cam; that should be safe enough. For a criminal mastermind, Lex is damned boring to watch. Oliver clicks on the cam feed. Breakfast table being set. Lex talking to his kitchen staff. Staff with trays going back and forth, loading and unloading food. Big yawn. Biiiig yawn.

Oliver tosses away his yogurt carton and gets up. He goes to his small 'fridge and considers his choices. Aha, Vodka Orange. He grabs the carton, pops off the lid, and strolls back to his desk.

Great. Just in time to watch Lex eat...oh, the excitement. Hold up, does Luthor have a guest? Good. He wouldn't mind a pretty face to break-up the boredom. God, he hopes it's that bocious British chick that sleeps over some times. Oh. It's Clark. Oliver watches Clark sit down at the table. The big brunette is looking quite sullen this morning. That's promising. Eating, talking, talking, more talking, annnd newspapers waving. Probably reading up on that new alien guy in town.

Oliver rolls his eyes. Weirdo Angel would be all over that one. More eating, talking, reading, eating, talking, reading. God, this is boring. Oliver straightens as Clark suddenly shoves his chair back and stalks around the table toward Lex. Ooooh, look who's got a mad on. About damned time, but what had Lex said to piss Clark off? Is Clark going to fling the obnoxious prick out the window?
Or at least hit him a couple of times? Oliver watches with interest as Lex's chair is jerked away from the table. He hasn't seen Lex look that startled since he and Geoffrey had depantsified Lex in the middle of the campus while Alden had filmed it. God, that had been funny. Oliver spoons up more yogurt. Come on. Go for it, Clark. Biff. Bam. Pow. Why isn't Clark biff, bam, powing? Why is the brunette just standing there? Maybe he's lecturing Lex instead.

Oliver shakes his head. Words just don't cut it with some people. Could Clark finally be getting that? Those big farmer shoulders are looking tense. And there's Clark looking over his shoulder. Wow, that's some frown. Why does Clark keep looking toward Queen Towers? Now Clark's leaning over Lex, all nice and threatening, and...now he's kneeling. What's he...SPLOTCH!

Oliver drops his squashed carton and gropes his desk for something to wipe the yogurt from his face. Justice Team members do not NOT suck Luthor dick. What does he have to do? Steal Lex's case files from Belle Reve and mail those to the Kent Farm? Get his old school buds together and invite Clark to sit in? Hell, the shit that Lex had done to Alden alone would fill a dozen filing cabinets.
Chapter Summary

Chloe calls Clark.

Chloe bites into her breakfast sandwich, enjoying the spicy taste of sausage and the milder notes of Cheddar and egg. She glowers at Lex's empty office as she chews. Where the hell is he? After Clark's Spandex Debut, she had expected to find Lex there when she walked into the newsroom. She hadn't gotten up at the crack of dawn so she could stare at a dark office. She looks up as the elevator opens with a discreet ding.

Her eyes widen as she watches her cousin stomp into the room, pausing only long enough to thump a leather purse into a desk drawer, before stalking toward Perry's office. Chloe swivels in her chair, watching in stunned disbelief. What's with the hideously ugly and faded mustard colored coat? Why is Lois dressed in her oldest jeans and sweatshirt? It's apparently dumpster diving time in Metropolis. What on earth had Lois been assigned to work on?

And to think that she'd been feeling envious of her cousin's perky newbie enthusiasm for the job. If a little dumpster diving doesn't kill it nothing will. Chloe picks up her triple espresso and watches as Lois makes emphatic gestures and talks at Perry. Uh-oh, she knows that look on Perry's face. If her cousin doesn't tone it down, Lois may be sentenced to a story that makes dumpster diving sound like high class fun.

Chloe spins back around as the elevator chimes again. Nope. Still not Clark. She takes another bite. She had fully expected to find him loitering around the building, tense and watchful. Maybe his nerves had gotten the better of him or he'd decided that it would be smarter to stay away. He could've called her at least. She glances at her calendar. He's done down with final exams yet. Maybe Clark had to rushed off and take a test.

She looks down at the pristine and perfect special edition on the center of her desk. There's a sticky note from Perry on the upper corner, 'Good job!' Chloe smiles. Wording it exactly right, while Perry breathed down her neck had not been easy. And now Perry wants more of the same from her. He's envisioning a whole series of interviews with Capes and wannabees. She could do it easily enough, but does she want to? There had been a time when she would have been all over an opportunity like that. But now...it only makes her feel tired. Like a dishwasher for a diner who sees another load headed her way.

Chloe wads up the waxed paper sandwich wrapper and tosses it into the trash. She gives her silent phone another annoyed stare. Could they be still...alright, she'll give Lex that one. Admit that if Clark was happily parked in her bed, she might not let him out for days. Chloe opens her phone and scrolls through her contacts until she reaches the rarely used number. She begins silently composing a snide message as she listens to the ringing. Is Lex ever going to pick up or...

"What?" Lex growls.

Chloe growls back. "I want to talk to Clark."

"He's busy. Talk to me."
She hears a muffled inquiring sound from Clark. Chloe frowns. "Not good enough, I want to talk to Clark."

"Tough. I like his mouth exactly where it is."

Then she hears an outraged, "Lex!"

Chloe frowns, trying to place the sudden muffled metallic noise going off in the background. She's heard the noise before. It's familiar, but she can't quite place the sound. She looks up, as the exact same noise chimes in front of her, to see Lois getting into the elevator. Her eyebrows go up. An elevator? An elevator. Lex has a castle, and a penthouse, and a million Lexmobiles, and he picks an elevator. She gives the Planet elevator a wary look. She hopes the cleaners hose that puppy down, but just in case, she's buying a purse-sized container of hand sanitizer ASAP.

Lex laughs huskily. "Uh-oh. Someone just lost their bet."

"Shut up. That doesn't count. And give me the damned phone," Clark demands in a deep throaty voice that makes Chloe wiggle in her chair as she listens.

"Yes, it does," Lex insists. "The terms of the bet said nothing about unexpected interruptions. I'll expect payment in full."

"Lex, I've got finals. How am I supposed to concentrate on taking tests with something like that hanging over my head?" Clark asks over the rustling sound of fabric. "Why don't you let me make it up to you some other way?"

Chloe raises her eyebrows at the distinctive sound of a zipper. Is it going up or down?

"No. So you might as well take your hands off my zipper."

"If I ask nicely will you tell me about the painting?"

Chloe sighs as she listens to kissing noises. "Clark, if you don't talk to me right now, I'm going to put this on speaker so the whole office can enjoy."

"Uhmm, hi, Chloe. What's wrong?" Clark asks.

"Nothing apparently. I was worried about you."

"I'm fine. I had breakfast and...kinda got sidetracked. Do I need to come over there?"

"Do you need Pete to bring your clothes and phone?"

"Nah. We both have an algebra test this morning; he's gonna bring my stuff there. Besides I've got clothes for today. And a new phone. You should see it, Chloe. It does everything but make coffee for you."

"And god knows what else it does."

"What that supposed to mean?"

"Guess. Oliver wants to have a meeting."

Clark sighs loudly. "Again? We just had a meeting."

"That was B.A."
"B.A.?

"Before Alien." She pauses to take a quick drink. "Oliver wants to talk alien with the group. Personally, I'd think that you might want to sit in on this one."

"I can't. I've got three exams today. Does Oliver even remember that I'm going to college AND managing the farm while my parents are gone? See if he can schedule it for tomorrow instead. Chloe," Clark speaks over the sound the elevator doors closing," has Oliver ever talked to you about school?"

"School? You mean like college?" Chloe bends down to unlock the bottom desk drawer and flips rapidly through the colorful file folders hanging there. Now that's a thought. She could go to Met U and study...what exactly?

She's never even thought of another career besides journalism. Not until this year. Maybe she should go to their website...see if anything struck her fancy.

"No. You know...Excelsior."

"Excelsior?" Chloe straightens with a orange folder in her hand. "All I know about Excelsior is that it was a ritzy prep school for rich boys that closed a few years back. There was some sort of scandal. I don't really remember what...do you want me to find out?"

"I don't care about it closing. I was wondering about Oliver...and Lex. Why Oliver is so focused on Lex."

"I dunno." Chloe flips open her folder and spreads out information that she's collected on Lex's disappeared and dead bodyguards. They were suspiciously accident prone for such athletic types. Tumbling down stair cases, slipping in the shower, falling out windows...just look at this Charles Waller who managed to slip while jogging, fall down an embankment, and end up dead in Crater Lake. And then there were all the firearms accidents. "Maybe Lex is Oliver's personal Mount Everest...he's evil and he's there."

"Lex is not evil."

"Right. He's only sadly misunderstood." Chloe frowns at her collection of obits, death certificates, and clippings. She'd noticed that there was high turnover rate among Lex's guards, but she had assumed that the cause was partly due to attrition from the sheer number of attacks made on Lex, partly due to savvy guards deciding to move on. "Clark, have you ever noticed how many new guards show up on Lex's security team?"

"Yeah? So? Lex isn't the easiest person to try to protect. Between the Luthor name and being a meteor freak magnet..."

"Hey! Stereotyping," Chloe protests. "Some of us prefer to stay far, far away."

"And you do that by working for him?"

"I do not work for him. I work for the Planet."

"Which he owns."

"I was at the Planet first. I can't help who bought it. Good luck on your test." Chloe closes her phone. She shuffles the papers and places the scant information on Gina at the front. She touches the small black and white photo. "What happened to you? Did you slip, fall, trip or have a messy
accident?"
It's A Red K Christmas! (10/62)

Chapter Summary

Ms. Teague is up to no good. Clark rescues a distressed woman.

Clark walks across the street, whistling a happy tune, as he treats himself to a stroll through the fancy tourist section of town where the MetroTalon Prime does a booming business. A plastic grocery sack filled with his clothes from yesterday and his old cell swings jauntily from his hand. It's a beautiful, beautiful day. He's scored a sexy badass boyfriend. He's been initiated into the joys of elevator sex. No one has recognized him as Superman. He has a cool new phone. His parents are safely out of town, hopefully living it up on the Fruititoots tour. And, he's fairly certain, that he'd just scored an A on his math final. Ooooh, yeah... who's smoking awesome today?

His old phone quivers in his pocket. Is that his parents again? He's told them like a million times that he's fine. That no one even believes that Superman is an alien, much less connects him to Superman. He's fine, Kara's fine, the farm is fine, and, god is Lex fine. Okay, maybe he hadn't mentioned that last one to them. He's not delaying telling them... he's just waiting for a face to face talk. Clark sighs and digs the phone out of his pocket. He opens the text message. Oliver wants to see him. Tough.

Clark pauses beneath the awning of a movie theater to text back that he's busy taking tests. Even as he starts to drop the phone back into his pocket it twitches. He glances at the screen again. Fine. Tomorrow then. Clark slides the phone into his jeans and strolls on. God. Couldn't Oliver give it a rest? He glances up and down the street. Hadn't he seen a phone store? This two phones thing is already old, but he's got time before his next test to get his old number assigned to his new phone. Aha, there it is. Next to the sporting goods place.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

He steals another look at the expensive looking woman sitting next to him. Something about her makes him think of hawks. Perhaps it's warm tones of her russet pantsuit, caramel brown hair, and bright amber eyes. Or maybe it's the way she watches him with her head tilted to one side. He'd never imagined anything like her in the passenger seat of his rusty clunker. She might be decades older than he is, but she's still one hot piece.

He'd think that a woman like that could finagle a party invite easily enough without resorting to this. Maybe she thought she was too good to stoop to charming some sap on the invite list into bringing her along. Maybe she really was a corporate spy with a secret agenda to advance; she'd dropped enough hints that she was up to corporate hanky panky. But maybe she was only a cougar looking for thrills... in which case, he's more than happy to take her money and play James Bond. Just to hear her sexy British accent again, he asks, "Why me?"

"Turn right at the next traffic light."

"Why did you pick me?"

"Because you have access." She glances quickly in the crooked rearview, checking the row of cars behind them. "Would you prefer that I chose someone else?"
"Well, no. I could use the money." This gig has gotta be the easiest money that he's ever made, and the safest. Until he'd gotten a job at that stupidly pretentious party store, he'd had no clue how much some people would pay to acquire an invitation to certain invitation only events. And the best part is knowing that not only is he sticking it to his snooty bitch of a boss, but he's grabbing a tidy profit from it as well.

"Turn here."

Oh-ho. The exit for the most notorious reststop this side of the Rockies. He smirks. Cougar wants some action, does she? He's willing to scratch her itch...for a price. He merges into traffic. Doesn't look like many people are heading toward Granville this afternoon. He glances in his mirror, admiring the white classic corvette that is speeding up and passing him. He eyes the car enviously. "I can't go far. I have to get back before my lunch hour is up."

"Don't worry. It's not much further. Do you have the invitations?"

"Yeah. I got 'em. Two invites to the Lilian Luthor Christmas Costume Ball. Exactly what you asked for." He steals a look at her long legs. "You got a costume ready? It's tonight, you know."

She smiles brilliantly at him. "I was thinking of going as a devil."

Clark walks out of the phone shop and heads back toward Met U. He stops outside a flower shop and looks at the display of Christmas wreaths in the window. Would Kara like one? It's not a tree, but it's kinda Christmas treeish. Maybe she would forgive him for sticking her with the milking the last two days if he gave her a wreath. His eyes light up. Are those mini-Christmas trees glowing on the back wall? That ought to rate a smile and maybe she won't rat on him when his parents come back. He reaches for the door.

"HHEEEEEEELLLLLLLP!"

Clark steps back and looks up. It sounded like the cry had come from above. But no one is dangling from windows. No one clinging to rooftops. No one hugging chimneys. Something bounces off his chest and hits the sidewalk. Clark looks down to see a man in a black ski mask scrambling up, hands full of an enormous yellow purse, and running away.

"Dont just stand there. Grab him, you moron!" A blond snarls as he sprints past.

"HHEEEEEEELLLLLP! OH, STOP HIM! STOP HIM!" A beautiful woman leans out a second story window. Her half-exposed breasts bounce emphatically as she points after the runner. "HE'S GOT MY BOO! OH, JESUS, PLEASE! SOMEBODY GET THAT BASTARD!"

Her boo? What's a boo? Whatever it is surly blond can handle it; he looked like a fairly speedy... Clark looks down the street and sees that Blondie has indeed caught up with the masked man and is engaged in a determined struggle. Good. He'd left his spandex behind at the penthouse.

Clark watches as the beautiful brunette races down her steps, boobs wobbling frantically as she races down the street screaming, "BOOO! BOOOO! GIVE MY BABY BACK, SONOFABITC!"

Baby? There's a baby involved? Why the hell hadn't someone said so. He tucks his bags underneath the hedge bordering the flower store and speeds through the sporting goods store next door. Damn, Clark hops on one foot. How'd people ever get into a wetsuit? He yanks it up over his ass. Shit! Ouch! That's worse than getting zapped by a wet towel in the locker room. He zooms down the street and snatches the squirming yellow purse away, bodychecking the masked man into the wall.
Clark smirks with satisfaction as the evil bastard bounces off the bricks and collapses in a heap on the ground.

"Oh, thank you, Red Blue Blur. I mean, Superman. Thank you!"

Clark looks down at the woman hugging him. Blondie is glaring savagely at him over her windblown curls. He gives the other man a helpless look and gets an even more savage stare. Clark sighs as a small crowd gathers and the cell phones pop out. Why him? Why him? Why HIM? He carefully pats her shoulder. "You're welcome, Miss."

"Thank you so much. How can I ever repay you?" She looks up at him with big brown eyes. Her rich brown breasts threaten to overflow the scoop neck of her white sweater. Her dainty hand spreads across the chest of his royal blue wetsuit. Her knee coyly nudges the hem of his baggy red trunks. "I don't know what I'd do without my Boo. Oooh, Mister Red Blue Blur...are you sure that there's nothing I can do to show my gratitude?"

Clark offers the yellow purse to her. "You're very welcome, Miss. I was glad to help. Is your...Boo okay?"

She opens the bag and a small white furred head pops out. Bulgy black eyes focus on Clark from beneath a fringe of hair and the dog growls. "Boo, you bad boy. Stop that."
Clark turns his yellow highlighter over in his hand as he starts down at his textbook and notebook. He needs to do something about a costume, but what? The cheap spandex from the costume shop probably wouldn't last another wearing even if he was willing to squeeze himself back into it. And no way is he going to ever wear a wetsuit again. He isn't sure what had been worse, trying to super speed into it or out of it. There's gotta be a way. Gotta be.

"Clark?"

"Lana?" He looks up to see Lana standing next to his table. With her long hair pulled back in an elegant swirl and a green designer pantsuit covering her slim frame, she looks nothing like the girl that he'd grown up with. "What are you doing here?"

She gives him a quizzical look over the foam go cup in her hand. "I own the chain. I like to make surprise inspections of my Talons. It's the only way to make sure everything is as it should be. Nice sweater."

"Oh, umm, thanks. It was a gift." Clark hastily stands up and pulls out a chair. "Have a seat."

"I don't think I've ever seen you in purple before. It's a good color on you." Lana slips into the chair and watches as he moves around the square table to his own seat. She sets her slim leather briefcase on the chair next to her. "Thanks."

"What are you brooding so hard about? Is everything okay?"

Clark rubs his thumb along the edge of the History of Journalism textbook that he'd been pretending to study for the last hour. "I've got finals."

"I don't miss those."

"Do you..." Clark blinks as lights flash at the edge of his vision. He turns to see a group of two guys and one woman snapping photos. Oh, god, has someone finally figured it? Do they know? "What the..."

"Ignore them."

"But..."

"Does it matter if they get a shot of me having coffee with an old friend?" Lana asks. "It probably won't sell, but the more photos they have, the better chance that they will succeed in capturing a money shot."

They were after Lana and not him? Thank, god. Clark relaxes. He drops his highlighter on top of his
open text and picks up his cup of coffee. He drinks as he watches the three photographers stow their gear and walk away. Is he's looking at his future? If he and Lex go public will he have to deal with that sort of thing? "How did you stand it?"

"It was a shock at first, but I quickly learned how to make it work for me, how to use it to promote my business. But since the divorce," Lana shrugs, "they only take the random photo. Just in case I suddenly do something interesting."

"Lana...can I ask you something personal?"

She stares suspiciously at him. "How personal?"

"Why did you get divorced?"

"Lex didn't tell you?"

"Irreconcilable differences." Clark shrugs. He sets his coffee mug down. "Grew apart. Wanted different things. The same stuff you two said in interviews."

"Ah. That. The Great Luthor Divorce. I suppose it's old news now. Chloe is the only person that I told the real story to."

"Will you tell me...since it's old news and all?"

"When we got married, we thought that I was pregnant." Lana shakes her head as Clark looks at her with big sympathetic eyes. "No, I didn't miscarry like your mom did. It was a false alarm. We were disappointed and we decided to try again."

"It didn't work out?" Clark asks softly. "I'm sorry, Lana. I didn't know."

"It's not something that either of us wanted to advertise." Lana grimaces. "The more we failed, the more strained and distant we became. It pushed us apart instead of drawing us closer."

"You didn't try a clinic?"

Lana stares at him. She arches her eyebrows. "Would you?"

No, but he wouldn't dare. He's oh. Oh. Had that been because Lex 'wasn't the average guy' as they liked to say in Smallville? And he doubts that Lana is the average girl...he's never seen her fail to immediately master anything that she decides that she wants to know from coffee shop management to astronomy to jewelry design. Clark admits softly, "Probably not. There's a lot of Smallville folks who wouldn't do that. Adoption's good though."

"We discussed it. But by then, we'd been fighting too long. We could seem to stop." Lana smiles ruefully. "Living in the castle with him...we were like two Siamese Fighting Fish dumped into an aquarium. We couldn't ignore each other, co-exist with each other, or leave each other alone. We decided that the only sane thing to do was to find our own bowls to swim in."

"You will find your family some day, Lana. I know it."

"That's all I ever wanted. A family of my own and my own business." Lana smiles brilliantly as she looks around the coffee shop with open satisfaction. "I've got the business. Who knows? The right person could walk into my life at any time."

Clark brightens. Hadn't Lana been at auction? Maybe his luck is turning again. He's already gotten a
free coffee and a chance to catch up with a friend. "Did you attend Lionel's charity auction?"

"Yes, I did." Lana smiles grimly. "I even bid on one of the items. I didn't see you there."

"I...kinda missed it." Clark blushes and looks away. "Anyway, I was wondering...did you see the painting that Lex donated this time?"

"Oh, yes. I caught the preview." Lana chuckles. "The bidding got pretty intense."

Oh, shit. What had Lex painted? Oh, god. Clark forces a smile. "Really? I didn't see any photos of it in the paper. Is it being displayed somewhere? I'd like to see it."

"Sorry, Clark. The winning bidder announced that the painting was going into a private collection."

"Who won it?"

"Selina Kyle. Whoever she is." Lana picks up her phone and frowns at the screen.

Clark licks his lips nervously. "So...umm...so...what was the painting of?"

"Oh, you know, Santa. I'm sorry, Clark, but I've got to go." Lana grabs her briefcase and slides out of her chair.

"But..."

"I'll tell them to keep you supplied with free coffee until you leave. Good luck with your next test. See you later."

Well, shit. Clark frowns as he watches her walk away. Damn it. What the heck had Lex painted? And can he steal it from this Selina Kyle person?

His parents wouldn't approve. Heck, he doesn't approve, but no naked parts of his are gonna be on display in some stranger's collection.

Genevieve Teague stands in front of a white corvette, tapping her toes as she waits for her son to finish dealing with the messier details. What is taking Jason so long? It wasn't like there had been that much blood. She eases the two invitations out of the elegant purple envelopes. A sprinkle of glitter blows away on the breeze as she opens them to inspect the white cards. There's a tiny Christmas tree embossed on the bottom corners and the center of the card is fill with red script inviting the bearer to join the Luthors at the ballroom of the Luthor Plaza Hotel. She tucks the cards back into the envelopes as her son strides back through the woods. "Jason."

"Yes, mother?"

"All taken care of?"

"Of course." Jason holds the car door open as his mother settles herself in the passenger seat. "Relax."

Genevieve watches as her son closes the door, and then walks around to climb into the driver's side. "We will need costumes, Jason. Any preferences?"

"What about Phantom of the Opera?" Jason backs out of his parking space.
He pulls onto the highway. "That would be easy enough. A tux and a white mask."

"The Phantom's mask covers the wrong part of the face. We need our mouths and noses covered."

"We could be a full mask Phantom. Or we could be mummies with bandages over our faces."

"Mummies? For a Christmas party?"

"Why not? We can tuck sprigs of mistletoe in our bandages or get bandages stamped with holly leaves or trees. We could interweave holiday ribbons. We could wear bows."

"Jason, if you aren't going to take this seriously..." Genevieve sighs with muted exasperation. Her eyes narrow as she studies the smile curving her son's full mouth. "Why are you so perky?"

"That's not perk. That's wind chill. Try to pick someone who can't run like a rabbit next time. If I wasn't an ex-football player, I might not have caught the target before he made it to the interstate."

"I think it's more than that." Genevieve sighs. "Tell me that you aren't glowing over the fact that she's on on the guest list."

"She? Who?"

"You know who."

Jason shrugs. "Hey, don't tell me that you aren't looking forward to seeing Lionel."

"That's different."

"Of course it is."

"It is," Genevieve insists. She stares at her son. "Which one of you ended up with the crystal?"

"Isobel."

"And I suppose it was Isobel that made no attempt to find you after you disappeared? Isobel who promptly began cuddling up to both Lex and Clark while you were dragging yourself out of the river? The only people looking for us were the Luthors and my darling Edward."

"Lionel shot me, but I don't see you giving him the cold shoulder."

Genevieve sniffs. "Lionel would be the first to tell you that it pays dividends to keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

"Oh, is that your excuse?"

"Don't be tedious, darling. Your father went monk on me. A woman has her needs."

"And besides, you think that Lionel has the crystals."

"I'm not sure who has them. Or who might have acquired them. Lex, Lionel, and Lana all had one or more of the crystals in their possession at various times." Genevieve touches her shoulder, tracing the raised lines of her scar. She almost lost once. She won't lose again, whatever it takes. "Remember, we can't kill any of them until we have what we want."
Clark makes another rescue in an improvised costume. Batman makes an appearance.

Clark strolls down the sidewalk, book bag hitched on one shoulder, grocery bag swinging from one hand, and a bag from the flower shop swinging in the other. He's pretty sure that he passed the test, but that prof is one of the sort that likes to put sneaky essay questions on exams. He'd gotten the fact part of it right, but the persuasive essay part...that's harder for him to judge. His chin lifts. Anything Lois can do, he can do, damn it. No History of Journalism class is getting between him and his degree.

"Help! Somebody, help me! HEEELLLLPP!"

His head turns as he searches the streets for the source of the cry. He can see other people doing the same puzzled head swivel that he is. Clark rapidly scans a leather goods shop, a lingerie store, two bistros, a jewelry store, three bed and breakfasts, a bank, a bar, two hotels, and a restaurant. Nothing. Huh. The street is full of people, but no one in any distress that he can see.

"HEEEEEELLLLPPP!"

Damn, that sounds close. Could the person be in an ally? A side street? No. Clark turns again, doing a scan of surrounding...BOINK! Something bounces off his head and hits the sidewalk. What the hell? Clark bends down and picks up a white high heeled shoe. A really, really big shoe. He didn't know that women's shoes came in that...another shoe bounces off his shoulder. Okay, that's it. What nutcase is beaning passersby with...oh. Oh, dear. Clark stares up at a pair of shapely legs flailing wildly beneath gauzy white skirts and a terrified face beneath tousled pale hair.

Someone in the crowd yells, "Look, it's Marilyn!"

"Oh, my god! Someone save Miss Monroe!"

"Must be one of those damned cross-dressers from the convention."
Crap. That’s the twentieth floor of the hotel. Shit. Clark glances around at the other people on the street. Some are filming Marilyn with their phones and others are calling the police and fire departments and emergency services and a few are calling the local news channels.

Crap, crap, crap. What should he do? This no costume thing is a pain in the ass.

Should he speed into the hotel, slam through the door, and grab Marilyn? Pretend that he’d been on that floor the whole time? But what if someone had seen him down here? Should he wait for him...her...Marilyn to fall and do a catch? Damn it. No time to speed back to the penthouse and snag the spandex. No handy sporting goods place here. Crap. Clark looks wildly around and his gaze lights on the leather goods store. There’s stuff in the window that looks sorta like what Oliver wears. Or would if Oliver wore black or red instead of green. Faster than the eye can see, he zooms into the shop, grabbing reds and blues.

"HEEEEEEELLLLLLP! HELPME!"

"It's a woman!"

"It's a man!"

"OHMYGOD!"

"Shhhhhhhiiiit! He's falling! Get outta the way!"

"OOOOOHSHIT!!!!!! AAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Clark zips out the back and around the building, frantically changing as he runs, stuffing his new cloths into the grocery bag, and swooshing upwards to leave the bag on the ceiling of the next building.

"Look, it's a giant bird!"

"It's a...what the hell is that?"
"Is that Blur Man?"

Clark lobs himself through the air to snatch the falling...what the hell...where'd the other one come from...he wraps his arms around both people, and gently floats them to the ground.

"Superman!"

"Red Blue Blur!"

"Blur Man!"

Clark pats Marilyn's wide shaking shoulders. "There, there. There, there. It's okay."

Marilyn twists in his grip. "Who stole my fucking shoes? Do you know who much Prada costs in that size? I'm gonna FUCKING KILL...oh, my god! You're the Red Blue Blur! I mean, Superman. Thank you."

Shit. Clark's eyes widen as an enthusiastic kiss is planted on his mouth. Lex is so not going to be happy about that. Does that sort of thing happen to the others on the team? Maybe it's the costume. People had never kissed him back in Smallville after a rescue. He absently lowers his arms as the second guy slams an elbow into his ribs and swears viciously at him. Clark steps back, releasing them. "You're welcome, Miss Monroe."

"Ooooh, angel baby, you're even prettier in person."

Clark takes another step back as Marilyn openly ogles him. He eases back, trying to find space enough for a safe launch. Something a thin black cord dangling from the opposite building catches his attention. He traces the line and frowns. Is that a bat on the end? Did some kid lose a kite? It's kinda small for a...

"And that costume...aren't you a frisky Blur. I've been a very, very bad person. Spank me, sweetie."
Wait. What? Clark turns his head and stares at himself in the window. Gold chains strain to lace a navy leather vest over his chest. His nipples peek over the links. He's wearing matching navy chaps and a scarlet leather thong with little gold swirls on it. His ass feels suspiciously chilly as a breeze kicks up the hem of the red curtain that he'd snatched from the display window for his cape. And standing behind him is a tall man in a black cape and mask. Clark whips around, staring.

"I tell you, Margie, I used to live in Gotham...that's really him."

"Batman!"

"Look, it's Batman!"

"Batman, in Metropolis! Quick, get a picture!"

Clark swallows hard as he looks down into dark, cold, cold eyes. Clearly Batman is not amused. "Ahh, sir...Mister Batman, sir...this is such an..."

"I heard that Metropolis was full of freaks," Batman rasps as he looks Clark up and down. His black cape swirls menacingly around him as he turns to Marilyn. "Are you alright, Miss Monroe?"

"Ooooh, yes. Thank you, Batman."

Clark scowls as he notices that no one is touching Batman. It's not fair. Why do people feel free to...he squeaks as a cold hand cups his butt cheek and squeezes. Clark claps his hands protectively over his ass and launches himself into the air. Oh, god. Ohgodohgodohgod. Okay, okay, calm down. Calm. First he's gotta change...and then...and then...he'll think of something.
Chapter Summary

Kara watches DVDs.

Kara eats another handful of Fruititoots. Her eyes half-closed in bliss at the sweet crunchiness. Her cousin is right. Fruititoots aren't just for breakfast; the cereal is good at any time of the day. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snacks...it's good for all occasions. She pauses to drink from her glass of chocolate milk. She sets the glass down on the coffee table, next to the glass of white milk. Kara tries another handful of cereal. Ummm. She licks crumbs from her palm. Chocolate milk goes best with Fruititoots. Clark had gotten that one completely wrong. Not that the white milk wasn't good with it, but the chocolate...oooooh.

She shakes more into her cupped hand and sets the box on the stack of DVDs that she had rented. Her eyes widen as the baby's father cheerily announces over profanity-laced screaming that mama is almost fully dilated. A dainty foot kicks savagely and he goes sprawling out of camera range. Kara picks out the green Fruititoot squares and eats those first as she watches the man stagger back into camera range, nose bleeding, as he praises the mama for being such a trooper.

Why hadn't they shown Birthing At Home With Bob at the high school? Kara flinches as the camera swoops in for a close-up of the baby's head crowning. That sight alone is worth a millions words on prudence from the strange woman who had waved a banana around. Kara frowns. She still isn't clear on what role a banana plays in human reproduction. Do they eat one first? Do they hang it over the bed?

One thing that she is completely clear on is that she is never walking by heaping piles of bananas in the grocery store without keeping a wary eye on them. They don't have any bananas in the fridge...will that pose a problem for Clark and Lex? Maybe Lex has the bananas. She hopes that one of them has bananas on hand because she is not walking into a store and buying some for them.

Kara crunches down the rest of her Fruititoots as she watches. Her cousin is so amazingly brave. To know that this is coming and still walk around that big smile on his face. It's almost enough to make her forgive him for sticking her with the milking again. Not that she doesn't agree a hundred percent that milk, butter, and ice cream are very fine things, but those cows, those stinky, ugly, and slobbery things. Maybe it would be different if they had some of the chocolate milk cows.

Why don't they have any of the chocolate milk cows? She will have to ask...Uncle Jonathan and Aunt Martha. Kara sighs. It feels so jarring to address them that way, in even the privacy of her
thoughts, but it wouldn't do to slip up. Can she convince them that Christmas trees are better than cows? Kara glances wistfully at the DVD that she'd found on Christmas tree farms. That one and three other Christmas DVDs are on the bottom of the stack. Her reward for sitting through the rest of the DVD set, 'Birth That Baby', 'Home Birthing', and 'OMG! It's Coming NOW!'

She hopes that Clark and Lex appreciate her willingness to help when the time comes. How much trouble is her cousin going to be in when his parents return? Using the rodersax is a very serious choice and one that should have been made only after discussions with both sets of elders and appropriate medical professionals. Will the A.I.'s approval as Uncle Jor El and Aunt Lara's proxy suffice?

Kara eats another handful of cereal. She suspects that Uncle Jonathan and Aunt Martha won't what's that phrase? Oh, yes. Won't give a rat's ass what the A.I. thinks. Or Lionel. But the A.I. had promised her that it had discussed the full rodersax ramifications with Clark, and that it had done so using a vocabulary that it's emissary had assured it would be perfectly comprehensible...even to one raised in a culture with such primitive sciences.

She wrinkles her nose as the camera veers in for another close-up. Kara picks up the stack of mail on the table and sorts through it. She'd forgotten to check the mailbox for the last few days. There's three seed catalogs for Uncle Jonathan. Two gardening supply catalogs for Aunt Martha. An envelope from Met U for Clark. She drops a sales circular for Fordman's Big&Tall section on top of the Met U envelope. Kara sets three clothing catalogs addressed to 'Lois Lane or currant occupant' aside for her own share of the mail.

What's this? Her eyes widen as she sees a pretty envelope with her name on it. She has mail! Real mail of her very own. She carefully opens it up and a dash of gold glitter falls onto the catalogs that she's claimed. Kara pulls out one creamy card. It's a party! Her face falls. A costume party. What's she going to wear? She could wear her jeans, borrow one of her cousin's plaid shirts and Jonathan's hat and say she's a cowgirl. She could wrap herself in sheets and stick flowers in her hair and claim to be a nymph. She could ask to borrow one of Lois' suits and a Daily Planet notepad and say that she's a reporter.

Her shoulders droop as she imagines showing up at a fancy Metropolis party in sheets or jeans. Her head turns as she hears a vehicle outside. Who could it be? One of her friends? A neighbor wanting Clark's help? The Sheriff dropping by to check on them while Martha and Jonathan are gone? Kara stares through the walls and door, watching as a van with a Metropolis Express Couriers logo on the side comes to stop in front of the house. More mail? She walks toward the front door and pulls it open as a woman in a white uniformed gets out.

"Kara Kent?" The woman bounces lightly up the steps, holding a large brown box. "I've got a delivery."
"That's me." Kara grins. Wow. Two pieces of mail for her in one day. She takes the package and signs for it. She shuts the door as the delivery woman walks away and studies the box. It's long and wide and flat. She places it on the couch and looks at the address label. There's her name and...oh, it's from her new relative. She tears open the brown box and finds a second one, wrapped in white paper and covered with tiny green trees. There's a white card tucked under the edge of the shiny green bow.

She plucks the card free and reads it aloud, "I thought this would suit you. If you don't like it, or it doesn't fit, take it back to the store and they will give you another one. Lex Luthor."

Kara pulls the bow loose and rips away the paper to find a beige and gold box beneath. She takes the top off and eagerly pushes back white tissue to find soft pale blue fabric, a golden halo, and wings with white feathers edged in glittering blue.

"A Christmas tree angel! I'm going to the party as a tree angel!" She hugs the long blue dress to her chest as she dances around the couch with excitement. It's perfect. The next best thing to having a Christmas tree of her own.
It's A Red K Christmas! (14/62)

Chapter Summary

Jor El and Lara talk to Clark.

Clark swoops down on the balcony outside the penthouse. He hastily grabs the hem of his curtain cape as it flips upward. Is anyone there? He scans the rooms, but doesn't see anyone. He eases the unlocked doors open and speeds across the living area, past the breakfast nook and kitchen, and into the bedroom.

Thank god that Lex can't see him now. Clark unties the curtain's hem and folds it onto the bed. He's gotta find some way to sneak that back to the store. He unlaces his leather vest and drops it on top of the red curtain. That too will need to go back. He unfastens his leather chaps and frowns at them. Can those go back? The red throng, he's gonna have to pay for. He can't take that back after tucking Mr. Happy and The Boys inside. God. How much does this sort of stuff cost?

He's going to have to visit that store now and discreetly check the prices. And the wetsuit...Clark sighs. He'd figured that he could return the trunks since those had been worn over the wetsuit. He hadn't wanted a boxershield and he hadn't worn them with the wetsuit...which means he's gonna have to pay for that. How much do wetsuits cost? This costume thing is really adding up already and he still doesn't have one that he can reuse. The spandex stuff, cotton cape, and red nylon briefs from the costume store hadn't cost that much.

But this? He holds up the chaps and stares at them...this is custom work and genuine leather. Clark drops them on top of the curtain...he can probably take the chaps back. That only leaves him with the leather throng and the wetsuit to pay for. Maybe it won't be too bad. He takes the throng off and puts in in the bag that holds his clothes. Clark fishes out his old cell phone and sets it on the bedside table. He likes the way it looks there...the way it announces 'Clark Kent was here.' But it's not enough. He digs into the bag and pulls out his clothes from yesterday and speeds into the laundry room, dropping them into the hamper to mingle with Lex's washables.

He zips back to the bedroom and tugs on his new jeans and purple sweater. Clark gathers up his bags. He strolls out into the living area and looks around. It could use a few Clark Was Here marks. He rummages around in his book bag and pulls out his notebooks. He drops the math one on the coffee table and sets his journalism history notes on the wet bar. He takes out his red paperback dictionary and leaves that on the fireplace mantel for good measure.

His stomach rumbles, reminding him that he'd never gotten around to grabbing some lunch. Clark walks into the kitchen. What kind of lunch fixings does Lex have? He opens the fridge door and smiles to see that the yogurt is gone. He pulls out a container of thinly sliced roast and a package of cheddar. Clark sighs. Seven kinds of mustard and not a single jar of mayo. He grabs the brown mustard. No iceberg lettuce either? Damn. The carton of onion and clover sprouts will have to do. At least there are pickles. Clark grabs a bottle of water on his way out of the fridge. He sets his loot on the counter and lets the door swing shut.

"Kal El."

"Crap!" Clark starts. "Stop that!"
"Lara and I want to be certain that you have a clear understanding of the seriousness of your situation."

"I am not conquering the world. I don't care if my parents are out of town. So just drop it right there."

"Did I say anything about world conquest?"

Clark pulls a plate from the cabinet. "You were going to."

"No, I wasn't."

"Were." Clark finds a loaf of multigrain bread and cuts off two thick slices. He spreads mustard over the bread.

"Was not."

"Were."

"Kal El. I only want to be certain that you understand..."

Clark slides a knife through the cheese. "I understand fine. You've only been after me to conquer the world since I was fifteen. I'm not gonna. Get over it."

"Let me try this again. See if I can make it...less complex." Jor El purses his lips thoughtfully as he considers. "Long, long ago, well before you were born, Krypton was home to a number of warring kingdoms..."

Oh, god...history lecture time. Clark rolls his eyes. He opens the container of sprouts and grabs a handful. He washes them and then pats them dry on a paper towel. He takes his time, carefully and artistically arranging the sprouts over the slices of cheese.

"And so it was that the custom of treaty brides came to be. But there was still a problem. The neighboring kingdoms did not always have male and female heirs. Indeed some kingdoms had only a prince apiece. And it was an unavoidable fact that invading warlords were statistically more likely to be male than female in those days, and so the social initiatives of treaty spouses arose. But this forward thinking still failed to achieve lasting peace and so the heroic Kryptonian scientists decided to devise a way for such princes to create a lasting alliance by begetting descendants who..."

Clark adds thin slices of beef to each bread slice. Then another artfully arranged layer of sprouts. A squiggle of mustard. Wait...wait...while he's thinking about it...he walks over the grocery list and writes 'mayo' on it.

"...which worked very well, but some princes felt it unfair that only one of them could be chosen as the vessel and so the Kryptonian scientists returned to their labs and in the fullness of time it was discovered that if both princes..."

Would Jor El ever shut up? All that history stuff is so freaking boring. And what does it matter anyway? It's not like he's gonna get a pop quiz and a grade on it. God, he's got another test to go before he's done. Why did Jor El have to pick today to go all history prof on him? Jeez. Clark opens his bottled water and takes a drink. He moves back to his sandwich and after due consideration layers into two more slices of beef.

"But it was discovered that if both princes were exposed to a certain rare mineral, a mineral that could be found only in the darkest, deepest caverns on the planet..."
Clark adds one more slice of cheddar and then a row of pickles. He stacks the sandwich together and then takes a big bite. Oh, yeah. Oh, man. That hits the spot. But a little dessert would be nice too. Where had those cinnamon rolls that he'd smelled this morning gone? He scans the kitchen. Aha, there they are. Clark opens another cabinet and pulls down a rectangular container. He pops the top off and inhales the sweet cinnamony-vanilla goodness. Oh, yeah. Come to papa. He takes three and adds them to his plate.

"And thus you should be particularly cautious about exposure to Red Kryptonite at this time in your life, my son."

"Huh? Red K?" Clark mumbles through his mouthful of sandwich, but when he turns the surface of the fridge is blank. Shit. Jor El's gone again. Damn it, he wishes the A.I. would stop doing that. It's so annoying.
Chapter Summary

Lana ponders. Weather Girl Candi runs into Jonathan and Martha.

Jason, that's who Oliver reminds her of...Jason with those beautiful brown eyes that always seemed so sincere. Is Oliver setting her up as deviously as Jason had? Her mouth tightens. If that's Oliver's game, he's going to be disappointed. She's older and wiser and no one is going to take her growing empire away from her. Lana looks around her oldest and favorite Talon. Her assistant manager seems to have everything running smoothly in the coffee house. There's no need for her to hang around any longer.


But no lipstick. She could have sworn that she had tossed a tube in her bag when she changed purses this morning. Lana glances at her watch. She's going to have to leave soon if she's going to arrive in Metropolis in time for her appointment to have her photo made. If there's any chance that her photo next to an article on local businesswomen will draw more business into her Talons, then she's going to make sure that her face is the prettiest one in the photo op.

She yanks open her desk drawer. Surely she's left some lipstick or gloss in there somewhere. She paws impatiently through the pencils and pens and sticky note blocks. Talon stationary and business cards get shuffled to the side. Wait. What's that behind the jumbo box of paper clips? She pulls out three sample-sized tubes of lipstick. The first is a garish red. She makes a face and drops it into the trash. No way is she wearing that. The second tube is pale pink; the sort of thing that she would have worn in high school. That one's a maybe. She tries the third one. It's a soft violet rose. A very nice shade. The stick is sharply angled and unused. Where had she gotten it? She turns it over and peers at the tiny print on the bottom. She can't completely read the bitty print circling the gold-edged star on the bottom. Something about essences. Whatever. It will do. She turns to the mirror hanging on the wall and strokes the color over her lips.

"Hi, Candi."

"We watch your show every night."

"Can we have your autograph?"

She smiles at the three redheads standing next to her seat. Must be brothers, she decides as she studies the freckled faces and matching brown eyes. "Of course, you can. What would you boys like for me to sign?"

The youngest boy holds out a book on the weather with a fresh receipt from the bookstore across the
corridor sticking out of it. He blushes a painful looking red. "To Josh, please, Miss Candi. Thank you."

She scrawls her signature over the title page and hands it back to him with a big smile. Her show hear that, Carver? After that bastard had tried to snip a few seconds off her air time. It had been a near thing, but the sheer number of letters and requests for autographed photos that she regularly received had tipped the balance and it had been Sid's sports segment that had lost those seconds instead.

The second boy hands her a magazine with her photo in the corner. "To Rob, please. Thank you, Miss Candi. Where are you off to? We're moving to California."

"That's wonderful, sweetie. I'm sure you will love it there." Candi glances over her shoulder at the camera and sound and make-up people. Will Carver and the producers be able to snag enough seats for them to all go on the same flight? It would be so sad if some holiday traveler got bumped because Carver got a bee in his pants about doing a follow-up on this silly Superman guy. At least, Sid would get a kick out of it. She smile at the kid. "We're going to Kansas, hon."

"Are you after that Red Blue Blur fella, Miss Candi? I'm Paul." He holds out a Weather Girls of the Southwest calender, flipped open to her photo.

She signs her name in the corner. "There's been enough viewer interest in him that Carver talked the producers into letting us try for a live interview with the Blur."

Paul looks at Carver and then back at her and winks. "If I was that Blur guy, I'd rather talk to you than Carver, Miss Candi. We better go. Our folks are waiting. Thanks."

Candi stares after him, his words circling in her head. She fingers the heart-shaped locket resting on her breasts. Wouldn't that be a fine payback for Ol' Carver? This Red Blue Blur Superman fellow did seem to have a habit of rescuing people. And he had given his very first interview to a very pretty girl. She's sure that Chloe Sullivan wouldn't like to think that's what had nabbed the interview for the reporter, but she'd bet that it sure as heck hadn't hurt. She's gonna have to do some thinking on that one. She turns as Sid taps her on the shoulder. "Hmmm?"

"Stop woolgathering and come on, Candi. Carver's got us a flight. You don't want to miss it. We got the last one."

"I sure don't. Thanks, Sid." She slings her carry-on over her shoulder and falls in beside him.

They pass a tall, rumpled blond who is spearheading the pack of disappointed passengers in front of the customer service booth. A little on the mature side, but still tasty looking with that golden hair and golden tan. And those shoulders ummm! He deserves a little something for getting bumped by the news team. His brown gaze crosses hers. His lips part and his eyes widen. A fan! How sweet. Maybe he won't mind so much then. She gives him her best weather girl smile over her shoulder and adds extra hip action to her strut. She grins at his choked, "Oh, my god."

At the edge of her vision, she sees him loom over the ticket agent. "You don't understand! I have to get home now!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. Sick cow emergency, right? I heard you the first time. Sit tight, Kansas. I'll get you a hotel room and..."

"Hotel room? No, I've got to get home!"

"Then go rent a car, E.T.," the agent snaps.
Wow. That guy must be a big, big fan. Maybe she'll mention him on tonight's broadcast. Wouldn't hurt to remind the producers that she had more fans than both those snooty anchors did.
Chapter Summary

Lionel offers Lex advice.

"Lex. Wait," Lionel orders. "I want a private word with you."

Lex watches the other lucky bastards pour out of the LuthorCorp conference room. His reluctant gaze goes to the tall man standing at the head of the table. Why does his dad keep maintaining the close-cropped hair that makes the older man look like a prison escapee? The thin mouth is crooked in a gentle, hopeful smile and the amber eyes lack the usual gleam of rabid wolf. Lex swallows hard as he remembers this man telling him, 'I love you, son.' What had happened to his evil, masterful, hard-hearted Luthor of a father? What had happened to the man who was never pleased or satisfied with him? Lex studies the stranger wearing his dad's face. "Yes?"

"I'm worried, son."

"About what?"

"You."

"Me?" Lex frowns. What does his father suspect him of this time? "Why?"

"You look pale and tired. You seemed distracted during the meeting." Lionel strolls around the table. His gazes moves measuringly over his son. "Are you well, Lex?"

"Is it time for the LuthorCorp mandated medical exams already? I thought that I had a couple of months left before having to run on the treadmill like a hamster for the amusement of your medics."

"I'm concerned, Lex." Lionel reaches out and touches his son's shoulder. "Youre my son and I care about you. Is that so hard to believe?"
"We've never had a traditional father-son relationship."

"No." Lionel sighs. He lowers his hand. "No, we haven't. That's something that I regret and would like to repair. It doesn't have to be that way between us, Lex."

Lex studies Lionel warily. What is his dad up to? Where is Lionel going with this pathetic pabulum? Could his dad truly mean this? No, there has to be an ulterior motive somewhere. He needs to look harder. "It doesn't?"

"No, son. It doesn't."

"Where would you suggest beginning?"

"I'm glad that you asked, Lex. I know how you feel about psychologists, but I think we could all benefit from family counseling...you, me, Lucas."

"I would prefer that you try to kill me again, and I feel absolutely certain that I speak for Lucas as well."

"Don't be so defensive." Lionel shakes his head reproachfully. "Lex, I have changed. And while my security team is benefiting from all the practice, the assassination attempts are getting tedious. How can I follow Dr. Dawn's prescription for therapeutic journaling if I am constantly getting interrupted?"

What? He hasn't...someone is targeting both of them? That should cut down the suspect line. Assuming that his dad isn't lying so that he will focus his resources on looking in the wrong direction. "Dad, are you saying that..."

"Dr. Dawn warned me that you might be resistant to the idea."

"She..what? You're actually talking to that New Age floozy?" Lex stares at his dad in horror. "You're telling a media personality...what the fuck are you telling her?"

Lionel blinks mildly at him. "Dr. Dawn says that without the courage to own your truth, you can't
expect to have a breakthrough. You really should read her books, son. I'll send you a copy of the
deluxe edition of 'Dawn of a New You'. It includes an audio version of the book along with the print
copy and a 'Truth Journal' to get you started on your Truth Journey. It's autographed too."

"Terrific." Lex edges toward the doorway. He swallows against a sudden nauseous twitch in his
stomach. Wonderful. Now he needs to set some of his people on taking a deeper look into Dr.
Dawn's background and hoping that there's some fucking good blackmail material on that bitch.
Otherwise he may be finding out if his goldfish consider New Agers more palatable than he does.
Perhaps he could save her for the newest batch of electric eels. Todd had said that a test subject was
needed.
Lois hunts for a big story. Lana asks Chloe out.

Lois peels off her oldest tee shirt and tosses it into the trash bag on top of her jeans, socks, and work boots the ones that she had used for working on the Kent Farm. Ah, the good ol' days, when she'd only had to muck out stalls. And to think how she'd griped about the smell. Compared to what she'd been doing for most of the day, cow shit was delightful.

She unfastens her plain white cotton bra and shimmies out of the matching panties. Holding her breath, she flings them into the bag and quickly knots the top closed. Sewers. God, what moron had come up with story idea? When Perry told her that she was going to do an urban legend story, she'd been excited. She'd been thinking of ghostly hitchhikers or maybe something with involving one of those old cemeteries in Metropolis or a vampire themed club.

Something with some juice. Something worthy of a rising young reporter's talents. Lois yanks aside the shower curtain and turns the faucets. What had she gotten? Monsters in the sewers. Puhleese. What moron had thought that assignment up? God. She steps into the shower and reaches for the soap. She can't believe that she had to get up at the damned crack of dawn to meet her guides to the city sewer system. And as if that wasn't enough, she hadn't been able to get back to the blessed surface until late afternoon.

Lois scrubs hard at her skin. After that, she could stay in the shower all day and not feel clean again. God. Most the damned day wasted. And what a time to find out that something about tunnels and watery clanky sounds make her nerves ping frantically. Thank god, that she'd brought a recorder and had every word spoken down there because she'd been beyond making any kind of sensible notes. She'd endured all that and for nothing!

Oh, the crew had been full of creepy stories about mysterious noises, bloodstains, and half-glimpsed red-eyed creatures, but she knew stories designed to freak out the newbie when she heard them. She and Lucy had been the new kids in town far, far too often for her to fail to recognize that particular brand of leg-pulling. But maybe she could make an article out of what she had. Write about how the sewers worked. Write about the people who worked there. And if nothing else, well, she had made some contacts that might one day turn into a real story.

Lois takes a deep breath of the lime-coconut scent that always makes her feel like she's at a beach. About to step out and see a wide blue stretch of water and find a handsome pool boy holding a tray of colorful drinks with cute little umbrellas in them. She needs a drink with an umbrella in it. Maybe two. A pool boy might be good too. Especially if she could arrange for Oliver to see her flirting with Mr. Speedo. She grabs her shampoo bottle. Monsters in the sewer, her ass. What nonsense.

She needs a real story. Something that will get her on the front page. She needs to get back in the game. It's time to put her wounded pride aside and demand that Oliver give her that interview that he'd offered. The question is should she demand an interview with Oliver or with the Green Arrow? A naughty smile spreads across her face. What about both? Superheros seemed to be this month's flavor and she'd rather write about them than feel-good Christmas articles. What if she nailed an interview with not only the GA, but the Red-Blue Blur and the Angel of Vengeance? Maybe she'd
"Chloe." Jimmy Olsen squirts a dollop of whipped cream into his coffee cup and then sets the can back onto the counter at the Planet's breakroom. "I was wondering if you would be interested in going to the Ace of Clubs tonight. I hear that the Kelman Greens will be playing there tonight.

"Jimmy, I..."

"Get bored with the high school set?" Lana asks. She smiles with satisfaction at the irritated look that Jimmy turns on her. "Hi, Chloe."

"Lana! Hi." Chloe hugs her friend.

Jimmy frowns at Lana. "I thought that you'd left already."

Lana smiles warmly at Chloe, ignoring the loser standing behind her friend. She eyes the sassy bow circling the edge of Chloe's red sweater. Her gaze skims admiringly over the fit of the narrow black wool skirt before moving back up to Chloe's big blue eyes. "I hope you don't mind that I arrived a little early. I really appreciate you're letting me read the rough draft of your profile on rising young businesswomen."

"You...what?" Jimmy stares at Chloe. "You let her read the draft? I never get to your articles until I picked up a copy of the paper."

"Lana is my friend." Chloe frowns back at him. "Clark and Pete taught me a long time ago that some times people are more important than the story."

Jimmy snorts. "Right. Clark. I should've known. Didn't I see him lurking around the lobby yesterday?"

"Oh?" Lana asks, adopting the same air of wide-eyed interest that she had used when Lex began talking chemistry or classical literature. "Were you helping him prep for finals?"

Jimmy glowers at Lana. "Weren't you in a big hurry to get done with the shoot because you had places to be and people to see?"

"And here I am...seeing Chloe."

Jimmy frowns, and tries again. "Weren't you supposed to be..."

"No," Lana cuts him off without ever taking her gaze from Chloe's beautiful face. "I'm here to take Chloe to dinner."

"Dinner?" Chloe asks as she reaches for her PDA. "Were we supposed to meet for dinner today?"

"I hoped that you would have dinner with me." Jimmy smiles hopefully at Chloe.

Lana stares at Jimmy. Maybe he isn't quite as slow as she had thought, but he's still out of luck. All those boyfriends hadn't been a complete waste of time; she'd learned a lot juggling them. She turns a pleading stare on Chloe. "I have to talk to you privately. It's important." She lets her lips quiver slightly and the faintest hint of tears touch her eyes. "Please."

"Of course, Lana." Chloe nods. "Let me go get my coat."
Lana smirks at Jimmy and mouths, 'Loser' at him as she strolls out behind Chloe.
"What were you thinking?" Bobby asks as he clambers down the ladder to the deeper levels of the system. He glances between his feet at the top of Steve's hardhat. "What?"

"Uhm, Bobby?"

"I tell you, Steve, I like messing with the new person as well as the next guy, but that was a frigging Daily Planet reporter! You know how the boss is...sensitive as girl, I swear. It's almost as bad as talking to my wife when I gotta deal with him."

"Bobby?"

"Jaysus, Steve, he's gonna have a six cow and a goat fit if that reporter prints any of that crap you gave her. Where the hell didya get that woo-woo shit, huh? Jayyyyyssus. Bloodstains. Scratch marks. And let's not forget the gnawed..."

"BOBBY!"

"WHAT? Jaysus. If the boss is like my wife, I swear working with you...it's like having a shift with teenage daughter. What, Steve? What the hell is it this time...was it," Bobby raises his voice to a mocking falsetto, "OH MY GOD, a mouse?"

"Would you stop giving me shit for five seconds? There's...there's...OH, SHIT!"

"Of course, there's shit. We're in a frigging sewer. Jaysus." Bobby sighs as the dim lights lining the hole go out. "Great. That's just frigging great. What did you do, Steve? Steve? Damn it, Steve, would you stop making those dumb-ass slobbering noises and tell me what the hell you just did? Did you fuck up the lights on purpose? Not funny. I've been dealing with guys like you for decades, you little shithead. You think that I don't know when...Jaysus, Steve! Keep your little fairy paws to yourself, okay? Which part of I gotta a wife and kid do you not...AAAAAAAGGGGGHHH!"
"Come on, Clark. Come ON." Chloe stands in the restaurant's privacy booth, clutching her cell phone. She stares warily through the glass wall at the customers waiting for a table. When Lana had offered to take her out to eat, she had been expecting a buffet and salad bar kind of place. Not Pomona's. Not the hot new date place. She wondered the second that she'd seen the sign what they were doing there. Did Lana know that Pomona's was the place to take a date you wanted to romance? Did Lana mean anything by the choice?

And shortly after their food had arrived, and exactly when she'd dediced that Lana simply liked the excellent pasta...Lana had kissed her. Right there over the Lobster Alfredo. Her lips are still burning with that kiss. What hell had happened? Chloe swears under her breath as she listens to the rings. Except for that senior year, Lana had always seemed pro-guy; she had dated guys, flirted with guys, and married a guy. Lana has a date with Oliver next week for crying out loud.

This can't be real, can it? She isn't going to be able to resist much longer if Lana keeps touching her like that. What is the point of having Superman's number if he never answers his phone? The sound of the door opening gets her attention and she whips around to see a smiling Lana squeezing into the booth. She scrunches against the glass, snapping her phone shut as Lana presses close, warm and smiling.

"There you are."

"Hi, Lana." Chloe smiles feebly as Lana strokes her hair back. She can see various guys stopping to stare at them with interest.

"Who were you calling?"

"Clark."

"Oh, him." Lana presses closer. "You don't need to call Clark for a good time."

"I I don't?" Chloe closes her eyes as Lana's mouth settles over hers. She's distantly away of Lana's arms sliding around her as the guys outside break into a round of applause.
Chapter Summary

The Late Nite Lite News Team and Lois hunt for superheroes in Metropolis. Bart impersonates the Green Arrow.

Clark strolls across campus, repressing the urge to do a victory lap around Met U. His last exam of the semester...done! He limits himself to a big grin as he heads for a narrow alley that runs between two brick dorms. The windows are dark and the adjacent parking lots empty. His grin widens as he thinks of Lex waiting for him at the penthouse. The idea makes him so happy that he doesn't even care if there's a Santa costume lurking in the penthouse. He takes one step into the dark slot of ally, races toward the end, and launches himself into the sky.

A sudden flare of bright lights and raised voices catch his attention. He veers off to exam a group of people huddled one the street corner. They look like a news crew, bristling with lights, microphones, and cameras. What's going on and does he have time to check it out? It might be something that Superman should know about. Clark glances at his watch. He's already late; the exam had taken him longer than he'd expected with all those dratted essay questions. Maybe if he offers to pose while dressed as Santa, Lex will forgive him a few more minutes of lateness.

Clark swoops lower and hovers, watching with interest. What are they looking for? Of course, they could be doing a consumer news piece. Maybe something on restaurant trash disposal. Or giant mutant rats. He floats higher as he hears something big and fast scraible deeper into the shadows behind the metal bins. A familiar blur of motion catches the edge of his vision and he swivels around to see Bart zipping down the street, skimming around traffic and pedestrians.

Was there a J Team mission tonight that no one told him about? Clark huffs and folds his arms over his chest. Well, well...good! He has things to do, but Oliver could've at least told him that some stupid mission was going down in Metropolis. It's his city after all. He doesn't fly down to Star City and do stuff. Clark scowls. Maybe he should...see how Oliver likes that. Moving on his city and his boyfriend, Oliver's asking for it if the other man keeps this up.

And what is Bart doing in a Green Arrow costume? What is going on? Has impersonating the Arrow become an initiation ritual for the J Team? Someone must be snooping too close to Oliver's real identity. There's no other reason for Oliver to send a fake G.A. out. If he known, he would've warned Bart not to speed like that. Clark shakes his head. Bart's gonna find out the hard way that leather chafes.

But if Bart is speeding away to do make more G.A. Appearances, who's that cornered in the ally? Could it be a meteor freak? Clark looks uncertainly from the news crew to the shadow hunched
behind the big trash bins. Who is the threat and who is in danger? He watches as the bright lights sweep closer as the crew inches deeper into the ally. Clark almost drops out of the air in surprise as a tall brunette in a daffodil yellow coat steps into the lights. Lois? Lois! What's she doing? Is she moonlighting at channel...he peers at the logos on the camera crew's knit hats...Late Nite Lite News! He stares in renewed alarm as Carver James and Jennifer Hills step in front of the camera crew. Oh, shit. What...what are they doing in Metropolis? And with Lois?

"Where'd he go?" Carver frowns at the camera crew. "Have you people lost him already?"

"Where else could he have gone?" a camera woman announces with irritation as she slowly pans the ally. "I saw him a second ago and he's not out there on the street."

"Why are we chasing that kid?" Lois looks at anchors with a frown. "I've seen the Green Arrow and let me tell you, that guy is no Green Arrow. I don't care what he was wearing."

Carver turns a polished smile on her. "You've been rescued by the Green Arrow and the Red Blue Blur? You must be a very adventurous woman."

"I'm a reporter. Adventure is my middle name. You asked me to advise you on the local capes so I'm advising. One, that's not Green Arrow. And, two, use whatever ridiculous handle the cape in question is going by. I don't care if one announces that his name is Blue Balls, you say it with a straight face. Clear? The Red Blue Blue prefers Superman, and god, is he both super and a man."

Lois sighs dreamily.

Clark drops a few inches in shock. Lois really likes him? Really LIKES him? Don't panic. Don't panic. Lois likes Superman, not him. She hadn't spoken to him for days after the his-name-inked-on-her-boobie incident. Like he'd had anything to do with that fake tat; the whole thing had been her idea. Okay, so maybe he'd thought that it was a really great idea while he was hopped up on the K...hmmm, a tat would be so much better than a tee shirt or boxers. Could he convince Lex to get a tat? Maybe 'Clark was here', or 'Property of Clark Kent', or his initials on Lex's gorgeous ass. But would a tat even stay on Lex's skin?

"Carver doesn't have a very long attention span." Jennifer drops her voice to a stage whisper, "It's all part of getting older."

Carver unfastens a few more buttons on his tweed coat. He rearranges the long wool scarf looped around his throat. "I think he should go with Red Blue Blur or Blur Man. It's friendlier sounding."
"Blur Man could work. Red Blue Blur is too long," Jennifer smiles at Lois. "We really appreciate the tour of local superhero siting spots, Lois, and your willingness to discuss your own Superman experience. It was so sweet of Chloe to refer us to you."

"My cousin prefers being on the other side of doing an interview. What was that?" Lois stares into the darkness of the ally as something shifts with a metallic clang. "Hello! Hello! Anyone there?"

"Are you sure that this guy isn't the Green Arrow?" Carver asks. "He was wearing green leather and he did have arrows."

Lois snorts. "There's more to the Green Arrow than leather and arrows. That guy's probably a wannabee. Or a kid playing around. The G.A..."

"The G.A.?" Jennifer grins at Lois. "Is that like S.A.?"

Lois grins back. "The G.A. definitely has loads of S.A."

"You ought to know. We heard that the G.A. kissed you," Carver announces.

Jennifer asks, "Any truth to that rumor? And if so, what was it like to be kissed by one of the Capes?"

"It was...awesome."

Awesome? Clark smirks. Is Oliver watching this? His smirk curls downward with dismay...shit. What if Lex is? How will Lex react to discovering that the kiss he had confessed up to hadn't been the first time that he'd kissed Lois? And he can't blame that one on drugs. But it never would have happened if Oliver...Aha! That kiss was Oliver's fault, not his. 'Cause if he hadn't been dressed up like the Green Arrow, Lois never would've done it and he wouldn't have had to play along since everyone knew that the Arrow liked girls a lot.

A rattle in the back of the ally reminds him of the mutant trapped in the back of the ally. God knows what it's getting ready to do back there if the news crew keeps pushing forward. He needs to distract them. Give the mutant a chance to escape without using any powers. Clark looks around. What can he use to distract the crew without hurting anyone? Would a nice huff of superbreath do the trick? Just enough to stir up some light debris? Clark twists around to look at the other side of the street.
There's a bank. If he shatters the window, would that be a big enough distract...

"Look!" Carver points upward.

Clark squeaks and shoves his book bag in front of his face as bright lights transfix him against the sky.

"Up there! It's him." Jennifer gasps. "It's...Superman! Isn't it?"

Shit! Shitshitshit. This hadn't been exactly what he'd had in mind for a distraction. Clark frantically tries to remember if he'd grabbed the bag with the Met U logo today or the plain red one? Ah, the red one, thank god.

"Are you sure? He's not wearing red and blue?" Carver squints upwards. "Looks like purple to me."

Jennifer demands, "Who else would it be? Are there any other flying guys in Metropolis?"

"Not ones that can actually fly." Lois shakes her head. "Maybe this is Superman's civilian wear."

Carver cranes his neck. "Are you the Red Blue Blur aka Superman?"

Should he admit to it or should he claim to be someone else? The Purple Blur? The Purple Fly Guy? Moth King? Shit, why does this stuff keep happening to him? Why?

"Wouldn't you like to come down and talk to us?" Jennifer purrs at him. "I'm Jennifer Hills of Late Nite Lite News."

Not really. No. Clark tilts his head as he hears the soft fffffpfft, pop, and clink of something lodging home in the building on his right. At the edge of his vision he can see a woman with long black hair and a Zorro style head wrap ascending the wall. The tails of her black leather duster dangle away from her slim body.

"We'll be happy to meet with you another night," Jennifer offers. "We can disguise your face and
"You can talk to me," Lois tries, "I'm Chloe's cousin."

Crap. He's going to have to say something to cover for the Angel of Vengeance. What the heck is she still doing in Metropolis? He'd thought that she'd left after she stopped working at the Planet. Clark lowers his voice as deep as it will go. "I know. I mean, Chloe told me that you are her cousin."

"Good." Lois brightens. "Have you read my articles?"

"Uh-huh."

"You liked Chloe's articles better." Her face falls. "That's why you asked for my cousin when you decided to come out."

"No. I mean, yes. I mean...I like your articles and Chloe's articles." Clark glowers at the Angel. Would she get a move on? "They're both good. I read the Planet for those articles...your's and her's."

"So why did you ask for Miss Sullivan?" Carver asks, trying to take over the interview.

"'Cause...she's..." Clark tries to think of something about Chloe that a complete stranger could know. He can't claim it's her writing or reporting skills or he would hurt Lois' feelings. "She's blonde."

"Blonde?" Lois and Jennifer chorus in shared outrage. "Blonde!"

"I didn't know that aliens preferred blondes. I would like to hear what else you can tell our audience about aliens," Carver steps into the lights and shakes his shiny blond hair back. He holds up a business card and smiles. "This is my number, Superman. Call me and we can set something up. Something easy and informal. Just two hombres grabbing a couple of beers and chatting. We could have a campfire chat out on the range."

Clark rolls his eyes. Right. Two hommes, and a van load of lighting, sound, and camera people.
"You picked a reporter because of her hair color?" Jennifer demands. "You sexist alien pig!"

"Jennifer. That's so harsh." Carver smirks at her. "I'm sure there's more to Superman's choice of reporter than the fact that she's blonde and pretty."

Oh, crap. Chloe's gonna kill him. She's only been griping about unfair blonde stereotyping since high school. Would it make it better or worse if he announced that his boyfriend is a redhead? Or maybe since his boyfriend is a redhead, Superman should prefer blondes? Clark drifts higher as Lois glares upwards at him. "I picked Chloe because she's really smart. Anyone who reads her articles picks up on that."

Lois scowls and glares harder at him.

Crap, crap, crap. He hadn't meant to imply that Lois wasn't. Maybe he better get a few inches higher. Just in case. He doesn't like the thoughtful way that she's looking from him to the closed dumpster bin's lid and back.

"Indeed, Miss Sullivan is," Carver agrees. He gives Clark a man to man smile. "And it just so happens that she's very lovely as well. Icing on the cake, hmmm?"

Clark desperately blurts, "She's nice. And friendly. And...and she shared her doughnuts with me!"

Carver clears his throat and murmurs to the youngest camera man, "Sharing your doughnuts? Is that the latest slang phrase for it?"

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Steve listens hard in the darkness. Is that skretch-skretch sound one of...Them? Or just a rat? Not that he likes rats, but right now, he'd kiss one on the snout. Ohgod. Please don't let it be...what's that noise? That slosh? It sounds like something big. Like it might be one of Them. Had they gotten Bobby? That scream...it had been so horrible. How's he gonna tell Bobby's wife and daughter? He's scared to move. Scared that any noise will draw Them back to him. But he's gotta. Gotta find his way out. Gotta keep moving up.
Chapter Summary

Chloe and Lana enjoy the afterglow and talk.

Chloe absently strokes Lana's hair. She hasn't felt this content and full of potential since her senior year of high school. She chuckles quietly.

"What?" Lana asks. She leans up on her elbows, looking down at her new lover with a shy smile.

"I feel like I can do anything."

"Me, too." Lana moves in for a quick kiss.

"I'm going to email Lex Luthor, and tell him that I quit and he can kiss my ass."

Lana studies the other woman's face. "I thought that you loved working for the Planet."

"I did. Before it got Luthorized."

"You can handle Lex."

"It's more than his buying the place," Chloe admits. "I don't stride into to work, convinced that I'm doing my bit for truth and justice. I lost the passion that I used to have for being a crusading journalist."

"Chloe..."

"I took my Nellie Bly posters down. I can't look her in the face any longer."

"But you broke the Red Blue Blur story, Chloe! That was huge."

Chloe shakes her head. "I wrote it, but I didn't break it. It pretty much fell out of the sky at my feet."
"You're being modest."

"Modest about a story? Me?" Chloe sniggers. "Are you getting me confused with someone else?"

"I read it. I read all your articles and they're good, Chloe."

"Well written. Not good. And not articles...they're a half step ahead of a PR piece. My articles slant like a seesaw. I've been thinking about...I want to go to Met U." Chloe searches the other woman's eyes. "I want to study psychology. I want to find some property in Smallville. A farm, maybe, and turn it into the kind of place that Belle Reve should be. I want it to be a place where the...meteor enhanced can go and get help. Real help."

"It sounds wonderful." Lana smiles at her. "I'd like to help. If you want me to."

"I do," Chloe leans up for a kiss. "I want."

"In that case," Lana grins, "why email when Lex is downstairs? Wouldn't it be more fun to tell him in person?"

Chloe giggles. "That would be lovely, but I don't have a thing to wear. Or an invitation."

"It so happens that I do have an invitation...good for myself and one date." Lana wiggles around and reaches for the phone. "I bet the concierge can find us something to wear. If you're game?"

Chloe stretches and grins. "Do it. A lack of game has never been one of my problems."
It's A Red K Christmas! (21/62)

Chapter Summary

Clark finds another Santa painting. The Teagues make their own party plans.

Clark lands lightly on the balcony. He glances at his watch. Shit. He is so late. Lex is gonna be sooo...maybe if he offers to blow Lex while wearing the Santa hat. Clark straightens his shoulders and walks inside the penthouse. There's no Lex, scowling on the couch. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Clark drops his book bag on the floor. He opens his mouth to call his lover's name and then closes it as he sees the old wooden easel set up in front of the fireplace.

What had Lex painted this time? Clark walks slowly around to view the work on the easel. Santa is standing on top of one of Lex's glass-topped fish ponds. Goldfish, in a variety of colors, drift over a long bed of Christmas green gravel as they stare up at Santa. There's something vaguely unsettling about the way they are watching Santa...something that makes him think of bigger fish. Like sharks.

He forgets the fish as his gaze uneasily lifts from the big black boots planted on the glass cover to...Clark flinches as he sees that Santa isn't wearing a thing between the hat askew on black hair and the black boots; not unless he counts the diamond nipple ring or the diamond bar gleaming in...his hands clap protectively over his groin. That's wrong. Absolutely wrong. Santa does not NOT...Clark draws in an outraged breath. "Lex!"

There's no response. Clark scans the penthouse. No one. Where could Lex be? Had an emergency come up at LexCorp or LuthorCorp? Had Lionel...backslid into old habits? Clark pulls out his cell. There are two missed calls from his parents, one from Chloe, but none from Lex. Maybe Lex had left him a note. There's nothing on the easel or the mantel. He checks the fridge and the kitchen table. Nothing.

Maybe the bedroom...Clark walks inside and stops. There's a Santa costume spread across the foot of the bed and on top of it, propped against the hat, is an envelope. He eases over and picks up the envelope. A sprinkle of gold glitter falls out as he rips it open. His eyes widen in dismay. Oh, crap. The Lillian Luthor party is tonight?

Clark looks at the time on the invitation and winces. Shit. If he'd gone directly to the penthouse instead of helping out the Angel escape, and then catching up with Bart, and then Bart had talked him into a couple of celebratory beers in Miami, and...he sighs. Shit. Clark reaches for the Santa outfit. There's no way around it. He's gonna have to wear this in public, but that probably won't be enough to defrost Lex. He's gonna have to offer to pose any way that Lex wants, and do naughty things while wearing the suit.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Genevieve leans casually against the wall, keeping watch on the hotel hallway as her son tosses his bag of tools to the ground and then wiggles out of the service access vent. "All done?"
"Done." Jason pulls his breath mask off and grins. He picks up his canvas gym bag and hooks it over his shoulder. "The next time the air system kicks on in the ballroom, everyone there gets a snootful of the pollen."

"Good." Genevieve glances at her watch. "By the time we change into our costumes and go in, they will be too crazy to wonder why we are wearing breath masks."

"Did you get the mummy costumes?"

She turns and begins strolling toward the elevator with her son following her. "No."

"Damn. Zombies?"

"No."

"Tell me that you didn't pick up something totally lame like Santa and Mrs. Claus. Or elves. I am not wearing those stupid half-boots with the curly toes."

"I saw Lana entering the hotel," Genevieve tells him as the elevator's doors open. She steps inside and pushes the button for their floor. She watches her son's face closely.

"Really? Maybe I should stop by her room. See if the tattoo is still there." He avoids his mother's gaze. "For our family's sake, of course."

"I wasn't aware that you were so interested in flinging yourself on the alter of family duty."

"Some times you have to take one for the team. I learned that playing football. You think she's going to the party?"

Genevieve gives him a sharp look. "Would it matter if she was? Don't tell me you are willing to bypass a chance to drag the truth out of the Luthors because of her."

"I can multitask, you know." Jason shrugs. "I thought that if she was at the party, I might as well do
a tat check while I was there. And don't try to tell me that you won't be slipping Lionel a few non-
crystal related questions."

"I have no idea what you are talking about." Genevieve avoids her son's dark eyes. "She wasn't
dressed for a party."

"Was Lana alone?"

"No. She had some blonde in tow."

"Oh." Jason frowns. "Oliver Queen?"

"Not unless he's grown a bosom and lost some height since I last saw him."

"Ooooooh," Jason murmurs in a completely different tone.

"Jason!"

"Still sore 'cause I wouldn't kill her?"

"She stabbed me, Jason. Call me 'old-fashioned', but I would expect that to rate a stronger reaction."

"Lionel shot me. I expected a stronger reaction."

"Do excuse me for being a trifle busy escaping at the time," Genevieve snaps as the doors open.
Jason is every bit as impossible as his father...his real father. Had Lionel noticed that Jason and Lucas
look more like brothers than Lex does? Had that been why the bullet had hit Jason's shoulder rather
than his head or heart?

"Try swimming with a bullet in your shoulder." Jason stomps after her. "So what are we partying
as?"
"Devils."

"Devils." Jason grins suddenly. "I like it."
Lex watches Selina as she opens the faded red velvet box. Glittering red and black feathers flutter amid her upswept gold curls. A froth of black lace frames her ivory bosom and a black and red striped satin corset hugs her waist before blossoming into a froth of layered petticoats that show off her long black-stockinged legs and short black half-boots.

"Is this it?" Selina studies the black pearl bracelet. She touches the silver and diamond clasp and smiles. "Two more pieces and I will have the entire set."

"And my painting?"

Selina smirks. "I left it at your office along with a few comments about LexCorp security. Is there something that you would like to tell me?"

"About?"

"I didn't realize that you and Santa were like that. Do you have enough pull to get me off the naughty list?"

Lex raises his eyebrows. "Why would you want off the naughty list...all the most interesting people are on it?"

"No pull, huh? Is Santa going to be attending tonight? I could ask him myself."

"What's a Christmas party without Santa?" Lex takes his cell phone out of an inner pocket on his black jacket and scans the list of missed calls. "Santa operates on his own special Santa time, but I feel certain that he will arrive...eventually."

"Lex," Selina shakes her head reprovingly, "a cell phone with a gunslinger's costume. It ruins the image."

"Do you expect me to believe that you don't have one hidden somewhere in all those dance hall girl ruffles?"

Selina holds out her arm. "Put the bracelet on me."

"I don't want to unnecessarily annoy Bruce at the moment."

"That's a change of tone. I thought you liked annoying him."

"Not when we have a deal pending. Aren't you concerned that someone will recognize the bracelet?"

"Put it on," Selina orders. Her blue eyes gleam with mischief as she glances at the crowd, her gaze
lingering on one particular Batman.

"Are you two fighting again?" Lex removes the bracelet from the box and fastens it around her wrist.

"Not exactly." Selina holds up her arm, making a show of admiring the pearls, and then lean close and kisses Lex.

Lex gives her a narrowed-eyed look. "Which part of 'pending deal' did you not hear?"

Selina ignores him as she tilts her bracelet this way and that, watching the play of the lights across it. "Do you have any of the other pieces?"

"No," Lex lies as he watches her from beneath the brim of his black stetson. "Do you know who does have them?"

Selina shakes her head. "If I did, they wouldn't have them for long. Once I find out who has the choker and the brooch, there's going to be a property transfer taking place."

"I will let you know if I hear anything." Lex nods toward the assorted Batmen roaming the room. "Are any of those the real thing?"

"Worried?"

"No."

"If you want Bruce to think you're harmless, you might want to try a fluffy bunny costume instead of dressing as an Old West gunfighter." Selina tilts her head toward Lionel's white-hatted figure. "I see we have a new sheriff in town...is there a message somewhere in this?"

Lex looks down at her. "I'm not my dad."

"No, you're worse. Much worse as far as Bruce is concerned."

"He has no need for concern as long as LexCorp holdings remain bat free."

"Bruce doesn't see it that way." Selina glances at her companion. "He's curious about why you spend so much time at such a large and isolated property."

"I like my privacy."

"And what's Lionel's excuse? He ignored the place for years after he went to the trouble of importing it stone by stone. Then he sends you there, and suddenly the castle becomes fascinating."

"My dad finds the rural environment restful."

"And you?" Selina asks.

"Amazingly invigorating. Damn it. I can't believe he invited her."

"Who?" Selina follows his stare to Lionel Luthor and the slender woman that the elder Luthor is talking with.

"You don't know her? Lucky you. That's Dr. Dawn. Do you supposed that one of the Batmen would be willing to rescue her from my dad's evil clutches?"

"I don't think your father is the one doing the clutching." Selina frowns as she studies the pair,
comparing Lionel's scarecrow lankiness and Dr. Dawn's delicate shortness, Lionel's wild west sheriff costume and Dr. Dawn's peach flapper dress. "Isn't she a little..."

"Short? Perky? Nauseating?"

"Young."

"That too.

Thinking of tossing Bruce over and elbowing Dr. Dawn aside?" Lex asks. "You've got my vote."

"Thanks, but I think I'll stick with Bruce."

"Dad's richer."

"True, but Bruce is more fun."

Lex leans back against the wall and crosses his arms over his chest. "Dad isn't as fun as he used to be. It's been months since he tried to poison me. But think how much fun Lucas and I would be...wouldn't you like to be our new step? We would be much lower maintenance and far more entertaining than Bruce's wards."

"More entertaining?" Selina glances across the room at a stocky batman who is glowering at her. "I don't know about that."

Lex locks gazes with the glaring batman. "He still hasn't accepted your relationship with Bruce?"

Selina stands up and drapes herself over Lex's side. She purrs in his ear. "None of the Robins have. And that one is such a Dick."

Lex coughs as the air kicks and he inhales a scratchy rose scent. He looks around the room, but there's no Clark to be seen. Perhaps he should have added a few more piercings to his most recent painting. He glances toward the long balcony. He can see the silhouette of Kara's angel wings and halo against the thin curtains, but no one else has braved the balcony.

Lex slips an arm around Selina's slim waist. He trades stares with a disapproving Oliver and then pulls Selina closed. Fuck Oliver and his stupid Robin Hood costume. Where's someone fun to...ah, there's Lucas. Lex urges Selina toward a brunette in a gambler's outfit. "You haven't met my brother yet, have you? Come on. I'll introduce you to Lucas."
It's A Red K Christmas! (23/62)

Chapter Summary

Some DCU crossover in this part. Note for non-DCU folks, Brainiac 5 in some DCUs is in love with Kara and in some he is her boyfriend. Kara encounters a stranger at the party.

Kara leans over the railings and stares down at the Christmas tree display in the lighted plaza in the center of the square formed by the hotel. Each tree had been decorated by local community groups and schools. There's a sudden flash of light and a soft fump from the other end of the balcony. She turns sharply. "Clark?"

"No."

Kara cocks her head as she stares at the man standing there. What's he supposed to be dressed as? He's tall with short blond hair and green skin and wearing a snug brown costume of some sort. She moves closer, curious about the thin lines of gold that she can see on his cheekbone and temple. "Hello."

A heavy gold ring glints on his finger as he grips the railing. His jade green face tilts upwards as he stares at the stars. "You are expecting a Clark?"

"He's supposed to be here. I haven't seen him yet." Kara frowns. There's something...something about his profile and the shape of his face. It's faintly familiar, and yet completely strange. "Clark's my cousin."

"Ah." He looks over his shoulder, through the sheer curtains and into the ballroom. "Lex Luthor is here as well. And his father and brother. Interesting."

"It is their party. Why shouldn't they be here?"

He turns back and stares at her. "What are you doing here?"

Annoyed, Kara sets her hands on her hips. "I was invited. What are you doing here? Who are you?"

"I wasn't invited and I am here because I choose to be." He glances at the ring on his finger and then holds his hand out to her. "Do you recognize the ring?"

Kara shakes her head. "No. Should I?"

"Not necessarily, no. I thought that it was possible that you might."

"Who are you?"

A faint smile curves his mouth. "You can call me 'Five'."

"Five?" Kara narrows her eyes. Is he making fun of her? "Five's a number not a name."

"Can numbers not be names?" He glances at the ballroom and frowns. "You should not be here."
"Why not?"

He steps closer and offers his hand. "Trust me, Kara."

"How do you know my name?"

"I know a lot of things about you. I know that if you stay here, if you step back into that room, an incident that you will always regret will occur. Please come with me, Kara. Trust me. Look at me. Really look at me." He steps into a strip of light.

Kara gasps. She reaches out and runs her finger down the side of his face. His cheek is as smooth as her own and the green isn't rubbing off. She can feel the thin rigid strips of metal that gleam just under his pale skin. "You...you're...you're..."

"Alien to this place and time. I'm from the future." He shrugs. "A future to be more precise. A future in which we are...friends. Close enough that I know that you did something this night, in this place and time, that caused you pain and heartbreak."

"What?"

"I can not give you the details." He captures her exploring hand and kisses the palm. "Would you not prefer to remember this night as one on which you met a mysterious stranger and rescued someone in need?"

"Rescued?" Kara allows him to draw her closer. "Five, is someone in danger?"

"Listen. There." He points off to the southwest. "Can you hear it?"

Kara turns and focuses her hearing. At first she hears the roar of traffic and the din of thousands of voices and hearts and then the panic-rapid beat of a particular heart and the scared fast breathing and soft pleas for aid. There's the scrap of metal and a clang and then a raspy sound...and screaming. Her eyes widen. "Gods. What is happening?"

"Something that you can stop this time." Five rises into the air. "Come with me, Kara."

She shivers as the sounds of panic and fear wash over her. Her mouth firms and she leaps into the air. "Let's go."
Chapter Summary

Some DCU. Clark runs into Dick Grayson at the party.

Clark drops down on the hotel balcony and promptly stumbles over his big black boots. Damn those things were awkward. Why doesn't Santa wear work boots like a real guy instead of these big clunky...

"Where the hell did you come from?"

Clark flails and catches himself on the railing. He leans back against it, trying to look casual. Like he's been leaning there since the beginning of time and it's the other guy who is intruding on his space. He peers into the shadowed end of the balcony. Where is the guy? "Smallville. Where the hell do you come from?"

"Tonight? Gotham City."

Clark flinches as the guy steps out of the shadows in an all too familiar black bat cowl and cape. Wait a second, this guy is shorter and the eyes are lighter. Clark huffs the white ball of his Santa hat out of his eyes. "Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Huh."

Batman takes a sip of his drink. "What's Smallville like?"

"Smallville?" Clark shifts his hat to a different angle. "Small. Rural. Lots of corn fields. Why?"

"Just curious. You can't blame a guy for wondering when someone like Lex Luthor makes the place his main residence." Batman grins. "I figured there must be herds of dancing girls, or fields of beer-
flavored corn, or a supermodel training academy there."

Clark frowns at the stranger. "Maybe Lex likes living somewhere where he can relax and be himself."

"I didn't know they had an asylum for the criminally insane in Smallville."

Clark straightens. He pulls himself up his full height and looms at the Gotham stranger. "I don't appreciate that comment. Lex is my friend and your host tonight, if you can't be civil..."

"What? You'll drop me over the balcony?"

"Or set your cape on fire. Or freeze your feet to the floor. It's kinda a toss up right now. Could go either way."

Batman laughs. "I like you, Smallville. I'm Richard Grayson."

"Clark Kent. What's Gotham City like?"

"Everything you read in the papers and worse. Dark. Dank. Dangerous." Grayson shrugs. "I'm used to it."

"Did you grow up there?"

"No, I moved around a lot. My parents were circus acrobats. When they...died, Bruce Wayne stepped in and offered me a home."

"That was nice of him."

"Nice?" Grayson repeats the word like it's foreign one that he's never heard before. "Nice."
"Have you ever seen Batman?" Clark asks, wondering if Batman disapproved of everyone on general principle or if all the scowling had been directed at him personally.

"Batman? Why would you ask me about him?"

Clark rolls his eyes. "Maybe because you're from Gotham and you're dressed like him."

"Do you see me asking you about Santa?"

"You don't want to ask me about Santa." Clark sniggers as he thinks of his lover's growing Santa porn collection. "Trust me on that one."

Grayson moves closer and leans against the railing. "You didn't happen to see a foxy blonde chick out here, did you?"

"No. No one else was here when I came out. She must have left."

"Damn. I really wanted to meet her. I love blondes and she was so sweetly sexy in that angel costume. I was across the room and I saw her walk out here, but by the time I got here..." Grayson shrugs.

"Angel...hey, that was not a foxy sexy chick." Clark glares at Grayson. "That was my cousin. My seventeen year old cousin!"

"Oops. She looked older. Sorry, man."

They both look toward the ballroom at the sound of a crash, followed by giggles, squeals, and laughter.

Grayson shakes his head. "Sounds like the party's finally starting to get interesting. About time."
Chapter Summary

Genvieve Teague fights Dr. Dawn. Kara hunts a monster.

"No!" Genvieve sucks in a startled breath of air and then clamps her hands over nose and mouth. She watches in horror as a short flapper triumphantly stomps her custom breath mask to bits.

"There! How do you like that, you skanky cougar? There's more where that came from if you try to get between me and my Lionel again."

Lionel stares at her over the flapper's shoulder. "Genvieve?"

She gets to her feet, holding her breath, but there's a scratchy flowery scent catching in the back of her throat. Genvieve eyes the door. Can she get there before she has to...she coughs and breathes in more of the annoying scent. Damn.

"Here," Lionel offers his glass of wine. "Drink this."

Genvieve coughs again and glares at him. Her hand tightens around her plastic pitchfork. "You first."

He gives her an exasperated look. "You and Lex, so suspicious of every little thing. It's only wine, Genvieve."

"Every little...you poisoned me!"

"It was only the once. Beside you threatened Lex. What kind of father would I be if I didn't protect my progeny. I'm not that man any longer. I'm a different man." Lionel takes a drink from his glass. "See? It's perfectly safe."

The flapper sniffs. "She looks like a toxic case of bad feng shui to me, Lionel. You should throw her out with the rest of the trash."

Genvieve scowls. "Who the hell are you?"

Lionel begins, "Genvieve, this is Dr...."

"Someone who knows better than to wear a red leather minidress and spike heeled boots!" Dr. Dawn sneers.

"It's not a look that every woman can pull off." Genevieve rakes the other woman's thin figure with a pointed stare. "I see you decided to go with a flapper costume. Always a good choice for those lacking in...assets."

"Dr. Dawn, this is my friend..." Lionel tries again.

"Cougar skank!" Dawn snaps.

"Go play with the other children, Dawn, and leave the adults to their...business." Genvieve takes a
deep breath, noting with smug satisfaction that quite a few male stares, including Lionel's, are fixed on the swell of her breasts against the low sweetheart neckline of her dress. She looks deep into Lionel's brown eyes as she takes the glass of wine from him. She holds his gaze as she turns the glass and sets her lips to the place where he had sipped and takes a drink.

Dawn throws her drink at the other woman. "Bitch skank!"

Genvieve jabs her plastic pitchfork into the flapper's stomach. "Who are you calling 'skank', skank!"

"Ladies, ladies," Lionel moves forward and then ducks quickly as both women throw their glasses at him.

The other guests form a ring, chanting, "Girl fight! Fight, fight, fight! Girl fight!"

Kara breathes on the snake again, and the stands back to study the frosted coils that gleam white under the street lights like some strange ice sculpture. Should she do again and kill the huge snake for the citizens' safety, or leave it with it in a state of hibernation? Maybe the zoo would appreciate having it. She turns to look at the bedraggled man lurking behind her. Perhaps he would know what to do with it.

He rushes past her, rusty tire iron raised to strike. "Die! Die! DDDIIIIE!"

"Wait. Don't." She grabs him. "It didn't harm you. Maybe we should give it to the zoo."

"The zoo! That thing ate Bobby!"

"Bobby?"

"My work buddy. Oh, god, it was awful." He shivers.

Kara frowns at the snake. None of the coils are distended. She x-rays the snake. Ewww. Rats, rats, and more rats. Gross. She gives the stranger's shoulder a comforting pat. "It didn't eat Bobby. He's probably fine. Where did you last see him?"

He points at the open manhole cover. "Down there."

Wonderful. Kara sighs. She's gonna spend the rest of the evening x-raying the city's sewer system. Is this supposed to be what she's going to regret missing instead of a party? Future people had some damned strange ideas in that case, but it's not in her to abandon a job half done. Unlike Five who'd bailed on her, claiming that it was important that no one else see him or know about him. "Look, I will take you to the hospital and then I will find your friend. Okay?"

He shakes his head. "I can get myself to a hospital. Please, Angel, find Bobby."
Chapter Summary

Genvieve makes a startling announcement. Lex organizes a stripper contest.

Clark slides open the balcony door and steps into the ballroom. Next to him the guy from Gotham is coughing and complaining about the perfumes that some women insisted on dousing themselves with. Clark inhales. He kinda likes the scent himself. It's floral and sweet, but not too sweet. It smells like Spring and new beginnings to him.

"Ouch." Grayson grins as a tall devil in red leather slams a fist into the chin of a tiny flapper. "Damn. A chick fight and we missed it."

The flapper slides to the floor and stays there as the devil woman triumphantly straddles her body and raises a pitchfork to the ceiling. "He's mine and don't you forget it!"

There's a round of applause from some watchers and groans from others. Guests begin slapping money and IOUs into waiting palms. Clark sees Lex standing at the front of group and smirking as Lucas hands him a roll of bills. He licks his lips as he eyes the snug fit of Lex's black trousers and the way the tied-down gunbelt pulls the fabric even snugger over his lover's groin. Clark begins edging his way toward Lex.

The devil struts over to Lionel and sticks her pitchfork under his chin. "Tell these hussies that you are mine!"

Lionel reaches for her. "God, Genvieve, you're magnificent. Will you marry me?"

Lex sighs and hands the roll of bill back to Lucas who smirks and sticks it back into his pocket.

"Swear to me that you will never shoot your son again," she demands fiercely.

Lionel's gaze slides guilty to Lucas. "Genvieve, darling, you don't understand."
Lex frowns at Lucas. "Did you tell her?"

"Hell, no. Why would I?" Lucas frowns back. "Did you?"

"After that bitch and her son kidnapped me and threatened me?" Lex growls.

"What? Why?" Clark slides a protective arm around his lover and glares at Genvieve. "And why am I only now hearing about this?"

Lex leans back against the other man. "If I told you about every time that's happened in my life, we'd never talk about anything else. That's why."

"But," Clark begins.

"I understand that you shot my son!" Genvieve snarls.

"Oh! Oh. Your son. I thought that you said my son." Lionel twitches as the plastic points dig deeper. "If you recall, at the time..."

"Our son, you bastard! Ours! When you going to admit it?"

"Our...our son?" Lionel stares at her. He smiles. "Jason's mine? I thought that..."

"You can count, can't you?" Genvieve snaps.

"Genvieve! Darling!" Lionel swats the pitchfork aside and scoops her up, tossing her over his shoulder.

She twists, pushing her cascade of honey brown hair back. "What the hell do you think that you are doing?"
"The right thing," Lionel announces as he strides across the room.

"Jason Teague is a Luthor? Fuck!" Lex leans more heavily against Clark. "That explains why Dad went for a shoulder shot."

Clark blinks. "Coach Teague is your half brother?"

Lucas stares after his father. and then turns to face Lex. "Did you know about that?"

Lex shakes his head. "Fuck, no. Shit! I fucked my half brother's girlfriend?!

"Not really. Lana told me that she and Coach Teague never you know," Clark whispers in his lover's ear.

"Thank god." Lex relaxes.

"Dear, sweet god," the tall blonde dance hall girl standing next to Lucas murmurs, "more Luthor spawn released upon an unsuspecting world."

Lex glances at her. "Think Bruce will give a flying rodent's ass for all of us?"

"No. But he might fall out of his belfry laughing," she responds.

"I can only hope," Lex mutters.

Clark frowns. His arm tightens around his lover. "Who's Bruce?"


"Oh."
"I better take over as host." Lex surveys the party guests. He slaps Lucas on the shoulder. "Come on. Time to liven this place up."

Lucas glances at his brother. "What did you have in mind?"

"Christmas strippers."


Clark frowns. He's getting a bad feeling about this. "Christmas strippers? What do you have in mind, Lex?"

"A friendly little contest. We'll have first, second, and third prize winners. A panel of judges. Me, Lucas, and," Lex looks around.

The blonde waves her hand. "Me! Me!"

Lex grins, "And Selina."

"We need contest rules," Lucas adds.

"Each contestant will draw a number from my hat." Lex removes his black hat. He smirks. "A number and a Christmas carol."

Selina giggles. "You're going to make them strip to carols?"

An evil smirk spreads across Lex's face. "Bonus points if they can sing the carols and strip."

"Cool. I'll tell the band." Lucas walks toward the musicians.

"Lex," Clark protests. "That's...that's wrong."
Lex turns in his arms and looks at him with narrowed gray eyes. He pokes a finger in Clark's chest. "Nice outfit, but I'm still pissed. You know what that means?"

"I'm in trouble?"

"Big trouble. How do you feel about stripping to 'Deck the Halls'?"

Clark gasps. "Lex!"

"Excellent." Lex smirks. "You're number eight."
Kara drops the next snake into the next empty cage in the zoo’s snake house. It's smaller than the first one that she’d found. She looks into the cage that she’d placed the first four snakes into. The one that she'd caught first is beginning to stir, the melting coat of ice cracking as it's snowy coils shift. She treats herself to a slow stroll down the hall, pausing to peer at various residents. She'd never seen a snake before she had awakened on her new world. There had been none of Krypton.

"Ohhh, pretty." She pauses in front of a cage that holds a snake that looks similar to the ones she’d captured, only it's bright green and smaller. Kara glances at the label. Emerald boa. The name is as pretty as the snake. Would the Kents let her have one for a pet? Clark had Shelby so it would only be fair that she had a pet too.

She drifts out of the snake house and rises in the air, scanning the zoo and listening to sleepy animal noises and the movements of the nocturnal creatures. Two security guards are making their rounds on opposite ends of the zoo. Kara floats higher and moves out over the city; it's beautiful in the clear cold of the air. All bright lights and deep shadows. Full of pockets of frenetic activity and quiet stillness. She closes her eyes and listens to the waves of sound that come at her. The honk of horns and rumble of engines and the shrill shriek of sirens. The clink of glassware and hiss of espresso machines. The bark of dogs and squeak of mice. She slowly tunes out the layers of sound until only human voices are left.

"...No Gray No How shampoo for men..."

"And then I said..."

"He scores!"

"...in progress at the corner of Lenore and First..."

"Buy one and we'll give you..."

"It slices, it dices, it..."

"Order of pepperoni for Harrison!"

"Deck the halls with boughs of..."

Ouch. Kara opens her eyes. No wonder the Smallville Carolers hadn't asked her cousin to sings with them. She smiles as she hears two more familiar voices from Met Medical Center.

"Steve! You're okay!"

"Bobby! Thank god! I thought that it had gotten you."

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"Faaaa," Clark pulls his belt loose and tosses it to the floor. He yanks his coat over to expose his bare chest to Lex's touch. Clark grinds against the older man's erection as he croons, "lalalala faaaaalalalalala. Follow me in merry measure. Faaaaaaa..."

"Hey! That's not fair," Number Three protests. "No one said we could do a lap dance."

"Yeah," Number Four agrees loudly. "Unfair influence on the judge."

Lucas pats his lap as he leers at Four. "Wanna try to influence my vote, babe?"

"I want to know why no one is trying to influence my vote." Selina pouts. Her gaze flickers between Number Three and a tall, grim Batman staring at her through the balcony window.
Chapter Summary

Jason encounters Oliver Queen. Kara rescues beauty pageant contestants.

Jason glances at the glowing red numbers counting down the seconds on his watch. What's taking his mother so long? How long could it take to lure Lionel out of the ballroom and into the adjacent coat check room? As far back as those two go, he'd think that she would know exactly what buttons to push. She can damn sure find his easily enough. Maybe if his father had been more of a challenge she wouldn't have kept messing around with Old Man Luthor.

He adjusts his mask and tries to ignore the irritating foosh-woosh sound that echoes back with every breath. Christ. He sounds like Darth Vader with an asthma attack. Jason turns his head, checking on the attendant. Still tied-up and unconscious. Good. How much longer, damn it? His mask is driving him crazy. It's damned hot. And on top of that he can smell whatever weird aftershave the attendant is wearing. The scent is catching in the back of his throat and making him want to cough.

Jason jumps at the door is suddenly flung open. "Shit!"

Oliver Queen stands in the doorway. He glances over his shoulder and quickly pulls the door closed. He frowns. "You should be more careful. How am I supposed to tell my team to be more careful when you are running around setting a bad example?"

"Uhhh, sorry." Jason shifts his position, keeping a wary eye on the blond. Who does Queen think he is?

"There's something different about you."

"There is?" Jason asks. Is he gonna have to KO Queen? There's only so much body-stashing space in this damned room. "People change."

"Your mask!"

"My mask?"

"That's what it is." Queen leans closer. "Honestly, Dare Devil, the other mask looks better. Don't want to offend a superhero, but I gotta tell you the truth. Go back to the other one, okay? Much cooler."

Dare Devil? Superhero? How wasted is Queen? Jason glances at his watch. "Okay. Thanks for sharing."

"On a schedule?" Queen grabs a brown wool coat. He shrugs off his quiver and arrows and pulls the coat on.

"Sorta."

"I got a mission of my own. Make sure you stay out of my way." Queen opens the door and peeks out.
"Not a problem," Jason promises as the other man leaves with a slam of the door. He coughs again. God, that smell. Jason stomps over to the corner and kicks the attendant in the stomach. "That's for wearing stupid suck ass aftershave."

Following the sound of shrill screams, Kara zips past a blinking sign that reads, 'Metropolis Little Miss Christmas Queen'. She crashes through the ceiling and lands on a catwalk overlooking the stage. Frantic parents are racing from the stage, clutching elaborately dressed children. An enormous serpent is oozing down the steps after them.

A young woman, with a 'Miss Metropolis' sash around her evening gown, stand on the stage and batters a hissing snake with her glittering scepter. Her crown slides crookedly with the vigor of her movements. "Nobody messes with Miss Metropolis!"

"This way, ma'am!" Jimmy Olsen boosts a mom, encumbered by twin toddlers, up the metal ladder leading to the catwalk. "Somebody call the police!"

"Forget the police! Call the zoo!" Miss Metropolis squeaks as her heels slip out from under her as she makes an over enthusiastic swing. She hits the stage with a thump. "Do we have any veterinarians in the audience? No? How about hunters? Farmers? Sheesh. Gardeners?"

"Gardeners?" Jimmy echoes in disbelief.

"Hey, my granny is a gardener," Miss Metropolis snaps, "and if she was here tonight, that dratted snake would've been dead five minutes ago. Give a hoe and all three of them would've been dead by now."

"Get out of here!" Jimmy grabs the sparkly scepter and steps Miss Metropolis. He bats at the lunging snake and the scepter breaks. "Shit!"

"Here!" Miss Metropolis pulls off her spike heels and hands one to Jimmy. She turns to face the serpent crawling up behind her, and begins smacking it over the head with her heel. "Die! Die already. God, whatda we have to do, nuke it's scaly fanny?"

Jimmy glances at her, "Scaly fanny?"

She straightens her crown and gives him a look. "Miss Metropolis does not use bad words."

Kara drops from the catwalk to the stage. She blows her freeze breath over the big serpent and it stills into a glittering array of coils.

"Look, mommy, an angel!" one little girl yells.

She turns to see that Jimmy has dropped the shoe and is snapping photo after photo of her. "Jimmy!"

He drops the camera and stares at her, transfixed, his eye enormous in his pale face. "You know my name."

Of course, she knows his name. Kara gives him an exasperated look. She opens her mouth to speak and then closes it as she remembers how very few people has recognized Clark when he was wearing a costume. She looks around the roomful of staring people. Do they think that she's really an angel? Do they think she's a new super heroine?

"Excuse me, Miss Angel," Miss Metropolis frowns at her. "Could you do something about the rest of
these dratted snakes?"

"Oh, Yes, of course." Kara steps forward and freezes the last of the snakes.
Chapter Summary

Jason accidentally sees Clex.

Finally. It took his mother long enough. Jason kicks the attendant further back and pulls a row of coats forward to conceal himself. He peers between two long coats as he watches the door knob turn...a pair of bright red trousers and a pair black trousers come into view along with two pairs of black boots. Jason frowns. His mother had been wearing red boots, not black ones. Those are some big, big, big feet in that second pair of boots. Jason sighs quietly. Who'd believe that a coat check room would get so much traffic?

"Ooooooh, god. Lex."

"Clark. Oh, fuck."

Oh, shit! Kissy noises. Why did they have slobber on each other in his coat room? They were in a stinking hotel. Surely to god, there was a room somewhere in the place that they could rent. Hell, he’d let ’em sublet his room if they’d just go away. Jason grabs a plaid scarf as the low bass moaner gets louder. He hold the cashmere over his eyes. Some things a guy just doesn't need to see.

"Fuck me, Lex. Fuck me."

"Not here."

Thank you, god. Jason tugs at his mask. He's starting feel unpleasantly hot and sort of sick. Why is he supposed to be wearing this lame mask again? Maybe he should take it off. It's not like Lionel isn't going to know who they are.

"Why not? I need you, Lex."

"And we need some lube first. That's not exactly a standard supply for a coat room."

"I don't care. Fuck me

"Trust me on that one. You care."

"Leeeeexxxxxx. Please."

"When we get home. Where is your coat?"

"I told you. I didn't bring my stupid coat.

I don't need my stupid coat. I need you. Ooooh, Lex."

"The faster we get out coats on and get out of here," Lex begins, "Oh, there it is."

Jason almost squeaks as fingers brush the scarf and pull it away. His eyes widen in horror as he sees a pale hand reaching for a short brown coat.
"That's not mine."

"Of course, it's yours. Look. Plaid. Who the fuck else wears plaid?"

"Forget the stupid coat!"

Suddenly there's a pile of brown coat and plaid scarf dangerously close to his feet. Shit. If anybody leans down to pick them up...Jason pushes his mask up. There. That's better. Finally he can breath. It's so hard to think with dumb mask on. There's a shuffle of boots on the floor and then a muted thump against the door.

"Damn it, Clark."

"You're sooo Lexy sexy. I gotta have you now."

"You've been reading tabloids again, haven't you? You're going to rot your brain. What do you think you're doing? PUT ME DOWN NOW!"

"No."

"Clark, I swear, if you don't put me down immediately, I will raze your ass."

"Cool. Let's go home and practice our fa-la-la-la-las."

"Clark!"

There's a thump and a weird fffwoooosh noise and he's alone again. Except for the stinky aftershave guy on the floor. Why is he here again? Jason drops his mask on the floor and steps out from behind the coats. He pushes the door open and walks out into the ballroom and dodges back just in time to avoid a running Batman. "Hey! Watch it, moron!"
Chapter Summary


"I'm Batman."

"Bbbbaaaaaatttttman"

"Batmmmmmmmmmmnn!"

What sort of idiot wore a devil costume? His is seriously awesome and the best part...it's not a costume, it's a full working Batsuit. Grayson drums his fingers on his armored chest. He'd been careful to take the one from the furtherest reaches of the storage closet in the hopes that Bruce wouldn't miss it. It's his duty as a former ward to protect Batman from himself, even if it means stealing a Batsuit.

Why Batman can't see that that cat-loving psycho mental reject is a menace to the world is beyond him. Not that he has anything against cats, but that woman...she's one paw away from crossing the line over into the supervillain category. He's tried and tried to tell Bruce. The other Robins tried to, but they had thought that since he was the eldest Robin, and had branched out into his own superhero business as Nightwing, that Batman would listen to him.

That had been one freaky conversation. He'd always known that Bruce Wayne had a sex life; that he had expected, but to discover that Batman had a whole separate sex life from Bruce, that's taking the separate identity thing too far in his opinion. It's almost enough to fry his brain when he thinks about all the times that he's seen Selina and Bruce pass each other at parties with their dates in tow. And all the rooftop chases across Gotham City as Batman and Catwoman. Sick. That's what it is. Sick.

He'd tried to talk to Bruce about it, and then Batman, but both had shut him down hard. The only thing left to do is follow that cat bitch around and get solid evidence. Tonight he'd nailed her; he's got photographic proof of her associating with known criminals aka the Luthor clan, and receiving stolen property from Lex Luthor. Let Batman try to ignore that!

Grayson shakes his head. His tapping fingers hit a rigid raised object on the chest of his stolen suit. What the...Grayson steps closer to the bathroom mirror. He sucks in a shocked breath...goddamnit! He'd grabbed the Nipple Suit! He jerks his hands away from the chest piece. Out of all the suits in the pile, he'd had to grab the one that Catwoman had sent Batman for his birthday last year. Batman had never worn it except for...oh, god...there'd been a rooftop chase that night. OHGOD. Did this suit have cat coochie cooties on it? Bat spunk? Had they Done It in this suit? AAARRRRRRRGH! Get it off! Get it off! GET IT OFF!

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Jonathan looks at his stack of whole wheat waffles topped with only a tiny drizzle of syrup and a half pat of butter. A fruit cup of orange slices and strawberries sits next to his mug of coffee. Jonathan glances wistfully at the two truckers sitting at the table across from them. Each man has a huge plate
piled high with sausage, biscuits, bacon, eggs, hash browns, and waffles.

"Don't even think about it." Martha digs into her own stack of fruit-topped waffles. "That's not turkey sausage or bacon."

"Turkey bacon isn't real bacon," Jonathan grumbles as he watches his pitiful piece of butter melt and mingle with the maple. "And don't even mention soy bacon or sausage to me."

"You look tired. Want me to drive the next stretch, sweetheart?"

"I'm fine."

Martha gives him a look and her voice firms. "Next stop, I'm driving. You need to get some rest."

"There's not enough room in that thing for a chicken to roost, much less for me to stretch out and sleep."

Martha urges, "I saw a billboard for a motel that only six miles ahead. We could stop for the rest of the night."

Jonathan yawns. He is tired and his legs are beginning to cramp up from being folded up that ridiculous excuse for a car. He'd expected to be able to rent a nice roomy truck for the drive or at least a big car, but no, there had been several conventions going on, and all he'd been able to rent at the airport was that stupid doll-sized car.

"Look, Late Nite Lite is on." Martha points her fork at the logo flashing across the TV screen. She turns and calls to one of the wait staff, "Could you turn that up, please? Thanks."

"Hello, this is Carver James...coming to you from Metropolis, Kansas!"

"And I'm Jennifer Hills. Welcome to Late Nite Lite. We have a lot to report tonight on Caped friends, but first, here's Candi with the weather, and Sid with sports."

Jonathan trades looks with his wife. He forces a reassuring smile. "Maybe the Green Arrow's getting married."

"Maybe someone had a mask malfunction," Martha suggests lightly, but her eyebrows are crimped into a worried line.

Jonathan eats his waffles, carefully ignoring Candi and her cleavage as she poses in front of various maps. "Whatever it is, I'm sure that it's got nothing to do with...uh, anything."

"Probably not. This is exam week."

"Gotta keep those grades up."

Martha slides a look at the screen where Sid is wrapping up his sports report. Her eyes widen and she gasps. "Jonathan."

He twists his head around to stare at the TV where a blue-robed woman is flying across the screen, glittering wings and golden hair blowing around her as she lands softly on a wooden stage. He chokes on a mouthful of waffle and grabs for his coffee.

"There's yet another new cape in Metropolis...or is there?" Carver James smiles confidently from the screen. "Superheroine or angelic agent of the supernatural?"
Oliver tips rapidly down the hall. He's got four minutes before the guard walks back...shit! They'd changed the routine since his last visit. He dives into the nearest room and promptly rams his toe into a box. Oliver hops around, clutching his foot and swearing softly. What the hell did Lex keep in this room?

He leans against a stack of boxes and rubs his foot until the throbbing ache in his foot eases. Tomorrow, the Green Arrow is adding a pair of steel-toed boots to his wardrobe options. Oliver flicks on his miniature flashlight as the security man's footsteps fade in the distance. Paper boxes? Really? Lex expects him to fall for that? Clearly Weirdo Angels doesn't know who he's dealing with.

Oliver flips the lid off the top box and peers cautiously over the edge to find...reams of paper, covered in glossy gray paper wrappers. No. That's got to be a psych. Oliver rips away the glossy wrapper to discover five hundred sheets of letter-sized white paper. What? That can't be. He rapidly tears open the next ream.

No. No. No. He knows Lex is hiding something. This is Excelsior all over again. That Luthor bastard is messing with him. Think. Think. So if the top layer is paper...then that's the psych. He scatters the paper on the floor and reaches for the next layer. He yanks open both glossy wrappers and finds...more paper. He dumps the reams on the floor and grabs the last layer...okay, this is gonna be...crap! Oliver throws the last two reams on the floor. He shoves the empty cardboard carton on the floor and kicks it.

Wait. Wait. He's not thinking big enough. The whole first carton is the psych. And the next carton...Oliver jerks the lid off and tears into the first layer of reams. Crap! He scowls and upends sheets of legal-sized paper onto the floor. The next layer is paper and so is the next and the next.

Oliver whip kicks the box across the room. It bounces off the side of the dark machine in the corner. Oliver drops into a crouch as the lights blink and the evil thing hums into life. Is it gonna turn into a giant metal spider and attack him? There's something vaguely familiar about the sound. Oliver risks a flash of his light over the machine.

Oh. He straightens from his crouch. Apparently even loser spawns of pure evil use photocopiers. Who'd thought? Oliver walks closer, shining his light on the rows and rows of tiny buttons and the touch screen menu glowing beside them. He lifts the lid. Maybe he should run a copy. Make certain that it really is a copy machine and not some evil Luthor device disguised as a harmless copier.
Chapter Summary

Clex flirt. Jason runs into Cat Grant.

"I only do one free floorshow per night," Lex whispers against his lover's mouth. "You want another one, it's going to cost you."

"I don't think so." Clark growls. His hands tighten around the lithe body moving against his with such teasing sureness as Lex presses him back against the wall. "I think you owe me."

"And what makes you think that?"

"If you hadn't insisted on walking out of here, instead of letting me speed us out, we'd already be falalalalaing in our own bed."

"You don't need to do anything to attract the wrong kind of attention from some of the people who are here tonight."

"Which people would that be?" Clark peers over the balcony at the hotel lobby. It's crowded with costumed carousing party guests and hotel staff frantically trying to get the lobby back under control. He smirks as he watches Selina get scooped up by a tall Batman and carried out the door. "I hate to break it to you, Lex, but I don't think that any of them would notice anything we did."

"Luthors always get noticed."

"Sure, they do."

"You don't believe me."

"It's gonna take more than a Luthor to get that crowd's attention, but who cares? Come on, sweetie bear. Let's go." Clark leans in and presses a demanding kiss on his lover's scarred mouth. "If I don't
get you soon, I'm going to explode."

"We can't have that."

"So where do you want to go?" Clark asks eagerly. "I can have us there in seconds."

"Here and now."

"What?" Clark pulls back with a frown. He likes the sound of 'now', but 'here'? He looks at the hotel hallway and then back at his lover. He'd been thinking longingly of the ginormous bed back in the penthouse and spreading Lex out on it. "Not exactly what I had in mind."

"Scared someone will notice who a Luthor is doing after all?"

Clark turns his head against the wall and looks over the balcony again. Nobody that he knows is down there, but he'd bet that everyone there knows Lex. How many of them know Oliver as well? He'd looked around for Oliver, but the blond had been drinking at the bar, and not part of the guests watching the dancers.

There had been plenty of people filming and snapping photos with their cells that Oliver will probably see it at some point. And Oliver had probably seen him blowing Lex by now. But it still doesn't feel like enough. Like there can ever be enough to emphasize that Lex is his now. Clark looks back at his lover and allows his eyes to glaze bronze as he smiles tauntingly. "Is there a Luthor doing someone here? I hadn't noticed."

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"AAAAAAAAAAAGH!"

"Hey! Watch it!" Jason steps out of the way and scowls after the running man. Some people. God. A bat cowl and tighty whities...what kind of costume is that supposed to be? Still, he's gotta admit, the guy had disappeared around the corner with a nice turn of speed. He could probably do it faster.

"AAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGH!"
Now what? Jason flattens himself against the wall as the guy does a backwards flip into the main hallway. Now that he couldn't do. Jason turns to watch as the stranger bounces to his feet and sprints away.

"AAAAAAAAAGGGGGH!"

"Well! I didn't think I looked that bad." A lower feminine voice purrs behind him.

Jason pivots to see a tall woman dressed in leopard spotted spandex. Two fuzzy cat ears poke through her long auburn hair. He stares at the rounded breasts pressing against her low neckline. "I don't think that we've meet. I'm Jason."

"Cat Grant." She moves closer, looking him over. "You aren't running away screaming. That's a good sign."

"I don't see anything here to run from," Jason strokes a strand of her long hair, deliberately brushing his fingertips over her breast. He moves closer. "Wanna come back to my room and see if you can make me scream?"

"Why not?" Cat smiles at him. "Let's go."
Clark watches with interest as his lover's expression shifts... gray eyes narrowing, the scarred mouth tightening and then the gray shades into a smoky silver and the mouth curves into an arrogantly confident smile. What's Lex gonna do? Clark swallows as the other man steps closer and reaches...not for him, but for the velvet Santa hat perched on his head. Clark sighs. "Are we back to that?"

"I wasn't aware that we had left it." Lex strokes the fabric thoughtfully as he looks the brunette over slowly.

Clark shivers with sensation as the smoky stare flows over him, lingering on his tented trousers before rising to his chest.

"Take this off." Lex tugs at the fuzzy white hem of the unfastened jacket.

Had that sly brush against his erection been deliberate? Clark shudders as his lover tugs again and there's another delicate rub of velvet over his cock. He shrugs out of the jacket, dropping it on the floor. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to do you, Clark."

"Now? Here?" Clark swallows heavily. His gaze drops to the slope of Lex's parted lips so teasingly close to his. Is Lex is bluffing? How much could Lex do to him in a public hall? How far will his lover take this?

"Now." Lex leans in and kisses him. "Here." He bites the pink mouth softly. "I believe that was the idea."

"What...what are you going to do to me?"

Lex smirks. "Nothing that Santa would disapprove of."

If they are talking his lover's personal porny Santa, that leaves a whole lot of options available. Clark presses a lingering kiss against his lover's mouth. "That doesn't really reassure me."

"Is reassurance what you are looking for?" Lex pulls back and stares into his glittering red eyes. He smiles. "No, I don't think so."

"Just tell me that this won't involve piercings."

"You saw my latest, did you?"

"I'm guessing that you were kinda pissed when you painted it."

"Worried that I'll sneak up on you one night with a set of rings?"
"I prefer to wear a ring in a more traditional location."

"Do you?" Lex traces a circle around one pink nipple. He gives Clark a sly look. "I hope that doesn't mean that you won't like my gift."

"Gift?" Clark repeats warily. A quick x-ray of the other man's pockets reveal no lurking rings or boxes. "What gift?"

"I'll show it to you later. For now..." Lex draws his finger slowly down over golden skin, dipping into his lover's navel and then tracing the sparse line of black hair to the thick belt blocking his path.

"Lex, we can't." Clark looks over the shielding frosted glass panels and the sensual metal curve of the railings snaking down the staircase.

"Yes, we can."

Clark looks back at the handful of people below who are furtively watching him and Lex. He smiles and flattens his palms against the wall as his lover unfastens his belt. "But what if someone sees?"

"What if they do?" Lex whispers in Clark's ear, following up the question with a suggestive flicker of his tongue.

"Lex..." Clark breathes in sharply as his lover's warm hand settles over his cock, squeezing and cupping him through his trousers. Oh, god. He thrusts into the sly caress and hides a smile as he gazes at the guests and staff flowing around on the floor below. "Oh, god. Lex, please...they can see us."

"No, they can't. At least not anything below the waist." Lex trails his fingers lightly over Clark's fly. "So as long as we stand here talking, who's to know?"

Clark moans as his hips tilt toward his lover's touch. His head thumps back against the wall. He trembles with renewed need as he thinks of Oliver seeing this...seeing Lex stare at him with silver hot eyes...seeing the possessive grip of Lex's hand on him. "Lex, please."

Lex glances down the long hallway, seeing nothing but dim lights and closed doors. He unfastens the front of Clark's pants and eases his hand inside to cup the heavy erection. "This is mine."

"Yes. God, yes. All yours." Clark groans, pushing into hand slowly exploring the shape of his cock through his cotton boxers. He arches into his lover's touch. He sighs with relief as a warm hand slips into his boxers and wraps around his cock, easing him through the cotton slit and past the zipper of his red trousers. He looks down at himself, swollen and dusky against Lex's hand, precum beading on the blunt tip.

Lex slides his hands away despite Clark's muffled protest. He folds the red hat in half. The fuzzy white ball on the tip dangles jauntily. "Don't ever forget that."

"Never," Clark gasps as Lex's hand closes firmly around him, stroking precum over the length of his cock. He bites his lip as he stares at the velvet sliding through the fingers of his lover's free hand. What is Lex going to do with it? Clark rises onto his tiptoes in response to an almost too firm squeeze. "Lex! What was that for?"

"I saw you out on the balcony with the guy in a batsuit. What were you doing out there...with him?"

"Lex, it wasn't...it wasn't like that. We were talking. That's all. Hell, I never saw the guy before I ran into him out there." Clark gasps at the sensation as Lex folds the red velvet around his straining cock
and molds it around him. "Oh, god." Clark trembles on the verge as the older man rubs the velvet over the sensitive wet flesh of his crown. "Oh, god. Lex."

"Do you like that?"

"Yes." Clark shudders as the soft coolness of the fabric transforms to a slick damp cling as his lover pumps him. "Yes, yes, yes, yes."

"You're so beautiful. I love watching you like this. Seeing you want me. Knowing that I'm the one who makes you look like that. Come for me, Clark."

Clark swallows a moan as he hears the soft click of a door opening. He turns his head to see one round blue eye and one narrowed dark eye peering through the crack at him and Lex. Chloe...and Lana. God, that's almost as good as if Oliver was staring, watching Lex publicly claim him. Are they looking at his velvet wrapped cock? Or the demanding cadence of Lex's hand?

Can they hear the sush-sush sound of his cock thrusting into the velvet tunnel? The harsh rasp of his breath, and the hot sweetness of Lex's voice alternately praising him and commanding him? Clark slumps against the wall, barely aware of the door closing softly, as he stares into his lover's hot eyes. His stare dips to the hard outline of his lover's cock. "Lex, what about you? Let me..."

"Later." Lex gently slides the stained hat away, cleaning away all traces of his lover's climax. He leans forward, pressing a quick hard kiss to Clark's mouth. "I have plans for you."

"Good." Clark relaxes into the pampered sensation of being cared for as Lex adjusts his clothing. He smiles as he wonders what else Lex will be doing to him tonight. He suddenly knows where he wants to take Lex. Not the penthouse. Or the castle. Or his loft. His smile widens as he imagines the glow of starlight and crystals on his lover's pale skin. But first, there's one stop he wants to make. "I want you to always have plans for me."

"You have a way of constantly inspiring me to make plans." Lex folds the hat and tucks it into his jacket pocket.

"Lex," Clark looks from the deceptively virginal white of the fuzzy ball peeking over the edge of the pocket to his lover's wicked smile. He's getting hard again, knowing that Lex is walking around with his...with a pocketful of...oh, god. "Lex, you can't."

"No?"

"But, Lex, they'll smell it...me."

"So they will. Do you like that, Clark?" Lex grins as fresh bronze sparks flare across Clark's irises. He strokes a teasing fingertip over the white ball. "I could go rinse it off."

"No." Clark grabs his lover's hand, and lifts it to his mouth. He kisses the pulse beating beneath the tender skin of Lex's wrist. "No. Don't rinse it off. I want them to know that you're mine."

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"Jonathan?" Martha stares at the winged woman standing on a stage, surrounded by excited pageant tots and parents. "I've changed my mind. Clark isn't old enough to be left at home by himself."

"You think that she's gone...costumed because he has?" Jonathan shakes his head. "I'm not sure that that's fair."
"When we left, all Kara talked about was getting a Christmas tree...and now look at her."

"She looks like a Christmas tree topper." Jonathan glances at his wife. "If she was copying her cousin, wouldn't she be wearing something...with more red on it?"

The clip ends and the camera pans to Jimmy Olsen, sitting in the studio. He stares dreamily into the camera. "She knew my name. How could she if she wasn't an angel?"

Miss Metropolis gives him an annoyed look. "Oh, get real. That was a woman in a costume."

Jennifer asks, "Did she give a name?"

"We were a little too busy fighting snakes to exchange introductions," Miss Metropolis responds dryly.

"Whew! I had no idea that Metropolis was such an exciting place." Carver grins. "All this on our first evening in town. No wonder the Green Arrow decided to extend his visit."

"Visit our website to see Snake Cam!" Candi announces. "You can see the giant snakes that Angel fought. And if you are in Metropolis, go visit them live at the zoo."

"To see more footage of the Angel and her fight with the snakes, be sure to visit our webpage." Jennifer turns her shoulder to Candi and looks at Carver. "Doesn't Metropolis already have a hero named 'Angel'? This could get confusing."

"That's right, Jennifer." Carver nods. "This is the Angel of Vengeance. I wonder how she feels about there being another Angel in town."

Jennifer gives the camera an intense stare. "If you are listening out there, Angel and Angel of Vengeance, we would love to interview you both. Please contact us."

"And on the Red Blue Blur aka Blur Man aka Superman front, we are delighted to announce that we managed to get a short interview with him. It's coming up after a word from our sponsors." Carver smiles brightly at the camera.

"He did what?" Jonathan scowls.

"See?" Martha shakes her head. "Maybe we should give it another decade before we try to go further away than Metropolis."
Lex flings his arms wide. He poses in front of the frosted glass clock face, surrounded by the wisps of smoke wafting from the smoldering ruins of the exterior security cameras. "I'm king of the world!"

Clark curls a protective arm around the older man's waist and pulls Lex back against his side, bracing his lover against the push of the wind as it rounds the tower. "I can't believe you watched that movie."

"Titanic? I saw it, god, did I see it." Lex grimaces. "Twenty-five times. It's Lana's all time favorite. What's your excuse?"

"Chloe. After the fifth time, Pete and I banned her from taking her turn at movie selection for the rest of the month. Then, the very next night, I had a date and guess what he wanted to see."

"Clearly a sign. Can I assume he didn't get a goodnight kiss?"

"It was and he didn't. There. You see how easy that was?" Clark urges his lover toward the small glass service door facing the landing. He shoves the door open, leaving it askew on its hinges as he pauses to take out the interior cameras with blasts of his heat vision.

"What was?" Lex asks as the wind swirls in behind them, riffling loose papers and flinging them playfully around the room. He snatches a few pages from the air and tilts the sheets toward the soft glow of the emergency lights.

Clark snatches the papers away. He hadn't brought Lex here so his lover could play spy. "Casually dropping a piece of my dating past into the conversation."

Lex pulls stalks away, circling the room. "Desiree had the Porsche symbol tattooed just above her..."

"Lex."

"No? Not what you wanted to hear about?" Lex glances over his shoulder, eyes shading cooler and grayer with annoyance.

"No. I want to know about..."

Lex announces, "Victoria can tie a knot in the stem of a cherry with her tongue. You wouldn't believe how good she was at giving head. World class talent. Have I ever mentioned that she's fond of ass play too?"

Clark growls. His eyes flash red.

"You would think being a physician would give a girl that extra edge at providing quality blowjobs," Lex blithely continues, "but Helen was surprisingly squeamish. Considering that we first met when I vomited on her shoes after a bodyguard insisted on dragging me out of a club and into ER, you
would think that she wouldn't be so disgusted at the prospect of...

"Lex," Clark snaps. "I don't want to hear about you fucking people. I want to know about you and Oliver."

"Is that why we are here? Your fascination with my relationship with Oliver? Why does it matter so much to you?" Lex gathers another handful of papers from the floor and flips through them beneath one of the emergency lights.

"Stop that." Clark speeds across the room and grabs the papers. "We are not here to spy."

"But we are here because this," Lex waves a hand at the office, "is supposed to induce me with a desire to discuss Oliver?"

"I want to know."

Lex smirks. "Feels different when you're the one wanting to know my secrets, does it?"

"Is that what this is about? Payback?" Clark watches through narrowed eyes as his lover returns to prowling. "That's not fair, Lex. This is different."

"Ummm." Lex pauses in front of a painting and studies it. "God. Where did Oliver get that? I've seen work with more depth spray painted on the sides of passing trains."

"We're lovers now. It's not like I'm asking you for a secret formula."

"I can remember when merely being friends made you feel that you were entitled to any and all secret formulas that I might possess as well as granting free range rights to my estates. What's in here?" Lex opens a door and steps inside, turning on the light.

"Conference room." Clark leans, sulking against the doorway. He taps his fingers against his big black belt. Why does Lex always have to be so difficult about telling him the simplest little fact? It's not like he wants to know every detail...he only wants to know when it started, when it ended, why it ended, and if there had been any making up in between, and...

"I was expecting something with a little more...style." Lex strolls around the room. His cowboy boots are silent on the pale green carpet as he circles the round table of pale blond wood.

"What's wrong with it?"

"What's wrong with it?" Lex shakes his head. "Nothing if you're a fan of the generic hotel conference room look, and apparently Oliver is. I bet his interior designer is still crying in a corner somewhere."

Clark looks around the familiar room. It's not as warmly comfortable as any of the rooms in his house. It lacks the chilly menacing elegant of the castle as well, but it's okay. "It's not that bad."

"Oh yes, it is. I can't believe that my downfall is routinely plotted in a room with industrial carpet. It's an insult. What else do you do in here...besides plot against me?"

"Plan missions. Get briefed. Plot against other people. That sort of thing. See, answering question is easy. Why don't you give it a try?" Clark asks as his lover walks toward him.

"Making statements is more my style."

"Yeah?"
"Yeah." Lex sharply slaps the muscular arc of his lover's ass. "This is mine." He palms the big cock behind the loose red velvet trousers. "And this is mine. You're mine. Don't ever forget that."

Clark cups his lover's head and presses a hard kiss against the scarred mouth. He touches the fuzzy white ball, bobbing at the edge of Lex's pocket, and breathes in the scents. It satisfies something deep inside to smell himself on Lex. To smell that while standing on Oliver's turf. He stares down at his lover with red eyes. "You're mine. Don't you forget that. Lex...did you and Oliver ever fuck here?"

"No. Never."

"Good." Clark growls. He nuzzles the edge of his lover's jaw. "So when was the last time that you two..."

Lex shrugs. He turns away to study the office area. A smile touches his mouth as he spots a closed laptop sitting on the desk. "I don't remember."

"How can you not remember?"

"Because it wasn't memorable."

Clark closes the conference room door and follows his lover across the room. "It wasn't?"

"No." Lex pauses by the desk, staring down at the computer. "Why do you keep asking me about him?"

Clark frowns. "Maybe if you'd talk more about you and...him, I wouldn't be wondering."

"I would think that you would be happy that I'm not one of those boring people who can't shut up about their exs." Lex drops into the chair behind Oliver's desk and opens the laptop. He turns it on. "Ah, the look on Oliver's face, the first time that he saw what Victoria could do with a cherry. Then he found she was my date."

"You know that's gonna be password protected." Clark sits on the edge of the desk, watching Lex's face in the dim light given off by the glowing screen. He should probably take the computer away, but really what could Lex do to it? Oliver had it packed with heavy duty security and encryption programs. It's not like Lex is gonna guess Oliver's passwords in a couple of seconds.

"I'm sure it is. Hmmm..." Lex taps a few buttons on the keyboard. Broods and taps a few more. He cups his chin in his hand and stares at the screen. "Huh."

"Were you dating Victoria when you met Oliver?" Clark asks as Lex taps one-handed on keyboard.

"I met Victoria my second year at Excelsior."

"Oh. Then she was your rebound date after you broke it off with Oliver?"

Lex reboots the laptop. A faint satisfied smile curves his mouth as he stares at the screen. His hand spreads over the keyboard again and he begins typing. "Oliver couldn't believe that she'd rather date me than him."

"You both wanted Victoria?" Clark frowns as he tries to sort it out. Had Lex being doing some sort of threesome thing with Oliver and Victoria?

"Hmmmm." Lex pauses, stares at the screen, and then types some more. "Yes. We were both hot for her back then, but she was bored by Oliver. And so was I."
Soooo Lex had met Oliver and by the next year, things had gone wrong. Wrong enough that Lex had been waving Victoria at Oliver like a war banner. Clark brightens. Had Lex's affair with Oliver been more like a brief fling than a real relationship? He can live with that. He drums his fingers against his thigh. He still wants to know why it hadn't lasted. Maybe that might tell him something that will help him hang on to Lex's notoriously short dating attention span. "When did you start dating him?"

"I told you before that we didn't exactly date." Lex types rapidly and then sits back, regarding the screen with a smirk. "Does Oliver keep anything decent in his bar?"

"I dunno." Clark frowns. That was a lot of typing. How long does Lex think Oliver's password is? What is Lex doing? As the other man walks over the bar, he leans forward to peek at the screen. It's filled with lines of letters and numbers and symbols scrolling past. "Lex? What did you do?"

"Let's just say that there's a reason that I selected a different set of security and encryption programs for mine." Lex pauses at the small bar area. He opens the mini-fridge. "No wonder you have yogurt issues. He's got enough stocked in there to withstand a siege."

"Oliver likes yogurt." Clark watches broodingly as his lover slams the fridge door and moves on to inspect the contents of the bar. "You know that."

"Probably reminds him of the days when he ruled Excelsior."

Clark folds his arms over his chest. Is Lex finally ready to talk, really talk about Oliver and what had gone wrong between them? He waits with forced patience as Lex pulls out a bottle of scotch and studies the label.

"Lex...please. I want to know. I need to know how he lost you."

"Oliver never had me to lose, Clark." Lex looks up from the bottle. He walks back to the brunette. "Why are you so curious about my relationship with him?"

"I don't want to lose you."

"You won't. You can't. You're mine." Lex kisses the wide pink mouth. Clark whispers against his lover's lips. "I need to know. What did it?"

"Nothing that you ever need to worry about. He's not the same man that you are. You would never do the things that he did." Lex sighs as he meets a stubborn stare. "Fine. If I tell you, will you drop it?"

"Yes."

"Oliver wanted to rule me as well as Excelsior, and I am no man's subject," Lex whispers fiercely. "I rule myself and my empire. No one else does."

Clark nods. He can see that. Lex is far too much an emperor to take well to another emperor wannabee encroaching on his sense of self or territory. And it's not in Lex's nature to land in a new spot and not immediately begin assuming control and territory. So Oliver had been at Excelsior first, ruling the roost, and suddenly there was new contender for the throne appearing on campus. "Okay. I can how a merger between the two of you could've gone bad. Was that all there was to it?"

"No." Lex looks down at the bottle in his hand. "There was one other factor."
"What?"

Lex looks up, gray eyes cool and distant as the moon. "Oliver's a cheat."

Clark stares back, trying to take it all in. "Oliver?"

"Yes." Lex moves past him and turns the laptop off. He closes the case and shifts it back to it's original position on the desk.

"Oliver cheated on you?"

"Yes."

Clark pulls the other man back into his arms. He kisses Lex's temple. "I'm sorry. That must have hurt you."

"Not as much as it hurt Oliver."

Clark winces as he imagines how much losing Lex would hurt him. Just thinking of it makes his heart ache. His arms tighten around his lover. "I can't imagine having you and wanting someone else. Lex, you know that I would never, never do that to you."

"I know."

"Will you let me take you somewhere?" Clark asks. He kisses the edge of the older man's mouth. "Somewhere that as special as you are."

"And where might that be?"

"I want you to meet my parents. Sorta."

"Your parents?" Lex twists in his arms and stares suspiciously at him. "Clark, I've already met your parents and they don't like me. Remember?"

"Not my real parents. My bio parents."

"Your...bio parents?"

Clark nods. "Jor El and Lara. They're really an A.I. simulation, but I wouldn't mention that to them. I'm not sure how they would take it and believe me, you don't want to make them mad."

"An alien A.I." Lex grins. "I'd love to meet your parents, Clark. Take me to them."
Oliver starts as his iphone begins playing 'Secret Agent Man'. He snatches it out of his pocket and kills the sound. The phone quivers madly in his hand, but the copier room is silence except for the ssssssh-fffffa, sshh-ffffaa of paper filling the copy tray. He looks down at the screen and sees a text message asking why his headset is turned off.

That's silly. It's not off. He distinctly remembers that as soon as he had cleared the garage he'd...oh, that's right. He'd gotten distracted by the vintage Harley parked neatly at the end of the row and the discovery that Lex had been the mystery bidder who'd swiped the bike out from under him. Bastard didn't even ride motorcycles. Oliver tucks his iphone away and taps his ear piece. "What Impulse?"

"Can I stop now? It was fun being green the first couple of times, but I'm getting really tired of having to do a slow run while some crazy reporter chick won't stop chasing me. What did you do to her?"

Oliver perks up. "Crazy reporter chick? Which one? What does she look like?"

"Which one? Is that why you get all the good press? You're boinking reporters?" Impulse's voice rises in surprise.

"Nooo. Not exactly. Not literally, except for one of them." Oliver asks hopefully, "Is she a tall and pissed off brunette?"

"That's her."

Oliver pumps his free arm triumphantly in the air. HA! He's still got it. Lois still wants his smokin' hot ass no matter she told her cousin. He knew it! Who's the man! "That one's mine."

"You calling dibs on a reporter? What have you been drinking while I've been running green?"

"Nothing..." Oliver frowns as he tries to remember how much he'd drunk at the party. One good thing he'll say about the Luthors, they put out quality booze. Not stingy with it either like some parties that he's been to. And that bartender, she'd been so hot that he'd expected the bar to go up in flames any second. She'd like him too 'cause she kept flirting and filling his glass. Almost like she'd been trying to get him drunk so she could drag him off later. He sniggers.

"Riiiiight. You went to a party with an open bar and didn't drink."

"I didn't say that. I'm not drinking anything at the moment. I'm working." Oliver looks around the metal supply shelves. All this talk about drinking is making him thirsty. He'll hit up the mini-bar in Weirdo Angel's office later.

"Really? You sound sorta wasted."

"I am not wasted! It's this crappy earpiece. We need better gear."
"I don't think it's the gear."

"Of course, it's the gear." Oliver rolls his eyes. "You want good press? I'll tell you how to get good press."

"You already have...boinking reporters. Isn't that kinda dangerous...for a guy with a secret ID? I know that some of these reporter chicks are pretty hot. Almost Watchtower hot, ya' know what I mean? But..."

Oliver sighs. "How many times to I have to tell you, 'look but don't touch', 'kay? I know Watchtower has some sweet knockers, but we don't boink team members. It's unprofessional."

"You think that you and bird girl are fooling anybody?" Impulse asks. "We all know that the Canary is bumping uglies with you."

"That's different."

"How?"

"She's not a team member yet." Oliver waves his free hand over the glow of the copier's faceplate. "She's like Red Blue...an independent contractor."

There's a moment of silence and then Impulse asks, "So if the Blur and Aqua guy are doing the mattress dance that would be okay?"

"Yeah, that's what I was saying." Oliver sits up abruptly and his quiver thunks against the copier's raised cover. Clark and A.C.! Why hadn't he thought of that? "Is Aqua dating anyone?"

"He's always dating someone," Impulse mutters enviously. "How does he do it? All he does is surface, slick his hair back, and stride out of the surf...and people are tucking cards in his swimsuit and buying him drinks, and inviting him to parties."

"But he's not seeing anyone special?"

"No. Random dating. Tell me more about this will man-ho for good press gig."

"Man-ho," Oliver repeats menacingly. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It's a guy who..."

"I know the definition, thank you!"

"Oh, you prefer a different term? He ho? Hobag? I can roll with that. Personally, I can live with the man-ho label. How'd you get the gig?"

"The things I could do with your head and a toilet..."

"Gotta catch me first."

"I get good press because I have enough sense to hire a professional to deal with it."

"You hired a ho to fuck reporters for you? Where's the fun in that?"

"I hired a public relations specialist," Oliver snaps. "That's how I get good press."

"Oh. I think I like the man-ho concept better. Can I change back into my jeans now?"
"Ditch the reporter first," Oliver orders as he wonders if A.C. would be up for it. Probably. As far as he can tell A.C. is up for anything. In fact, it's A.C.'s duty to seduce Clark back to the right side.

"Done. Speaking of done...you are finished with that op, aren't you? I can hold out a little longer if you need me to stay green."

Op? What op? Oooh, that's right. He's supposed to raid the Norton's townhouse. Oliver glances at his watch. Night's still young. There's plenty of time yet. Plenty. "Did the people buy it? Did they think you were me?"

"Not really. Not if they got a good look at me. Most of them kept staring and saying that they thought I was bigger. That reporter chick only saw me for a second and she started saying that I was a fake."

Sooooulmates. This is proof of what he'd always known. Lois is his soulmate. All he's gotta do is get her to accept it. Oliver smiles and sways dreamily as he imagines waking to Lois and yogurt every morning of his life. "She didn't buy it?"

"She said that I lacked Green Arrow’s sex appeal." Impulse huffs with displeasure. "She called me a 'kid'."

Aha. He knew that she thought he was hot and now he's got proof that she thinks his alter ego is hot too. He's got twice the hot! Oliver grins and adjusts his codpiece. "We didn't expect to fool everyone."

"I came across the Angel of Vengeance. I paused for a rooftop break and when I looked around there she was."

"We've never met. No reason why she should be suspicious." Oliver leans over and checks the copy tray. It's still filling with sheet after sheet of paper.

"She said that she thought that I was taller."

"Don't worry about her. She's so cranky that no one talks to her if they don't have to."

"Except for the Blur."

Oliver shrugs. "The Blur's like that."

"Yeah. He saved her bacon tonight by distracting the Late Nite Lite News crew and did she thank him? No. She gave him the finger and ran off."

"Late Nite Lite? What were they doing there! And how did Red Blue come into it?"

"I told you. News people have been chasing my ass all night. They were after me, but I speeded outta sight, and they saw Angel of V skulking about...thought that she was me, I mean you," Impulse corrects. "They cornered her in an ally and then the Blur showed. Next thing I know, Angel is scaling the building and escaping while Jennifer Hill and Carver James are trying to chat up Red Blue. How do you wear leather all the time? It's hot. And it chafes. Give me my sweats any day."

"It's not that bad."

"I kinda had a few beers with Red Blue. So if you hear any reports about the G.A. being spotted in Miami..."
"What did you tell Red Blue?" Oliver looks around in alarm, but no hulking metahumans are lurking amid the office supplies.

"The truth. That you had an op tonight and decided to field test whether people would buy me as the G.A. Why? Is there some reason that I shouldn't have?"

"No. No reason. He knows about my steal and resell Robin Hood financial fund raising." Oliver hops off the copier and closes the lid. "He doesn't approve. You know what he's like."

"Trying to avoid lecture time, huh? Got it. Impulse signing off."

Oliver taps off his headset and grabs an armful of paper. He turns toward the supplies shelves and fumbles amid the boxes. Do they have any markers in here? He's got a message for Little Lexifer.
Chapter Summary

Clex at the Fortress. Jonathan and Martha see more alarming Late Nite Lite News reports.

When exactly had he lost control? When had Clark's mouth had stolen mastery from him? Lex stares up at the big crystalline shafts spearing and interlocking overhead. He can glimpse distant patches of sky through the lattice work of crystals as Clark sucks, licks and kisses, coaxing him back into full hardness. He lifts his head from the folded softness of red velvet and looks at the whiteness of his thighs spread open with Clark's dark head bobbing between.

His fingers glide over Clark's head to trace the line of his lover's nape. How many times has he responded helplessly to the siren pull of Clark's mouth? Three? Four? Five? He no longer knows. He'd barely had time to exchange a handful of comments with the alien A.I. before Clark had pounced on him like a red-eyed ravishingly ravenous beast. Lex smirks as he remembers drawing out his conversation with the A.I., pretending to be oblivious to his lover's hungry impatience as he waited to see how long it took for the other man's control to break.

Lex fingers the now buttonless plackets of his silk vest and shirt. Fuck, that had been hot...Clark shredding his clothes in the alien's impatience to get to the flesh beneath. He can see the black patches of his trousers, neatly ripped in half, dangling from a crystalline spear like a pirate flag. His boxers...god knows where those had gotten to...Lex smirks at the notion of some bewildered arctic explorer finding his monogrammed silk underwear blowing across the snowy plains.

He pulls the plackets of his silk vest and shirt wider, baring more of his skin to the slow, tender glide of Clark's questing hand. He thrusts desperately into the hot ruthless demand of his lover's mouth, his balls tightening, and then he's cumming and swallowed down hungrily. His head falls back against the cushioning fabric of Clark's trousers. He cradles his lover's head against his stomach, stroking the wavy blackness of Clark's hair. His breathing slows as he stares at the patches of sky and the prismatic radiance of the crystals.

It slowly dawns on him that he's in the arctic and he's not cold. Not that he's exactly warm either, but no worse than walking down one of the less used castle corridors in the dead of winter. By all rights he should be freezing his ass off, but his exposed skin is only slightly chilled. The half covered by Clark's body is as warm as if he had a cashmere blanket wrapped around his waist and legs. Even the slab against his back has gone from cold to pleasantly warm.
Lex reaches out and presses his palm against the crystal. It's cold there, but not as smoothly hard as sculpted marble. There's texture to it that changes as colors shimmer through it...now silken, now velvety, now satiny as it warms beneath his palm. He shifts his hand to different spot with the same result. He skims his fingers over the slab; if he keeps moving the crystal stays cold to his touch, but the colors shift, the intensity of hue and glow responding to the play of his fingers. Lex deliberately huffs out a breath, but no foggy exhale appears in the air. "Clark."

"Ummm?"

"It's not cold."

"Told you so."

"So you did." His hand tightens in his lover's hair as Clark nuzzles his stomach, evening stubble rasping over his skin. "Forgive me for doubting your scientific acumen."

"Is that sarcasm I hear?" Clark lifts up on his elbows.

Lex searches his lover's flushed face. It's almost impossible to not be distracted by the amber sheen hazing Clark's eyes or swollen ripeness of his mouth. He smirks. "How could I doubt someone who showed up in my office, clutching his textbooks on a regular basis?"

"Wanna know a secret?"

"Need you even ask?" Lex smooths the fabric of his shirt, his fingers linger over the concealed hardness of his left nipple. His eyelids droop lazily lower as he wonders how long it will take Clark to discover his surprise. "Always."

"I didn't really need that much help. I liked to hear you talk." Clark lowers his head and kisses the tightening muscles of his lover's stomach. He rubs his chin over the dip of his lover's navel.

"Hmmm, so if I demanded that you earn your next thrill ride by explaining how Octavian ended up as emperor of Rome instead of Marcus Antonius, or the mathematics underlying the..."
"I said that I didn't need that much help. Not that I didn't need any." Clark moves upwards and silences the older man with a hard kiss. "I liked being with you. Sitting next to you while you went over chem problems with me."

Lex raises his eyebrows. "Are you telling me that even back then, you wanted this from me?"

"Not at first. I thought it was because you were so different from everyone else that I knew." Clark kisses the curve of his lover's cheekbone and then the stubborn roundness of chin, before moving down the strong lines of pale throat.

"Great. You were attracted to me because I'm a freak."

"No." Clark pulls aside the white collar of Lex's shirt and bites the crook of the older man's shoulder and throat. He strokes a soothing hand down his lover's chest and stomach. "Smallville is the capital of the meteor enhanced, Lex. You aren't the only one that I know. It wasn't that."

"What was it then?"

"I'm not sure. I liked being with you. You saw me in a way that no one else did. When I was with you...I was suddenly interesting and funny and smart instead of being Mr. Dork. You listened to me like whatever I said was deeply important. No matter how busy you were or how mad at me, you always found time for me and heard whatever I had to say. I always knew that I wanted...more from you, than I did any of my other friends. That I expected more. But I didn't understand until later, until I was older, exactly what I wanted with you."

Lex inhales as the brunette's fingers skate lower to playfully graze his stirring cock. "Have you brought anyone else here to introduce to Lara and Jor El? Your parents, perhaps?"

"Jeez, Lex. Kill the mood why don't you? Jor El and Lara made contact on their own with my parents."

Lex hides a smile. He'd bet that had gone well. Both of Clark's fathers are equally arrogant in their own different ways. "Do they talk often?"

"Not unless they have to. Mainly when my parents are worried that I'm being a bigger weirdo than usual. Or when Jor El is pressuring me to go forth and conquer the world again."
"You? Conquer the world?" Lex sniggers. "Now that's a thought to keep me up nights worrying."

"I could so conquer the world if I wanted to." Clark curls his palm around the thickening length of the other man's cock and squeezes softly.

"I think I'll wait until you try to conquer Smallville...or even stage a coup for leadership of Oliver's team of twits...before I worry about the world."

"Hey, I'm on that team. Sort of." Clark nuzzles the edge of his lover's shirt aside and kisses the beaded tightness of the right nipple. "Why would I want to lead the team?"

"If you have to ask..." Lex smirks.

"Or conquer Smallville?"

"Act locally, think globally."

"Right." Clark rolls his eyes. "I think I have the tee shirt with that slogan. I'll wear it the next time Sheriff Adams sticks me with litter control patrol."

"Ask nicely and I'll let you borrow my highly trained attack lawyers."

"Somehow I don't think Sheriff Adams or Judge Ross will be impressed. If I show up with your lawyers, they'll probably double my hours or make me mop the sidewalks as well as pick up litter."

"Have you considered not getting caught at crime scenes? It's a simple, elegant solution to..." Lex gasps as his lover nibbles on his nipple. He cups his hand around Clark's head.

"Smart ass. It's not always that easy."

"Hmmm. You are aware that Sheriff Adams probably has you pegged as a uniform groupie."
Clark leans up on his elbows and stares down into his lover's face. "What?!"

"The whole department is probably betting on when you will ask to see someone's gun or handcuffs."

"Want me to rent a cop costume and arrest you?" Clark straddles the older man. He leans across Lex for the bottle of scotch and opens it. He takes a long drink. "Pull your Porsche over one day and make you spread 'em wide over the hood."

Lex draws in a shuddering breath as he imagines a spring afternoon and himself spread over the silver hood of his Porsche as the brunette's thick cock broaches him. He moans and thrusts against the warm curves of his lover's ass. "I could go for that."

"Me too." Clark drizzles scotch into the hollow of Lex's throat and then sets the bottle down. He delicately laps the liquid, stroking his tongue over the pale skin. "God. I love the way scotch tastes on your skin."

"Stolen scotch is the best kind." Lex tilts his lover's head up and kisses him, licking his way inside Clark's mouth. He sucks softly on the brunette's lower lip and then opens his mouth as Clark kisses him passionately back. He laughs breathlessly when the brunette finally pulls back. "I have something for you."

Clark slides lower, rubbing sensually against the swollen length of his lover's cock. "I noticed."

"Something else." Lex slides the other man's hand beneath his shirt, pressing Clark's fingers over his left nipple.

"What?" Clark frowns as his fingers trace the circular shape, then his eyes flash bronze as he tears away the vest and shirt, completely baring his lover's chest. He stares down at the small silver hoop cupping the tight bead of Lex's nipple. His finger tip grazes the tiny CK quivering with Lex's every breath from the hoop.

"Merry Christmas, Clark."

"God. Lex."
"It's not a Property of Clark Kent tee shirt, but..."

"Lex." Clark leans down and kisses it. He shudders as the tip of his tongue skims over metal and sweet flesh. "Fuck me. Fuck me. Now, Lex. I need you so bad."

"Then take me."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

"It's not every day that you catch a super hero in his civvies, is it?" Carver James smiles widely at his audience. "But that's why you watch the Late Nite Lite news team. We go further than the rest."

Jennifer Hills huffs. "I still can't believe that he picked Miss Sullivan solely because he fancies blondes."

"And not just any blondes. A very pretty blonde with," Carver winks at the screen, "doughnuts."

"Dear god." Martha shakes her head. "Chloe is going to kill him."

"If Lois doesn't beat her to it." Jonathan absently forks another bite of waffle into his mouth.

"We better hide the emergency meteor rock in a new place until Chloe gets over the worst of her mad."

Jonathan looks at his wife. "Chloe and Clark have been friends for years. Surely you don't think that she'd really..."

"Don't I? You know how hard she's worked for her career and now her biggest story has been reduced to her being a cute girl with really big doughnuts," Martha hisses in his ear. "If somebody publicly trivialized my success with my line of Kent Farm jams to the size of my bosom and the color of my hair, I would be shoving as many rocks as I could find down their shirts."
"Clark didn't mean it like that and you know it."

"Do you think it matters what he meant when it leads to national news anchors telling the world that Chloe got that story not because she's a talented journalist, but because he liked her great big doughnuts?"

Jonathan peeks down the front of his wife's sweater. "You know all this talk about doughnuts is making me...hungry."

Martha pokes his shoulder with her finger and gives him a warning look. "Don't even try to go there, buster."

"Nobody has doughnuts like you do, sweetheart." Jonathan purrs in her ear. "Fresh, hot, and tasty."

"You're driving a fast car down Trouble Street."

"You know what they say about redheads."

"They'll burn your breakfast in a heartbeat?" Martha asks sweetly.
Chapter Summary

More Fortress Clex. More Jonathan and Martha commentary on Late Nite Lite News reports.

"Ohgod. Lexlexlex." Clark rocks slowly, wanting it to last forever this time as he curls over his lover, holding those strong sly hands down so that Lex won't provoke him into cumming too soon. He wants to savor the thick length of his lover's cock sliding inside as they fuck. The surge and flex of Lex's sleek body beneath him. The smoldering silver gray of his lover's half-closed eyes. The sweep of copper lashes. The sweet vanilla gleam of Lex's skin beneath a fine sheen of sweat. The shimmering dance of his tiny silver initials against the delectable peach of the other man's nipple, shining proof of his ownership and his lover's commitment. The dazzling spark of lights beneath the crystal's surfaces, echoing the rhythm of his body as he fucks himself on Lex's beautiful cock. The low rasp of Lex's voice as the other man alternately curses, cajoles, and commands.

"And there you have it." Carver spreads his hands. "The Red Blue Blur aka Superman seems to be experimenting with his look. Go to our website to see video of all his latest rescues as well as that of our brief interview with him."

"Be sure and vote on which look you like best," Candi announces. "The original."

An image of Clark standing in front of a school bus, red cape flaring, appears on screen. His muscular body outlined by blue spandex and red briefs.

"Or the Super Surfer look," Carver adds as the image changes to Clark in a skin tight dive suit with loose red trucks covering his hips and thighs and a limp red cape dragging the ground behind him.

"Or the Super Throng look," Jennifer says as the next picture of Clark goes up. A navy leather vest strains across Clark's chest, golden metal laces gleaming over his skin. Navy chaps cover his long legs. A scarlet leather throng with gleaming gold swirls cups his privates. A long red capes is tied over his shoulder and behind him Batman is staring at him, thin mouth flat with disapproval.

Carver's smiling face appears on the screen again. "I urge you to vote, viewers. Apparently Superman needs all the costume help that he can get. Tonight, we welcome noted fashionista, Kim Hoskins. Ms. Hoskins, what do you think? Superman got caught in his civvies. Is that a true fashion faux pas or merely bad form?"

A sleek brunette smiles back at him. "Fashion faux pas? I don't believe so, Carver. Those a designer jeans that he's wearing. It's hard to tell with that viewing angle, but I'd bet my newest purse that those are Hugo Boss jeans. The sweater...I'm not certain about a designer, but that's quality construction and a classically simple design. I would call it a superhero faux pas. It's definitely not a fashion mistake."

"And what is your take on his original costume?" Jennifer asks as she holds up a photo of Superman standing in front of the school bus.
"I know a lot of superheros will insist on wearing spandex, but it's simply heinous. In this particular case, those colors..." Kim slowly shakes her head. "The only way this costume could be worse would be if it came in plaid. I would strongly advise that if Superman insists on sticking with spandex, that he should wear his proper size. It's always a mistake to try to squeeze into a smaller size than you actually wear. Also...he should consider a groin cup...for that extra support while flying."

Candi holds up a picture of Superman in a wetsuit. "And the Super Surfer look?"

Kim studies the picture and sighs. "He is apparently going to insist on the red, blue, and yellow combination."

"He is the Red Blue Blur," Candi murmurs.

"He's at least willing to experiment, I'll say that for him. And he's learning," Kim nods. "The dive suit and swim trunks both appear to fit properly. However, I don't recommend wearing the swimsuit on the outside of the dive suit. I'm a diver, but I do believe that traditionally, it's worn beneath, and in this case, the nylon briefs that he was wearing in the first photo would be a more suitable selection."

Carver holds up the last picture. "And this one?"

"Merciful heavens." Kim stares at the photo. She fans herself with a handful of papers. "His skin tone is flawless and his musculature...clearly this hero doesn't need any help with molded armor to achieve the cut and chiseled look. That shade of blue is simply amazing on him. He's moving in the right direction, he needs to stay with that shade. And ditching the spandex for leather...another good choice. He is clearly capable of wearing leather well. But I would recommend that he rethink the design."

Martha growls softly and her hand tightens around her plastic fork. "If that woman doesn't stop ogling my boy..."

"I think he should stick with the spandex. If most of the heroes wear it there must be a reason."

"Not all of them," Martha corrects. "The Green Arrow wears leather."

They both stare at the image of their son on the screen. Jonathan clears his throat. "Maybe if he wore a little more of it. Maybe if we bought some hides and leather working tools in another town...paid cash..."

"Or look at Batman. " Martha nods toward the screen. "He wears some sort of armor."

"Right. I'll break out an anvil and a blow torch when we get back."

"If you don't have anything helpful to say, Jonathan..."

"No doughnuts tonight for me, huh?"

Martha sniffs. "Let me drive and there might be some doughnuts in it for you when we get home."
Chapter Summary

Clark wakes up hungover. Oliver and the Justice Team gets a surprise. Chloe is also feeling the after effects.

Clark turns over and flinches as all his back muscles protest at once. What had happened to his slab? When had it gone so hard and comfortable? He's slept on it before after his training sessions and he's never felt so stiff and achy. He sits up and then pops out of bed much faster than he'd planned to. Ow! He clutches his throbbing ass. Ow, ow, ow. Sitting is plainly not going to be part of his activities for the day.

Maybe he should've stopped demanding that Lex fuck him after the...how many times had they done it? He can't remember and he refuses, absolutely refuses to ask Jor El for a count. It's not like they had used a whole tube of...Clark's eyes widen as he spots the completely flattened curl of plastic on the floor...shit, they had used the whole tube. He's never ever used a whole tube. What the hell had gotten into him last night? It's almost like he'd been exposed to the red stuff. No. No. He couldn't have been. Could he?

He shuffles slowly across the chamber to the corridor leading toward the restroom as he searches his memory, trying to stir some concrete image to the surface. Okay, he remembers drinking with a Bart who'd been strangely shy with him. And then going to the penthouse and discovering that he'd forgotten about the party. Putting on the Santa outfit. Talking on the balcony with a guest in a Batman costume. All that is clear.

What'd happened after that? Clark frowns. There'd been a girl fight over Lionel. And then...and then...it gets really fuzzy. Why does he have an earbug chorus of falalala, lalalala chanting away in his head? He tentatively sings, "Deck the halls with boughs of holly, falalala lalalala. 'Tis the season to be...ohcrap!"

Had he really...he had, he had. His hips twist tentatively in a half-remembered movement as memory seeps back. Clark moans softly. He vaguely remembers faces turned toward him as he had straddled Lex's lap and...and...rubbed and pressed and stroked and circled and twisted against his lover, watching Lex struggle for self-control, face flushing, eyes going smoldery gray. All his attention had been on Lex. Nothing else had seemed important. Something else is tugging at his memory...red velvet...Lex...being stared at...Clark gasps, clamping his hands over his mouth. Don't panic. Don't panic. He has absolutely no reason to think that anyone might have...except people were always snapping photos of Lex, and filming Lex, and...ohgod.
Okay. Okay. This isn't that bad. Honestly. It's not like he hadn't planned to live openly as Lex's boyfriend as soon as he broke the news to his parents. Or that most of his close friends don't already know. The J Team might be...a tiny bit disconcerted. They might even stop asking him to help out, but so what? He'd rather be doing his own thing anyway. Besides what are the chances that his parents will find out before he has a chance to talk to them? It's not like his parents spend quality time on the Internet or anything. He should have plenty of time to decide what to say.

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"Whoa," A.C. stops and stares from the glass door propped against the clock window to the boarded up space where it had hung to loose papers stacked along the curve of the polished mini-bar. He looks down at Dinah. "You've gotta stop screaming in Oliver's office."

Dinah ignores him. She brushes her wig's dark hair back as she moves cautiously into the office area. "Oliver? What happened? Are you okay?"

"Wonderful." Oliver slaps desk drawer closed. Where had he left his bottle of aspirin? His hand closes blindly around a bottle and he pulls it out. Antacids. Not what he needs right now, but it might be good for later. "Apparently while I was busy...fund raising...some sonofabitch broke into my office."

Victor steps around A.C. He looks around the office. "What was taken?"

"Nothing. Not a damned thing as far as I can tell. A security guard noticed a draft at 1 a.m. The head of security called me, but I was," Oliver gives Victor a significant look, "busy still. I didn't get the message until later. I got here before dawn, and spent hours going through all those papers."

"Any of it about us?" Victor asks.

"Of course not." Oliver slams one drawer closed and opens the next one. He sighs with relief as he finds a familiar glass bottle. "It's all business correspondence. Project reports. Contracts. Proposals. Cost estimates."

"Who was it? Do you need help checking your..." Victor's voice trails off as he stares at the scorched spots that mark the locations of the security cameras. "Oh. I guess not. Did they get all of them?"
"Yes. Even the exterior camera on the clock's service balcony. Damn it." Oliver stomps over to the bar and fills a mug with tap water. He swallows his pills. "The last image on it is the skyline and then nothing...bastards managed to fry it while staying out of sight. I don't know who the hell they were or what they wanted."

"Maybe they weren't after anything, but kicks," Bart suggests.

"Kicks." Oliver stares at the youngest team member. He hadn't considered that. Had he been wasting his time, attempting to discover some hidden common factor in the scattered papers? Could the loose papers really be randomly chosen? He had been skilled enough that he could've scaled this building before he was twenty years old, and he had been breaking and entering for thrills and passing grades well before then. "I hadn't considered that."

"How did the fund raising go?" Dinah asks. "Did you snag the painting?"

"See for yourself." Oliver nods toward the conference room and winces. God, his head is killing him. He leans against the bar, massaging his temple as he watches as the team troop into the conference room. Instead of the awed murmurs that he expects to hear there's dead silence.

Bart leans around the doorway. "Uhhhnnn, Oliver?"

"What?"

"I know that I haven't even finished high school yet..."

A.C. looms behind Bart. "And I went to a state school instead of a fancy college..."

Oliver sighs. What now? He strolls around the bar and toward the conference room. "What is it?"

Victor leans against the other side of the doorway. "It doesn't look like a Van Gogh to us."

"What do you mean it doesn't look like a Van Gogh? Of course, it's a Van Gogh. Look at the classic brushwork and subject...how can you say that it's not a..." Oliver stops, staring at the uncovered painting propped against his green chair.
"Classic subject?" A.C. arches his eyebrows.

Victor smirks. "Tell us more about his naked Santa period. They missed that one in my art history class."

Dinah murmurs. "You know...there's something familiar about that Santa. If only we could see his face. I almost feel like I should know him."

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God, what a crazy ass wonderful dream. Chloe smiles against her pillow, hugging sleep, not wanting to lose the already fuzzing images of sharing champagne and strawberries with Lana. Making love, and cuddling together as they watched Titanic, and then making love again. Dancing on tables and kicking over centerpieces with Lana. Yelling at Lex to kiss her ass, and that he couldn't fire her 'cause she quit. Clark doing a lap dance while dressed as Santa. Lex groping Clark outside her door. Ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.

She turns over at the sound of low voices and a door opening and closing. Who? What? Chloe opens her eyes and sits up. She pushes her tousled hair back and stares some more. This is the same room as the one in her dreams. The bed with tumbled ivory sheets and a beige satin comforter. The large flat screen TV. A fireplace with a pale blue velvet couch curving in front of it. A silver bucket with a champagne bottle sticking out of it. A marble coffee table with an empty silver platter and a pair of crystal flutes resting on it.

It wasn't a dream! A huge smile lights up her face. She hugs her pillow against her bare breasts. But if the best parts of the dream were real...her eyes widen as she stares at filmy white tunic draped on top over a gold breastplate and sword. An Egyptian goddess costume is heaped on the floor next to it. Oh, shit. She really had told Lex to...Chloe flinches as she remembers flipping up the hem over her tunic and slapping her backside to emphasize the sentiment. At least she had been wearing satin bikini panties, having decided that Amazon queens didn't go commando. Chloe puts her hands over her face and groans.

"Regrets?"

"What?" Chloe drops her hands to see Lana standing in the doorway, her loose black hair streaming over a red brocade robe. The other woman is holding a black tray with two coffee cups on it and watching her with a guarded expression that breaks her heart. Chloe shakes her head firmly. "No.
"Good." Lana smiles and walks toward the bed, placing the tray on the end table. She offers a cup to Chloe. "What then?"

"Where to start? How about showing my ex-boss and half his party guests my fanny and telling him to kiss it?"

"It's such a cute fanny and very kissable. And the look on Lex's face." Lana giggles. "It's a memory that I'll treasure."

Chloe smiles. "Okay, so maybe I don't regret it all that much. My budget might be a little tight, but I'm sure that I can free lance or get a part time position to tide me over while I'm going to Met U. After all, I'm the reporter who broke the Red Blue Blur story, right?"

"About that..." Lana gives her lover a concerned look. She settles lightly on the edge of the bed. "The Blur had a Q&A with Carver James and the Late Nite Lite people."

"He did?" Chloe raises her coffee cup and pauses as she breathes in the steam rising from it. Could it be off? It doesn't smell quite right. Maybe it's the brand that the hotel uses. Her stomach twitches uncertainly and she sets the cup untasted on the bedside table. Strange that Clark had talked to those people. He'd been so relieved when she had advised him to spread any Superman interviews out.

"It's fairly short, but he mentioned you."

Had Clark given her a shout out? Chloe smiles. Told the world that she is an amazing report? A fabulous journalist and investigator? Recommended her to superhero community as a trustworthy reporter? How sweet. And she could use the boost now that she's hunting for a part time job. "What did he say?"

"He..." Lana drops her gaze to dark liquid in her coffee cup. Her mouth tightens. She takes a sip of her coffee and looks away. "I think you should look at the website and see it for yourself. You can borrow my laptop and use the suite's wireless."

"Thanks. Oh!" Chloe slides out of bed and grabs one of the bedposts. She lifts her hand to her swimming head. "God."
"What's wrong?" Lana quickly sets her cup down and reaches for her lover. "Chloe?"

"My head. How much did we drink last night?"

Lana glances at the champagne bottle. "Ummm..."

"Damn. I haven't felt like this since Lois and I...oh, god, my stomach." Chloe leans against the other woman's side. She takes a deep breath and inhales the unsettling scent curling up from her cup. Her stomach lurches. "God, I'm sorry, Lana...I'm gonna be sick."

"Ssssh, it's okay. I got you. This way."
It's A Red K Christmas! (38/62)

Chapter Summary

Clark feels unwell. He talks to Jor El talks and Lex.

Can't be Red K, Clark decides as he examines his reflection on the smooth crystal wall behind the urinal. Yeah, he had kinda overdone it on fucking last night, but whenever he takes off the ring, or necklace, or whatever, he feels exactly like himself again. There's no achy muscles, no headache, no backache, no ass ache, and no weird bubbling unease brewing in his stomach. No lingering sense of something not right. Nor does he look like...like...this! Not exactly like this. The tangled bird's nest of hair perching on his head, that's the usual. And so is the heavy stubble on his cheeks.

But what's with the pallid greenish hue on his skin? Could it be the crystal's prismatic glow that makes him that at the fish market too long look? His eyes have a similar gazed stare and the shadows beneath are not helping. Clark tilts his head this way and that, but the view remains unimproved. He still looks like some half-chewed rodent that the barn cat had rejected for breakfast while Lex...he glances over his shoulder the sleek figure stretching easily in the midst of the steamy confines of the cleansing circle. Lex looks as hot, fresh, and scrumptious as an apple turnover just out of the oven. His stomach flinches as he thinks of the dessert. What's wrong with him? Clark calls, "Jor El? I don't feel good. Jor El?"

"Yes, my son?"

Clark spins around, flattening his hands over the menacing twitch in his stomach. He peers suspiciously from beneath his tangle of bangs at the hologram. Why does Jor El look so happy? Even the alien's white hair seems to glow with delight. Clark frowns. "What's going on?"

"Where shall I begin? There's so much new in the world today. I know." Jor El snaps his fingers. "Frogs!"

"Frogs? Frogs?" Clark rubs at the ache spreading along his lower back. Is it migrating up from his ass or down from his shoulders? He adds a second hand to the massage. "What do frogs have to do with anything?"

"You don't want to hear about the new frog species that have been discovered in along the Amazon?" Jor El frowns. "I forget that you lack my interest in the sciences. Perhaps I should begin with something less...I know! The weather. Would you prefer to start with local conditions and work
our way across the globe or start with Smallville weather and work our way outwards?"

"Frogs are fine." Clark rolls his eyes. Jor El could be so annoying. And boring. Frogs. Jeez. His head and body aches and Jor El wants to talk about frogs for crying out loud. He glowers at Jor El. If he told his real mom and dad that he felt like this, they wouldn't be standing around and talking about frogs. They'd probably tuck him in bed and make tea and toast and oatmeal. They would stroke his hair and read him the Smallville Ledger just like they had when...wait, maybe he's got that virus again.

He sniffs tentatively, but no urge to sneeze hits him. No, not that. At least he doesn't have to worry about sneezing the Fortress into the stratosphere. Could he have some other kind of virus? Could viruses that could make him sick have escaped the Phantom Zone? What...what if Brainiac had seeded the Fortress with virus traps for him? Ooohhgoh. Bizarro has been to the Fortress too. There could be Bizarro germs. God. Is Jor El still talking about frogs?

How can Jor El talk about frogs at a time like this? How much can there be to say about frogs? Does he look like he cares about...Clark breathes in sharply. Hadn't Lex said something to him one time about how frogs could change their sex as needed if the ratio of boy frogs to girls frogs in the pond tipped too far? What if that's why he feels sick? Why Jor El is going on and on and on about frogs...maybe it's a lead in. Clark hastily looks down. It's still there. Mr. Happy and the boys look the same as they had yesterday. Thank god!

"Kal El? You have a very peculiar expression on your face. Is something wrong?"

His shoulder muscles tighten. Now that he's started thinking about boy frogs turning into girl frogs and what symptoms the frog in question might experience, he can't stop. Jor El has done all kinds of stuff to him. Could Jor El...Clark glares at the A.I. "I was thinking about frog sex!"

"Frog sex," Jor El repeats in a careful tone.

Okay so maybe he shouldn't have tossed it out all bare like that. Out of context it sounds a little...okay, a lot...weird. Is that a smirk lurking on the edges of Jor El's mouth? Clark narrows his eyes. "You know how frogs can completely change sex and still have babies?"

"I'm aware of the phenomenon."

"You can't do that to me, can you?"
Jor El's eyebrows climb upwards and then snap down into a frown. "Kal El...I realize that your science education needs some additional reenforcement before it begins to meet my standards, but surely you are aware that the energy required to so alter a species like our own would be..."

"Can you?" Clark demands in increasing alarm.

"I have never had any reason to attempt to do so. Theoretically..." Jor El rubs his chin. "Do you wish to attempt..."

"NO!" Clark smiles weakly and ventures a reassuring wave as he sees Lex's head snap toward them. That's just...great. Now he has something new to worry about Jor El doing to him.

"It would be an interesting experiment."

"No, it wouldn't," Clark tells the A.I. in his firmest voice. Shit. Jor El is getting that same mad scientist look that scares him on Lex. His heart rate shoots up as he imagines the pair of them having a mad scientist confab and brain storming session. Oh god. What had he been thinking when he'd introduced them last night? "I was wondering..."

"Yes, my son?"

"I feel kinda weird this morning."

"How so?"

"I feel achy and tired. My head hurts. My memory is fuzzy. My muscles hurt and my stomach feels...I haven't felt like this since I came down with some freaky virus from the Phantom Zone."

"You don't have a virus."

Oh. That's good, isn't it? Or is it? 'Cause if he hasn't managed to infect himself with some alien-loving virus, then...what? Clark frowns. "Bizarro cooties?"
"Bizarro cooties," Jor El repeats. He squeezes his eyes shut in a pained expression. "Bizarro cooties. No. Where do you get these ideas, Kal El?"

Clark scowls. "Then why am I sick?"

"You aren't sick."

"I'm not? But I feel exactly like all the commercials say that sick people do," Clark protests.

"Commercials?" Jor El opens his eyes.

"Yeah. Like on TV. And the radio."

"I don't know, Kal El. Could it have something to do with your Red K exposure last night?" Jor El rubs his forehead as if Clark's headache had managed to transfer to his holographic skull. He sighs heavily. "And after Lara and I had the Red K discussion with you. I'm very disappointed in you, Clark. Very. Disappointed. I have to talk to Lara about this."

"I...Red K? But when? How? Wait!" Clark grabs the spot where Jor El's shoulders had been as the hologram abruptly vanishes. "The Red K discussion?"

"Clark?"

Clark turns sharply to see Lex standing behind him. His grin flickers on and then fades under his lover's stern expression. Damn. How much had Lex heard? Why hadn't Jor El warned him that Lex was standing a few feet behind him? "Lex. Hi!"

"You were exposed to Red meteor rock last night? Why didn't you say something? Who dared?" Lex demands. His hands flex into fists. "Who, Clark?"

"I...didn't know? I mean someone must have slipped it to me. 'Cause I didn't realize until I was talking to Jor El." Uh-oh. Clark frowns. Lex is getting that I-am-Luthor-see-me-and-flee-screaming look. He
better distract and defuse Lex fast. Clark gives his lover his most pitiful stare. "Lex, I...I don't feel so good."

Lex covers the distance between them rapidly. He brushes his hand over the brunette's forehead. "You're warmer than usual."

"My head hurts. And my stomach. And my back...and ummm," Clark pauses. Maybe he better stop there.

"And ummm what?" Lex demands.

Clark blushes. "I think I kinda over did it last night. I'm a little sore."

"Let me see."

"No! I'm fine."

"I know you're fine. Very, very fine," Lex coaxes. "Come on. Let me see. It's not like I haven't gotten up close and very personal with your ass before."

"No." Clark backs himself up against the crystal wall. He gives his lover a look. "That's different. Besides Jor El said that I wasn't sick."

"Did you ask him specifically about your..."

"No," Clark snaps.

Lex narrows his stare. "Clark Kent, you either let me take a look or I am hauling you off to a doctor as soon as we hit Metropolis."

Clark crosses his arms. "You and what army?"
"I have your parents' number."

Clark gasps indignantly. "You wouldn't!"

"You think not?"

"That's not fair!"

"Hello, I'm Lex Luthor...haven't we met somewhere before? You look familiar."

Clark glares. He abruptly turns his back to Lex and plants his hands against the crystal wall. His annoyance eases slightly at the warm, steady, gentleness of the other man's touch. "See? Everything is right where you left it. Can we go now?"

"Does it hurt when I touch you here?"

Clark shifts away. "A little."

"How many times did we..."

"I don't remember and I'm so not asking Jor El." Clark slants a narrow-eyed look over his shoulder. He sighs. Now he's gotta get out of here and hide that empty lube tube before Lex sees it and decides to make him see a doctor any way. "You aren't asking Jor El either."

"I'm not?"

"It's a long walk to the nearest city," Clark warns. He jumps as his flank is sharply slapped in response. "Hey!"

Lex kisses the small of the other man's back and lays a soft trail up the length of the brunette's spine. He plants a final kiss under Clark's ear. "You're sure that your..."
"My ass is fine, okay?" Clark turns and brushes his lips over his lover's scarred upper lip. "My head hurts miles worse than my ass does, I promise. I'm gonna go get cleaned up. Why don't you go talk frogs with Jor El while you wait."

"Frogs?"

"Yeah. Apparently there's some new ones hopping around."
Chapter Summary

Lucas arranges payback for someone who annoys him. Clark gets a shock. The Justice Team discuss the stolen painting.

"There you go." Lucas counts out cash spreading it on the counter of the Triple X Gift Store. He drops an additional twenty on the glass and smiles at the clerk. "Would you mind writing the message on the gift card for me? My handwriting is terrible."

"Sure." The guy slides the twenty away and tucks it into the pocket of his snug jeans. He picks up a pen and a gift card. "What do you want it to say?"

"Darling Alaster, I had to go out of town. Here's a little something to keep you hot while I'm gone. God knows that bucket of ice you married can't do it. Sign it 'Love, Brad'" Lucas taps the plastic package with 'Blow Me Ben and Stuff-It Stan Dolls' printed across the front. "I want this front and center of the gift basket. Use the clear cellophane wrap and tie the card on with a ribbon, but don't seal the envelope. Throw in the king-size tube of the Hot Persimmon lube and the party pack of Neon Glow condoms. Tie a few balloons to the basket too."

"This is a business address. Is this Alaster dude out?"

"Absolutely." Lucas smirks. He holds out a fifty. "That's for not being able to remember what I look like if anyone should ask."

"Gotcha." The clerk pockets the money. "Strange how blond and tall that fifty makes you look."

Lucas steps out of the store. His phone buzzes again in his coat pocket and he pulls it out. He glances at the screen and sighs. What's got all the LuthorCorp lawyer fossils clacking their jawbones at him now? He hadn't done anything...much. At least not anything that they were likely to know about. They couldn't possibly care that he'd spent the night with...what the hell had her name been? Angie? Audrey? Alice? Whatever. Should he listen to one of the...fuck...106 messages? And does he want to when he'd finally gotten rid of his damned hangover? That's a big 'hell, no'.

Let his dad or Lex deal with whatever had the fossils in an uproar. His stride slows as he scrolls
down the list of messages, looking for any interesting names on the list. Why had most of the LuthorCorp board and all of the LexCorp board called him multiple times? And the respective heads of security. Holy shit. What the hell is going on? And why isn’t there a single call from his brother or his dad? Could something have happened to both of them?

Lucas rubs his head. He can already feel the fucking headache edging back. He stomps past a magazine kiosk and then freezes. Had he just seen...no, it couldn't have been. He had not just seen his brother and...he backs up and stares again at the ruffled rows of tabloids resting on the rack beneath the magazines. Ahhh, shit. That is his big brother trading tongue with Kent.

Clark presses his finger along the thin blue fabric seam, sealing the snug suit closed. He touches the textured embossed house symbol that sits over his heart as he studies his reflection in the crystal wall. If he leaves off the loose robe traditionally worn over Kryptonian garb, the one-piece suit is very practical. He can seal and unseal it at any seam. It's extremely tough and yet very lightweight. It's snug, but highly flexible.

Plus it provides that extra protection and support in certain crucial areas. He turns sideways and stares at his groin. He's not sticking out nearly as much in this as he had in the spandex and swimsuit. He gently shimmies his hips and nothing wobbles or flops about in an unseemly way. Clark strikes a poise. He stares at the suit, imagining it in red and blue. He taps the small house symbol. Can Jor El make it bigger and center it over his chest?

Maybe if he...Clark rumples his hair and then runs his fingers through it, flattening out the damp black waves back. One stubborn curl snaps back out over his forehead. He frowns and slicks it back again. There. He looks...different. Stern. And more alien...and, Clark sighs as the curl pops back out. There goes some of the stern. He turns away and heads back out into the corridors. At least he's feeling a little better now. Stomach settled. Headache gone. The back ache is still there, but it's easing.

Good to know that sudden onslaught of alarming TV commercial symptoms could be blamed on the Red and not some weird ass Phantom Zone alien virus. But he still hasn't been able to figure out how he'd gotten exposed. Or who had done it. Or why. But as he'd talked to the A.I. while soaking in the foggy heat of the cleansing circle, he'd narrowed the where of his exposure down to the party. Figuring out why might tell him who, but he doesn't even know if it had been aimed at him. It might have been done in all ignorance...like the jewelry company that had thought that red meteor rock would make a terrific stone for class rings.

If someone had deliberately and knowingly targeted him with the Red, why hadn't they approached him afterwards? Maybe what the person wanted had merely been getting and keeping him distracted.
Of course, that assumes that the person knows he's Superman. Otherwise it begs the question of why anyone would care if a small town farmer was distracted last night or not. Maybe the person had been after something else and his exposure had been accidental.

Clark rubs his head as a slow throb starts up behind his forehead. Maybe he should see if Lex has any thoughts on the subject. Lex could chat up the other party guests...see if any of them had noticed anything odd. He rounds a group of crystal shafts and stops, staring at his lover. Wow. The other man is wearing a sleek gray suit beneath dark plum outer robes that gleams around the hem with silver geometric designs. Surrounded by the glow from a disturbingly throne like crystal chair, he looks like an exotic prince of the universe. Less thrilling is the sight of Lara and Jor El sitting around a crystal table with Lex and talking in low voices.

"Clark." Lex stands up. He walks over and kisses the brunette's cheek. "You look better. How are you feeling?"

"Good." Clark glances uneasily from Jor El to Lex. "What's up in the world of frogs?"

"I didn't think that you cared." Jor El raises an eyebrow.

Lara gives him a disapproving stare. "They are an indicator species, Kal El. You should care a great deal about them."

"We began with frogs and worked our way up to eels. I've been having some minor problems with some of my new experimental eels. Jor El had some intriguing suggestions for tweaking my results." Lex smiles at the A.I.

"And Lex had some equally intriguing suggestions for my consideration should Zod or Brainaic reappear." Jor El gives Lex an approving look.

Clark opens his mouth to ask and then closes it, deciding that he really doesn't want to know. Besides what are the chances of Zod or Brainiac returning? What harm could there be in a wholly theoretical discussion? And eels seems like a harmless enough topic. Lex had developed quite an interest in aquaculture recently. All the same, it might be a good idea to go ahead and hustle Lex back to Metropolis before the conversation swerved into dangerous areas. "Ready to get back to the big city?"

"I do have a few things that I need to attend to," Lex turns back to the holograms. "Jor El. Lara."
Thank you for your hospitality."

"You're welcome." Lara smiles brightly at him.

Jor El nods. "Most welcome."

"See ya!" Clark wraps an arm around Lex's narrow waist and hops upwards. His feet thud back on the slick crystal and go skidding out from under him. Only the quick brace of his lover's body keeps him upright. "What the hell?!"

Jor El clears his throat. "Perhaps this would be a good time to mention that your powers migrated to your mate last night."

"What?" Lex immediately eases his grip around his lover's ribs. "Clarify that."

"How?" Clark clutches the older man close as he remembers what had happened to his father. "Take them back. Now! If anything happens to Lex because of this, I will drop this whole damned Fortress in the deepest part of the ocean and squash it flat...I swear I will."

"Calm down, Clark. What are you talking about?" Lex frowns.

"My father got powers for only a day and his heart..." Clark hugs Lex close. He stares at the older man, his eyes big and worried. His fingers touch the artery pulsing beneath the smooth skin of Lex's throat. "Do you...how do you feel? Does your heart feel weird or anything? God, Lex, we gotta get you to a hospital and get your heart checked."

"Fret not, my son." Lara smiles benevolently. "Your mate will be well. He's different from Jonathan Kent."

Jor El nods. "He's younger."

"Then there are the changes wrought by Zod while he was preparing Lex to be his vessel," Lara adds.
"Plus his own healing powers." Jor El leans back in his chair. "Lex wouldn't be able to sustain having the powers for an extended length of time, but this is strictly a temporary situation."

"So my powers will return to me and Lex won't get hurt by them?" Clark stares at the couple suspiciously. "You promise?"

"Oh, yes. We promise." Lara nods.

Clark relaxes against the reassuring warmth of his lover's body. "How did it happen?"

Jor El sighs loudly. "We discussed this, my son. Red K as you like to call it."

"But...it's never happened before. Not with Red K, I mean," Clark adds quickly as Jor El's lips part on a response.

Lex gives him a disbelieving look. "You gave other people your powers before?"

"No! It was an accident. I didn't even know that it could happen the first time."

"What happened?" Lex asks, his eye narrowing. "Who did you fuck?"

"It was back in high school." Clark wrinkles his nose at the idea of sex with Eric Summers. "Jeez, Lex. I told you it was an accident."

Lex stares silently at him.

"On a school field trip," Clark adds. Really, how could Lex possibly think that he'd gotten laid on a field trip?

Lex keeps staring at him.
Okay, clearly some people didn't consider getting laid on while on a high school field trip an impossibility. Clark frowns as he wonders if Lex and Oliver had gone on field trips together while they were at Excelsior.

"What. Happened," Lex demands in a cool voice. "And who did it happen with?"

"Eric Summers." Clark shrugs. "There was meteor rock, and we were touching it, and we got hit by lightening...and bam, my powers jumped to him."

"Eric Summers. I remember him from Belle Reve." Lex rubs his head.

"And Jor El took my powers," Clark blurts, eager to distract Lex from the subject of Belle Reve.

Lex turns to look at the A.I. "You can strip his powers away?"

"We warned him." Lara tosses her golden hair over her shoulders. "Jor El told Clark that abandoning his training at that particular point and not resuming it before sundown would have consequences."

"You didn't say what consequences!" Clark snaps.

"You said that this happened because of Clark's exposure to Red K, and yet he says that it's never been a side effect of exposure before. What made this time different?" Lex asks.

Jor El spreads his hands. "An anomaly. On previous occasions, Clark had been exposed to both pure Red K in meteorite fragments. He has also been exposed to ground Red K compounded mixed with other ingredients to create lipstick. He had the same reaction each time, but this time...when we analyzed the garments that you were wearing, we discovered that this time the source of the Red K was botanical."

"I want that analysis sent to my laptop," Lex orders. He pats Clark's wide shoulder. "I will find out how we were exposed and who dared to do it."

Clark narrows his eyes as he studies the closed expression on his lover's face. "And then we call the police, right?"

"Absolutely." Lex looks at Lara. "How long before Clark gets his powers back?"

"Yeah." Clark nods. "I'm sure the team will be wanting me to go on missions and stuff. I need to know when I'm good to go again."

Lara and Jor El trade glances. "This is a new situation for us as well, Kal El. There are factors to weigh and consider."

"How long?" Lex demands crisply.

"Ooooh, around 38 weeks," Lara tells him.

Jor El adds, "Give or take a week."

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Bart bounces after Oliver, following the taller man back into the office area. He grins over his shoulder at the rest of the team. "Was I an awesome G.A. or what?"

"Definitely a what," Victor teasingly cuffs Bart's head.

"Hey! Come on. Give the props where they are due. I did good last night." Bart flits over to the bar and grabs a beer. He raises it in a toast. "No. I did awesome. Everybody bought me as the G.A. except for some reporter chick."

Oliver props the painting behind the bar. He grabs the bottle from Bart and tosses him a carton of orange juice. "Beer...it's what's not for breakfast."

"Where's Chloe? Is she stuck working the day job again?" Bart asks as he opens the carton.

Oliver smiles with satisfaction. "I suspect that she's busy cleaning out her desk at the Daily Planet."

A.C. turns away from the coffeepot, two filled mugs in his hands. He scowls. "Did that bastard fire
"What happened?" Dinah adds a thin slice of lemon to her tea cup. "Did Lex figure out that she works for you as well?"

"She quit. Stood in the middle of Luthor's pretentious party and yelled at him that she quit...and that he could kiss her ass. Then she walked out with Lex's ex. It was wonderful." Oliver grins.

Victor glances at him. "Did you get it on your phone? I would love to see that."

"Check the 'net." Oliver shakes his head. "I wouldn't be surprised if someone posted it."

"Good. I never liked her working for Lex." Bart inhales, his gaze hopefully following A.C. "Is that for me?"

"Forget it, shrimp. No sane person gives you caffeine." A.C. hands one mug to Victor. "Here."

"Thanks." Victor takes a sip. "So Chloe's gonna be Watchtower full time now?"

Dinah waves her tea cup. "What else is she going to do?"

"I haven't had a chance to speak to her yet about that." Oliver grabs a mug and pours coffee into it. "She hasn't responded to the messages that I left on her phone last night."

"She's probably still celebrating." Bart grins as he tosses his empty juice carton into the trash. "I would be. "Why isn't Clark here? Did you fight with him again?"

"Don't sweat it if you did, Oliver," A.C. pauses to drink from his mug. "You know how Clark is. He's kind of...you've met his dad, haven't you? I think he gets the lecture thing from Mr. Kent, and I know it can be really annoying, but it's Clark's way of showing that he cares."

"Clark lectures?" Dinah looks across the bar. "I've never noticed it."

"Wait until you've been here longer." Oliver drops spoonful of sugar into his coffee and stirs. Victor nods. "Yeah. Give it time. Sooner or later, maybe after he gets to know you better, he'll have a lecture with your name on it."

Dinah smiles primly. "Or perhaps I haven't done anything that he considers wrong."

A.C. trades looks with Victor over her head. "Yeah. That's probably it."

"I can't think why that guy looks so familiar," Oliver mutters as he stares at the painting. He taps his spoon on the rim of his mug. "I could swear that I've seen him somewhere before."

"It's not like you can see his face." Victor cocks his head and frowns at the painting. "Where the hell did you get that?"

"How the hell did you get that?" A.C. asks. "You don't really expect us to believe that you really thought it was a Van Gogh, do you? You were just pulling our legs, right?"

"Oliver has already told us that he made a mistake. Why on earth would he grab something like...that," Dinah gives the painting a disapproving look, "on purpose?"

"I bet you could bounce a quarter off that thing." A.C. leers cheerfully at the bared swell of Santa's ass.
Bart gives the painting a disinterested glance before turning to open the small fridge. He pulls out a carton of milk. "It reminds me of Wonder Woman."

"Wonder Woman?" Victor chokes on his coffee. "You need an eye exam."

Dinah stares at the painting. "Now that you mention it...I do see it."

"You're kidding." Victor swivels on his bar stool to face her.


"You better hope no one tells Wonder Woman that you just said that she looks like a guy." Victor swivels back around. "Where did you grab that crazy painting?"

Oliver looks at the curious faces turned toward him. He can either admit that he'd been so skunked last night that he barely remembers what he did. Or he can claim that he actually had a reason for stealing a Lex Luthor original. He drinks his coffee to buy a few more minutes. "Look at the signature."

A.C. leans closer. "Lex Luthor? I didn't know that he paints."

"He's painted as long as I've known him, but he's always been weirdly secretive about it." Oliver rinses out his mug and refills it. "It's only during the last four years that he's been donating the occasional painting or sketch to charity auctions."

Dinah raises her eyebrows. "That was auctioned off?"

"Yeah. It was. Some ditz named Selina Kyle paid a hefty amount for it...and yet, while I was testing LexCorp's new security system, I found it in Lex's office." And had gotten a higher bid than he had. Oliver leans against the bar. The coffee turns bitter in his mouth as he swallows.

Victor shrugs. "Maybe she wanted her money back."

"Maybe Lex bought it back from her," Dinah suggests. "If he's so secretive about his painting, he might not be comfortable allowing a stranger to retain possession of it."

Oliver studies the painting closely. The setting is an usual choice for a Christmas painting, but so is the subject. He frowns at the beach and it's turquoise surf, sliding over golden sand. The smoothness of the sand is broken only by a solitary trail of footprints that lead to a man standing in front of a fir tree in a bright orange pot. There are boxes of ornaments and curls of garlands stacked to one side, just out of the surf's reach.

The tree is crowned with a golden star that glints in the sunshine. The man is in the act of reaching one hand upwards, a turquoise and silver ball dangling from his fingers. A red and white Santa hat is set askew on his black curls. There's the faintest rosy-golden tone to his ivory skin, as if it's on the verge of tanning. The expanse of skin is broken only by the thin crimson line of a thong flowing over the arch of his ass and vanishing between his muscular cheeks; the thin line manages to somehow make the man look fives times as naked as he would have if he'd merely been nude.

Oliver's gaze lowers to the big bare feet curling in the sand and then moves upwards again. There's something so familiar about the tilt of that dark head and the set of those wide shoulders. Who could the model be? Does Clark know that Lex is painting porny..."Oh, my god!"

"What?" Dinah asks over the rim of her tea cup. "Oliver? What's wrong?"
His coffee mug almost slips from his fingers as he stares at the painting. He's always been amused by Clark's modesty...the insistence on loose trousers and shirts with the extra layer of jacket, or second shirt, on top of that. But this...this barely there throng wearing Santa slut...it's Clark. Does Clark know that Lex is selling smutty paintings of him? He's never so much as seen Clark without a shirt, surely a guy that modest would be angry over this painting. Maybe there is a way that he can use this and make Clark see what an asshole Weirdo Angel is. Maybe the crazy idea that he had last night isn't so wild and crazy after all. Maybe A.C. won't have a problem taking one for the team. Oliver turns to face the group. "I know who he is."

"You do?" Victor frowns. "How? You can't see his face?"

Dinah gives him an uneasy look. "All that we can see of him is his back and his backside. There aren't any helpful tattoos or birthmarks."

Oliver ignores her and Victor. He looks at A.C. "Did you mean it?"

A.C. arches his eyebrows. "What?"

"That you would be willing to tap that." Oliver nods toward the painting.

A.C. looks at the painting. "Oh, yeah. Why? You know his number?"

"As it happens, I do."
No wonder he'd felt off all morning. All the background noise is gone. That's what had been missing. He can't hear any of the things that he automatically half-listens for...the things that formed a subtle background music for him. He can't hear the heartbeats of his parents and friends or the comforting murmurous wash of their mingled voices. He can't even hear his lover's heartbeat; something that really freaked him for the first few seconds when he'd been scared that Lex's heart had been damaged. Clark ignores the urge to shake his head or rub his ears. He looks from Lara to Jor El. "Lex has all my powers now?"

"What's that?" Lex asks. His eyes are narrowed into slits like an annoyed cat as he stares at Clark's waist.

Clark takes a step back. "Are you x-raying me?"

Lex points to his lover's middle and looks at Jor El. "What is that?"

"My son is perfect representation of a Kryptonian male."

Lex frowns at the A.I. "That wasn't what I asked."

Clark spreads his hands over his middle. It feels normal and he's never seen anything weird there. Not that he's x-rayed himself recently, but back when he'd first found out that was an alien, he'd sat down in the loft with his biology textbook and compared himself with the anatomy diagrams. Most everything had matched up. "What's what?"

"It's an internal organ," Lara offers in a brightly helpful tone.

Lex gives her a long look. "I can see that."

"It's a Kryptonian organ. You don't have one," Jor El tells Lex.

"That would follow. Ipso facto." Lex crosses his arms over his chest and stares some more at the pair. "What is it's function?"

Jor El shrugs. "In the average Kryptonian male...nothing. Think of it as being similar to your appendix."

"A vestigial organ then?" Lex asks.

"I don't have an appendix," Clark announces. That had been one of the differences that he'd noticed, but since his teacher had said that appendixes didn't do anything, he'd decided not to worry about the lack of one.

"No, dear," Lara smiles at him. "Humans have appendixes. Kryptonians don't."
"I have this other thing instead?" Clark asks. Is that what the extra organ that he'd noticed was...an alien version of the appendix?

Jor El nods. "That's correct, my son."

"That's all very interesting, but shouldn't we be talking about something more important than my alien appendix substitute?" Clark frowns at his lover. Trust Lex to be curious about some minor anatomical difference when they are trapped in the Arctic for god knows how long. It had taken him years to learn how to fly.

Lex raises his eyebrows. "Such as?"

"What would you prefer discussing, my son?" Jor El asks.

"What about how we're getting outta here?" Clark demands. "What about that?"

"The same way we got in, I would assume." Lex shrugs. "I can fly a helicopter or a small plane if necessity requires. How hard can flying me be?"

"How hard? It took me years to work up from hops to leaps to flying. Years." Clark waves his hands. "Can't you get a plane up here or something?"

Lex sighs. "Clark, I realize that keeping secrets is not your forte, but are you really suggesting that we should..."

"I didn't mean give somebody the coordinates for the Fortress! We could speed away and have them meet us out there somewhere." Clark snaps. He might not be up to Luthor standards of secretiveness, but he's no slouch either. After all how many people in Metropolis, aside from Lex and the J Team, know that he's the Red Blue Blur?

"One, we have no Arctic survival gear. Two, it will give rise to speculation about what we are doing in this area. Three, if I suddenly appear in the middle of a wasteland...quite a few corporation will assume there's profit in it somewhere and immediately begin exploring."

"Okay, then. I'll call Kaaaaaaaa!" Clark clutches Lex closer as he stares down at the rapidly dwindling Fortress. Ice blurs far beneath his dangling toes and then ocean. He shuts his eyes as his stomach lurches in protest. Clark turns his face into his lover's shoulder and concentrates on the warmth of Lex's body against his.

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"That," A.C. stares at the painting, "that's Clark? Wow."

Dinah's frown deepens as she looks from the painting to Oliver. "Are you certain?"

"Dammnn," Victor mutters, "how much time have you spent staring at Clark's ass?"

Oliver turns on him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. Just saying." Victor waves his hand. "I work with A.C. all the time and you know how he is about keeping his shirt on. It's like trying to keep my baby brother's shoes on when he was a toddler. But all the same, I couldn't pick his pecs out of a pecs line-up."

"Do you supposed that Wonder Woman's really an alien and the Amazon thing is her cover story? Or that Clark got kicked outta the tribe 'cause he was a guy? Or..." Bart's eyes widen, "what if he's
really an Amazon who had a sex chance operation and claiming to be an alien as his cover?"

Oliver rubs his forehead. "Bart."

"Those two look so much alike...and they both wear red boots. Ya know that could explain why Wonder Woman has white trim on her boots and Superman has plain red boots. Maybe it's a secret Amazon code." Bart suggests. "Maybe that's why Clark never uses the Team's locker rooms."

"You're crazy," Victor tells him.

"Then why doesn't Clark use our locker room, smartypants?" Bart asks.

"I can think of several reasons. Maybe he is an alien, and he got some sort of alien thang that he's hiding."

A.C. snorts. "Not in any of the costumes that I've seen him in lately."

"I think Victor has a point," Bart nods. "Take a look at that painting and tell me which way he's facing? What's always covered up no matter what costume he wears? Maybe he is hiding alien naughty bits instead of surgical scars."

"Whatever differences he's hiding, it must be small if he can hide it under spandex." A.C. pauses as he realizes what he implied and then snickers.

Bart giggles. "That's a theory. Maybe it is small and that's why he doesn't use the locker room. Hey! Stop that!"

Victor lowers his hand. "Keep it up and I'll smack you harder next time. Have you forgotten that Clark was on his high school football team? That Met U tried to recruit him for their team? He's been there, done that, and bought the tee shirt, okay? And I better not hear any 'done that' jokes from the two of you."

"You two need to grow up." Dinah nods. "Maybe Clark's in a hurry and speed changes so fast that you never see him. Or he could pop back home and shower and change before you've even got both your shoes off."

Oliver shakes more aspirin into his palm and swallows the tablet with a glass of water. Time to pull this conversation back on track. "I think we can all agree that we have concerns regarding Clark's completely inappropriate relationship with that...Luthor. For a metahuman of Clark's powers to come underLex's influence...and it gets worse."

"Worse? How?" Bart eyes the coffee pot wistfully as he watches Victor fix another cup. He puts on his most pitiful expression. "Can't I have one cup? Please? Pleeeaaase. Just one won't do anything."


Dinah suggests, "What about a nice cup of tea instead?"

"Give the kid a break." A.C. gets up and pours out a cup of coffee. He adds a liberal amount of milk and then slides it across the bar to Bart. "Here."

"Thanks, A.C.!!" Bart chirps gleefully as he grabs the cup. He holds it in both hands, smirking at Victor over the rim.

"Are you insane?" Victor sighs. "He's going to be impossible now. Voice of experience here...give
into the big eyes and whine once, and he'll only do it more often."

A.C. leans over to murmur, "Chill, Victor. It's one third coffee to two thirds milk. He can't get much of a rush out of that."

Victor snorts. "Dream on."

"Have any of you seen the morning papers?" Oliver pulls a folded paper from beneath the bar and waves it. "I'm referring to the Luthor articles, of course."

"I skinned the Daily Planet. I didn't see any Luthor stories." Dinah rinses out her cup. She refills it with tea and drops in a fresh lemon slice. After a moment, she sprinkles a tiny pinch of sugar on top. "Not unless you could the inner city playgrounds that Lionel is preoccupied with refurbishing."

"I didn't mean the Planet." Oliver lowers his paper.

"I didn't see anything about Luthors in the Smallville Ledger," Bart announces. "Not unless you count an article about Lex paying for a new scoreboard for the high school football field and sponsoring the team's uniforms."

Oliver shakes his head. "Not the Smallville Ledger."

Victor shrugs. "Don't look at me. I don't read the paper with breakfast. Bad for the digestion."

"I flipped through the Cryptic Times, but I don't remember seeing any..." A.C. begins.

"Not that one either." Oliver grits his teeth. Who the hell is buying all those millions of copies of tabloids? He can't seem to walk by a newstand without seeing a few dozen of the things leering at him. He unfolds his paper and tosses it onto the bar where his team can see the photo of Clark straddling Lex's lap. "Fortunately, I have a copy of the paper in question."

"Don't look." Victor holds his hand in front of Bart's face. "Close your eyes."

"Eww. Look who's kissing Santa." Bart peers over the edge of Victor's hand. "That's worse alright."

A.C. shrugs. "It's not like we didn't know...I mean, does anybody here think they sit around playing gin rummy or bingo when they get together?"

"I'm more concerned about what might slip during pillow talk than what they do on the pillows."

Victor waves his coffee mug. "You know how it is...you're all relaxed and sleepy, guard down. Perfect time for Luthor to sneak in a trick question."

"Is Clark really an alien?" Dinah sets her teacup down.

"I haven't exactly snuck up on him with a DIY phlebotomy and DNA sampling kit." Oliver shrugs. "I have no idea if he is an actual alien or if it's a cover story."

"There's a lot that we don't know about Clark. For instance, I didn't know that Clark knew Batman. Talk about impressive. Did you catch the clip of them teaming up to rescue that poor falling trannie?" A.C. asks.

"He's more relaxed around you, Bart, than he is the rest of us. Did you ever ask Clark about the alien thing?" Victor looks at the youngest member of the Team.

"Nope. He hasn't brought it up and I haven't asked. It's not exactly the sort of thing that's easy to work casually into a conversation."
"And it's not like it's really any of our business as long as it doesn't interfere with missions," Dinah adds. She pauses to take a bracing drink from her cup. "Why don't you ask Chloe? Have any of you thought about how close she is to him? That she probably knows all about it and yet never mentioned it to us."

Bart slurps down his coffee. "Wow. This is good stuff. Can I have more? I'm not feeling the rush."

"No. You're hyper enough. A.C. should never have given you any. And don't try the big eyes thing on me, okay? I got a baby brother. I know all the tricks." Victor grabs Bart's empty mug and sets it aside. "Have some milk or orange juice."

Oliver smiles. "I've got a plan for getting Lex out of Clark's life, but I need all of you to play your part."

"And we can't tell, Chloe or she will tell Clark." Dinah smiles. "Whatever it is, I'm in."
Lucas takes charge. Jor El and Lara ponder their son’s costume. Clark arrives back at the Farm. Martha and Jonathan make it to Smallville.

Lucas leans back in the big leather chair. It feels weird to be sitting in his dad’s office, in his dad’s chair, and behind his dad’s desk. Amazing how different the room looks from this angle. He'd rather be in his own comfortable office, but all three security teams had agreed that this is the most secure location in the building and had insisted on stuffing him into it. He checks his phone again. Still no messages from his brother or his dad. It's probably nothing. Making phone calls hadn't exactly been the first thing on his mind when he woke up this morning. Lex is probably either hugging a toilet or plowing his farmer's row. His dad is probably popping hard-on pills and riding the red devil bimbo... or hurling into a toilet. Or not, the bimbo looked the type to know a few hangover cures. Kent... Lucas snorts. Lex would be on his own there; Kent probably didn't even know what a hangover was.

He glances at the closed door. On the other side are two security men from his team and one from Lex's and one from his dad's. Supposedly guarding him, but he has no doubts that his dad's and brother's guys have instructions to spy on him. Is the quiet out there a good sign or bad? Are they all listening at the door to see if he says anything suspicious? Or has one of them quietly offed all the others? Maybe they had asked his dad's secretary to bring them coffee and she had unleashed her death glare and he will find piles of gray ash smoldering gently on the floor outside.

Lucas pulls a tabloid toward him. 'LUTHORS GONE WILD'. There's a large photo of his dad with the devil woman tossed over one shoulder. The next largest photo is his brother feeling Kent up. There's a smaller picture of him groping What'sHerName and an even smaller photo of Lex's ex, walking into the hotel with her arm around a curvy blonde. The next tabloid has a photo of his brother with Kent writhing on his lap beneath the headline, 'LEXY'S SEXY SANTA'. He sorts through the printouts that had been sent over from the PR department and spreads them across the desk.

The bloggers had been busy. 'ANOTHER LUTHOR BASTARD?', 'GIRL FIGHT LAST NIGHT', 'LANA GONE LESBO!', 'XMAS STRIPPERS', 'MY NIGHT WITH A LUTHOR', 'LEX STEPS OUT!', 'DR. DAWN VS DEVIL WOMAN!', 'WHO'S THAT BOY?', 'LUTHOR PARTY TURNED ORGY!', 'NEW LUTHOR IN TOWN?', 'SOCIETY STRIPPERS!' Lucas pulls 'MY NIGHT WITH A LUTHOR' out of the pile. Ah, Alison, that's what her name is. What does she have to say about him? 'Kisses like a dream'. 'Hung like a stallion'. He likes her better and better. Maybe he’ll give her a call. Ask her out. See if she could use a little more help paying off her car.

Lucas taps his pen against the stories about his new half-brother. Would the same provisions that applied to him apply to this Jason Teague? Probably so. Lucas frowns at the idea of the fucker getting shares in LuthorCorp, and a seat on the board. What if Lex likes this new guy better than him? He relaxes as he remembers that Jason had apparently been involved with Lex's ex. That can't make the new guy popular with Lex. Could Jason have planned for all of them to conveniently kick the bucket at the same time? Ballsy to get rid of all of them and then claim the entire pot, but the guy...
supposedly has Luthor genes. Unless Ma Bimbo was lying. Lucas cheers up at the thought. It wouldn't be the first time that claims had been filed against his dad. And merely because his dad was sexing the bimbo didn't mean that Jason was his brother. But his dad hadn't rejected the idea. In fact his dad had seemed pleased at the idea of another son.

"Shit." Lucas stiffens as a horrible idea stirs in the back of his mind. What if his dad hadn't been joking about marrying that bimbo devil woman? He's never cared that much about being the illegitimate son, but if his dad marries his new half-brother's mom, and leaves him as the only family bastard...he stands up and stalks across the room to open the door. To his disappointment all the guards are still alive and well, lurking on thier chosen sides of the lobby. He scowls at them. "I want the airport checked. Specifically flights to Vegas. Now."

Jor El and Lara stare at the projected life-sized holograms of their son. In one, he stands, chin lifted defiantly. In the other, he moves through the air as his cape flares behind him.

"Where did he get those colors?" Lara asks.

"Don't look at me." Jor El shakes his head. "None of the Els ever wore such colors."

"Nor any of my House." Lara's eyes narrow as she studies the costume. "The Kents possess a red barn and a yellow house. I had previously believed that humans used random color choices for their households, but perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps those are Kent colors."

"Our son possesses more than adequate weaponry and protection simply by being what their yellow sun has made him." Jor El frowns. "Still it is unseemly for an El to possess ceremonial garb of inferior quality."

"We can remake it. Add a few protective measures as a precaution."

"We could weave filaments that would allow us to track him into the fabric," Jor El suggests. "For his own good. You know how stubborn he is."

"Yes. A pity that he so rarely consults us."
"Particularly when using advanced technology."

"The rodersax?" Lara turns toward him. "Advanced? So primitive piece of machinery that even humans could assemble it?"

"Advanced for humans."

"True." Lara nods.

""We really must do something about that glyph. I approve of his wearing his house sign in such a prominent place, but this looks like a toddler's first attempt at writing."

"I'll add that to our list of modifications and corrections." Lara purses her lips. "Should we make one for Kara as well?"

"Same colors?" Jor El asks. "Same glyph?"

"As much as you and your brother fought, he was an El, and so is she. As for the colors," Lara shrugs. "Our son landed here first. He should have the right to select the colors for this new branch of the House of El."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Clark weakly waves good-bye as Lex zips away. He clings tightly to the porch post. He may never let go of it again. Flying isn't nearly as much fun when he's dangling helplessly in someone else's grip, watching land and ocean turn into a surreal blur under his toes. When he's the one flying, he's never left feeling like his innards are scattered across several different time zones. No one most people looked a little unsettled when he set them down.

He slides down to sit on the steps and swallows hard. He's actually feeling a lot unsettled. His face feel flushed and hot. He turns his head into the chilly touch of the wind, and closes his eyes. Maybe if he thinks about something else. Thirty-eight weeks. Thirty-eight weeks. The number keeps tugging at him. There's a familiarity to the sound of it. Like twenty-four hours or...his stomach lurches and he vomits on the steps.
He opens his eyes to see his cousin. One second she's standing outside the barn and the next she's next to him, her slender arm around his waist. "Kara. I...I don't feel so good."

"I see that. Come on." She gently eases him upwards. "Let's get you inside. I'll make you some tea and plain toast. You'll feel better after that. All the books say so."

"Books?" Oh, she must've been reading those family health books that he'd dipped into when his parents or friends got sick. Clark sighs as he flashes on a memory of standing over his sneezing, coughing dad with one of the books. At the time, he'd been bewildered by his dad's irritation, but now...he pulls away from his cousin and yanks the door open. "I don't want anything to eat."

"Umm. The books said that you'd get cranky too."

"I'm not cranky!" Clark stomps into the downstairs bathroom and rinses his mouth out. His stomach heaves again and he lunges for the toilet.

"I'll go get the tea, ginger ale, and toast," Kara announces.

His stomach knots painfully at the notion of putting anything into it. Clark manages to turn his head just long enough to fire a glare at his cousin. "Go away!"

"I'll turn on some Christmas music," Kara calls as she backs away. "That will cheer you up."

Jonathan leans against the fender of his ancient pick-up as he fills it up at Glory's Grab & Go. What a different it made when they'd hit Metropolis and had been able to trade in that tiny rental car for his big truck. He takes a deep breath of the crisp cold air and studies the gray sky and grayer clouds. He adjusts the thick brown wool scarf wrapped around his neck, tucking the ends beneath his brown plaid coat. Over the tarp-covered baggage tied down in the bed of his truck, he can see a patrol car parked in the lot next to the tiny store. Behind the store's plate glass window, Sheriff Adams is sipping from a foam coffee cup and munching on a cookie as she and Glory chats across the counter.
Jonathan watches as a cube truck with a News Subscription Service pull up in front of the store and two teens begin lugging piles of bound newspapers into the store. He's going to have to begin subscribing to the Planet. He'd never taken much interest in the goings-on in Metropolis. The Ledger had always been good enough for him and had all the news that he wanted to know. Until his son had seen fit to start wearing a costume. What if they are running more photos of his son? What if Clark isn't answering his phone because he'd pulled a new stunt? Jonathan looks toward the cab of his truck and meets his Martha's worried gaze in the review mirror.

Martha unrolls the window and leans out. She forces a grim smile. "Sweetheart, would you mind picking up a paper for me?"

"Want a cup of coffee too?" Jonathan asks. Coffee would give him an excuse to linger and talk to Glory and the Sheriff. "I could use one."

Martha nods. "That would be lovely."

"Back in a sec." Jonathan fastens his fuel cap and hooks the gas dispenser back up to the old pump. He looks around as a long red Cadillac pulls up. The woman inside opens her door and stands up. He eyes her smug smile with unease. "Afternoon, Adela."

"Jonathan. How was the trip?" Adela Fordman stares at him with bright, curious eyes. "Your back early. Is something wrong?"

"You know me, Adela. I can't stay away from the farm for too long."

"Ummm." She tilts her head and eyes him like a chicken spotting a fat crunchy bug. "And how is Clark doing?"

"Clark?" Jonathan forces his gaze to stay on her face and not slide toward the delivery truck. "Clark's fine. Excuse me. I need some coffee."

Martha leans out the truck window and gives Adela a barbed smile. "Adela! How wonderful to see you. How are Whitney's wedding plans going? Have they picked out a church and a date yet?"

Jonathan strolls across the stained cement to the store. He holds the door open as the teenagers leave after dropping their last stack of papers on the floor. He steps inside and smiles. "Sheriff. Glory."
"Mr. Kent. Back so soon?" Sheriff Adams takes a leisurely sip of her coffee. She fishes another cookie out of the small box resting on the counter and takes a bite.

Glory moves around the counter with a pocket knife in her hand. She bends over the bound papers. "Jonathan's a man of the land, Sheriff. He gets twitchy if he's away from the farm too much. His daddy was the same way."

Jonathan shrugs. "It was fun at first, but Martha and I were getting a little tired of it. We were ready to come back home and sleep in our own bed."

Sheriff Adams nods. "Know what you mean. I never sleep well in a strange place."

"Though I'd get two coffees, Glory. Oh, and Martha wants a paper," Jonathan adds casually. "Anything interesting happen while we were gone?"

Glory slices through the twine. "I guess you probably heard about that new nutcase dressing up in spandex and prancing his stuff around Metropolis. Made the national news that one did."

"Better there than here." Sheriff Adams eats another sugar cookie. "Better the Metropolis PD coping with one of those crazy Capes than me and my people."

"I heard a little about that." Jonathan opens his mouth to protest and then shuts it. He walks to the coffee table and pulls two white foam cups from the metal dispenser. "The news said that he saved a bunch of kids and some other people. That's gotta count for something."

"Not saying that it's not good that he saved those folks, but Capes are trouble." Adams shakes her head. "You want to hear someone go off on the Capes, just talk to an insurance agent, or a claims adjuster, or some small businesswoman filling claims after masked vigilantes busted up her shop."

Glory sighs. "Been wondering ever since I read the Planet if I ought not add Cape damage to my insurance. Got everything else...tornadoes, flash floods, fire."
"Might be worth it if the Cape section could be used to cover damage from...you know, Smallville stuff." Sheriff Adams drinks her coffee and reaches for another cookie.

Jonathan yanks open a sugar packet and sugar puffs all over the yellow plastic table cover. He stares down at the mess for a second and then brushes the spilled sugar into his cupped palm. He dumps it in the trash. "Smallville stuff?"

Glory snorts. "Don't act like you don't know what she means. Nobody here but us, Jonathan. You've lived here all your life, just like I have. Bet your insurance rates are sky high just like mine."

"Oh." Jonathan opens another packet and pours half into Martha's cup and half into his. He fills each cup with coffee and stirs the liquid. "That stuff."

Glory lifts the stack of Daily Planets and dumps them onto the second rack of her newspaper stand, below the one occupied by the Ledger. "You want a copy of the Planet, Jonathan? Hot off the press."

"No, thanks." Jonathan adds chocolate hazelnut creamer to his wife's coffee. "We picked one up on our way home, and we subscribe to the Ledger. There's probably a copy of it waiting on the kitchen table. What else do you have there?"

"Uhhhh," Glory stares down at the next stack of papers. "You might want this one Jonathan."

"Which one?" Jonathan fits two lids over his cups.

"This one."

He turns around to see the tabloid paper that Glory is holding up. Under the bold headline, 'LEXY'S SEXY SANTA', there's big photo of his half-naked son on Lex's lap, getting blatantly fondled and frenched, and apparently enjoying it.

Glory peers at Jonathan over the edge of the paper. "I didn't know that Clark was gay."

"I did." Sheriff Adams pops another cookie into her mouth. She crunches away as she studies the
photo. "Nice hat."

Glory turns an interested look on the Sheriff. "You did?"

"Uh-huh." Adams finishes the last of her coffee and crumples the cup into the trash. "I've known ever since the bar fight Clark got into at the Wild Coyote."

Glory frowns. "I was at the Coyote that night. The fight was over the Lang girl. How's fighting over a girl gay?"

"It wasn't the fight." Sheriff smirks. "Did you see that sleeveless shirt Clark was wearing? Did you see any other guy in the bar dressed like that? Have you ever seen a guy dressed like in the Coyote?"

"Oh." Glory blinks. "Ooooh! Can't say that I have now that you mention it, Sheriff."

Jonathan stares at both women. "Is this going to be a problem?"

Glory shakes her head. "Clark's a good boy. I've never had a problem in the world with him. He's always welcome in my place."

The Sheriff grins at him. "Jonathan, don't tell me that you think that Louisa and I really are sharing a house to save on rent money? No, I don't have a problem with Clark being gay. But I suspect there's a whole lotta folks that are gonna have a problem with him cozying up to Lex Luthor."

That he can understand. Hell, he's one of the people who have a problem with his son getting cozy with that smug butterwouldn't'meltinhismouth sonofabitch. Jonathan sighs as he picks up his foam coffee cups. "Add the paper to my bill, Glory. Martha's going to want to see it."

Glory gives him a sympathetic look. "You could buy all my copies."

"Wouldn't do any good," Adams tosses her empty cookie box in the trash. "If Clark's kissing Lex at Metropolis parties, it won't be long before he's kissing Luthor on Smallville sidewalks."

Jonathan manages not to flinch as he sets his coffee on the counter and reaches for his wallet. That's all he needs. Watching his son help himself to a daily serving of fruitcake. Why, why, why did Clark always go for the crazy?
Chapter Summary

Lex arrives back in Metropolis. Clark talks about Lex with the Kents. The Justice Team watches Lex on TV.

Thirty-eight weeks...there's something about that time frame that stirs a subliminal sense of unease. A sense of something big about to strike. Lex jerks to a surprised halt, dropping a couple of feet before he manages a controlled drift over the top of LexCorp. What the fuck? He stares down a mosaic spread of green and white covering the top of his helicopter pad. He drifts upwards until the scattered squares consolidates into an image of an ass covered in tight green leather. The image is framed by a wide border of white filled with dark green letters spelling out, "Hey, Lex! Kiss my green ass!"

"What the FUCK?!" Lex swoops down and lands on the far edge of the pad, just out of camera range. Something squashes under his foot and he lifts it to see a flattened bottle of industrial adhesive. He glares at the squares of laminated papers. How the hell is he going to get rid of this before someone sees it? Perhaps he should make certain that someone sees it. A slow smile curls his lips.

"Dad!" Clark shoves his chair back and scowls. "That's not fair. Lex didn't...he wouldn't..."

"Oh, wouldn't he?" Jonathan glares back across the kitchen table. He slaps his palm over the tabloid photo of his son with that Luthor loon. "I suppose it's purest coincidence that he threw a party and you were exposed to Red K there!"

"Now Jonathan." Martha frowns at her husband. "I know you don't like Lex, but he doesn't even know about how red meteor rock effects Clark. What would he go to all the trouble of..."

"Mom." Clark clears his throat. He reddens as both of his parents turn Oh-no-you-didn't stares on him. "He knows."

"He knows. You hear that, Martha? Luthor knows, god help us." Jonathan reaches for the pink bottle sitting on the table's center and takes a swig. He swallows and waits hopefully for the medicine to hit his clenching stomach and make it settle down.

Martha stares at her son, searching the troubled jade eyes. "Clark. Honey. What were you thinking?"

"The same thing that I'm still thinking. That I love Lex. That I want to spend the rest of my life with him." Clark lifts his chin. "Don't look at me like that. Did you always tell me that you both knew as soon as you met after class that you were going to always be together?"

"That was different." Jonathan takes another swig from the bottle. He looks down at the label. How long is it supposed to take for this stuff to work? The knot in his stomach feels bigger instead of smaller.

"How?" Clark demands. "How was it different?"

"Because he's a Luthor! And you're a..." Jonathan sighs. "Look, son, if things had gone bad between
me and Martha back then, my worse secret was that I’d been in a few bar brawls and street races."

"And he didn't confess up until we'd been dating for six months." Martha pats her son's hand.
"Clark, are you sure about this?"

"Is he sure?" Jonathan gives her an outraged look. Is she going to encourage this nonsense now? He'd thought that they were in the same canoe when it came to discouraging Clark's crush on crazy.

"Jonathan," Martha narrows her eyes at him, "that horse has left the stable already, okay? You can't get it back in the stall."

Maybe not, but he's sure as hell willing to throw a few bear traps, shotgun shells, drunk rednecks, rabid mutants...whatever it takes...in the back of his truck and give it a try. Jonathan scowls down at the bottle in his hand.

Satisfied that he's going to be silent, Martha turns back to her son. "Clark, have you told Lex...everything?"

"Yeah."

"Oh." Martha sighs.

Jonathan can feel his wife looking at him, but he stubbornly keeps his eyes fixed on the pink bottle that he's turning round and round in his hands.

"I took him to meet Jor El and Lara last night," Clark adds. "They liked him."

"They would." Jonathan snorts. Takes one to know one. It's scary how easily he can imagine Space Twit and Mr. Fruitcake With Extra Nuts bonding.

"Lara's not so bad," Martha murmurs after a moment.

"You're kidding, right? Kara said that there's only the one A.I. That means there's no more difference between that pair than between our front door and our kitchen door." Jonathan looks around with a frown. Why hasn't Kara showed up to throw her two cents on the table with everyone else?
"Where's your cousin?"

Clark shrugs. "One of her friends called. A pack of them wanted to take the train to Metropolis, catch the first showing of some girl movie, and then have a late lunch."

Jonathan frowns as he suddenly really sees the bottle in his hand. What's it doing out of the medicine chest and on the kitchen table when his son is the only one in the house? Clark doesn't get sick. No headaches. No tummy aches. Not a single one of the thousand indignities that afflicted any human and supported an entire industry of over the counter cures. He sets the bottle on the table and slides it across to his wife. "Sweetheart."

Martha catches the bottle and gives him an annoyed 'what?' look. Then her eyes widen. She holds the bottle up. "Clark? What's going on? Why is this sitting out on the table? Are you okay, honey?"

"Uh-huh." Clark wiggles on his chair exactly like he had when he was a toddler caught red-handed with the cookie jar open. His gaze shifts from face to face. "Earlier, I...umm...I wasn't feeling so good."

"You weren't feeling so good," Jonathan repeats slowly. "After telling Lex your secrets, up to and including red rock. After going to a Luthor party and...surprise, surprise...getting exposed to some whole new form of the damned stuff. After introducing Nutty As A Fruitcake to Space Cadet Arctic
Fortress, you weren't feeling so good. Imagine that."

"Jonathan." Martha narrows her eyes at him. "Let it go."

"What? I'm just saying."

"Well, don't. The Fruitcake has left the bakery, remember? We've already covered that."

Clark frowns at both his parents. "Stop calling Lex a fruitcake."

"Love me, love my fruitcake,' Jonathan mutters before he catches himself.

"Dad!"

"Jonathan!"

"I'm sure he calls me worse names." Jonathan reaches across the table and taps the bottle of stomach medicine. "You don't want to talk about Crazy Cakes, fine. Talk about this."

Clark wrinkles his nose. "It tastes gross, but it seems to work okay."

Jonathan gives his son a stern stare. "Not the response that we were looking for, Clark. Since when have you needed it to work?"

"This morning." Clark avoids his parents' eyes. "I feel fine now, but all morning, my stomach felt weird. I didn't start feeling really nauseated until after Lex dropped me off here and..."

"Wait." Martha leans closer. "Lex dropped you off."

Jonathannarrows his eyes. "Lex."

Clark gives them an exasperated stare. "Well, yeah. He's not a bad guy. I keep telling you that."

Jonathan crosses his arms over his chest and leans back in his chair, watching the emotions rapidly flitting over his son's face as Clark abruptly goes silent. "You didn't drop Lex off. He dropped you off. Just outta curiosity, which airport did Luthor Air use?"

Clark droops down and sighs. "It's temporary."

"What is?" Martha asks.

"IkindasortalostmypowersandLexhasthem."

"What!" Jonathan sits up sharply.

Martha frowns. "How did that happen, honey?"

Clark turns bright red. "I dunno. It just did. But it's temporary. Jor El said so."

"How temporary?" Jonathan demands. "How long are we going to need to man the ramparts and lock up the livestock?"

"Dad." Clark glowers at him.

Martha sighs. "Jonathan."

"Am I the only one here that remembers exactly how we came to acquire a whole new herd of
cows?" Jonathan demands. "I seem to remember you having a few words to say when we woke up to them chowing down on your kitchen herb garden, Martha."

"He meant well, sweetheart."

"And it wasn't even Lex's fault," Clark adds. "He was set up."

"I'm just saying." Jonathan shakes his head. "It's gonna be Crazy Time on Steroids around here now."

"Dad!"

"So that's the plan," Oliver sums up. He looks around the table. "What do you think? Are you up for the job, A.C.?"

"Uhhhm, Oliver?" A.C. stares over the other man's shoulder.

Oliver frowns. "What?"

"You might wanna turn the sound on," Bart advises.

Oliver turns to see the TV behind him is showing the top of LexCorp. Oh, shit. He'd forgotten about that. The camera zooms in on the block letters reading, "Hey, Lex! Kiss my green ass!" He can feel the group's collective stare settling on his profile.

"Oliver?" Bart asks. "Did you?"

"No!" Oliver snaps.

Dinah sniffs. "Don't be silly. Of course, he didn't. Oliver wouldn't do anything so ridiculously immature."

Oliver grabs the remote and turns on the sound as a sympathetic looking brunette speaks and then holds a microphone out to Lex. What the hell is that jerkwad saying? He taps the button just as the mike goes back to the pretty brunette. Her voice booms into the conference room.

"You're filing a restraining order against the Green Arrow as well as filing suit against him for trespassing, vandalism, theft, and malicious mischief?"

Lex nods. "And possibly other charges will be forthcoming. I've long suspected that certain acts resulting in destruction of LexCorp and LuthorCorp properties were perpetrated by a single sick obsessive individual. My lawyers and investigators, as well as my father's, are looking into it."

"You suspect the Green Arrow?"

Lex looks down at the squares of green that his black leather shoes are firmly planted on. He sighs wearily and then raises his head. He gives the reporter a warmly rueful smile. "You know what it's like. How unstable persons can become...fixated on certain types of individuals."

"WHAT!?!" Oliver yells at the screen.

"He said that you want to nail his ass," A.C. chimes in helpfully.

"That's what it sounded like to me," Victor adds.
Bart chirps, "Me too."
Lex discovers super-hearing. Chloe cleans out her desk. Clark figures out that he's mpegged.

Lex smiles and waves as the reporter and her crew walk out the lobby stores. His smile vanishes as soon as he turns to face the people waiting behind him. He looks at Hope. "Have someone check on Selina Kyle immediately. Send a LexCorp physician to her if she wants it."

"Why the special treatment?" Lucas asks. "She an old girlfriend?"

"Not a girlfriend," Lex announces firmly in a carrying voice as he glances around to see who might have heard that one. Having her bat loving lover decide that he's making a move on Selina is the last thing he needs right now. And if Selina thinks he had anything with her getting drugged last night...Lex rubs his ear. What's with the white noise roar? Some sort of delayed effect? "Selina's a friend. She's also someone who can create a lot of trouble that I don't need. Give her the kid glove treatment."

Lucas moves closer and lowers his voice, "What about Dad? Why didn't you hold a press conference about that instead of this Green Arrow loser? What if he has been kidnapped?"

"What if he's having a tryst? Not that it wouldn't be entertaining to burst in on him with a full security team, but the payback wouldn't be worth it."

"If it's only fucking around, why wouldn't he have his security around? Why would they know where he is?" Lucas glowers at his brother. "For that matter, why did you?"

"Circumstances arose." Lex resists the urge to whack the side of his head as the white noise roar increases. The last thing he needs, especially if something untoward had happened to his dad, is for everyone to think that he's gone crazy. Again.

Clark had been the only one who had believed him and believed in him when his dad had been spiking his scotch. Lex blinks as Jonathan Kent's voice echoes in his ear, 'He's nuttier than a dozen fruitcakes, son.' Then he hears Clark's voice overriding the white noise as Clark says, 'Drop it. Lex is not crazy.'

The firm confidence in his lover's baritone rumble steadies him for a second and then a cacophony surges over him, driving him to his knees as he claps his hands over his ears in a vain attempt to close out the torrent of sound. There's jumble of traffic sounds. Blaring horns. Purring engines. Coughing mufflers. The mingled din of music and talk radio pouring out of thousands of car radios and Cd players and Mp3s. He can hear cabbies and truckers and policemen talking on their radios. People chattering in cars. On buses. The chatter, clatter, and rattle of diners and restaurants. Sounds roll over his ears like endlessly shifting radio stations as he tries to sort out the noises. There are hands on his shoulders and then familiar voices trumpeting through the din.

"Mr. Luthor! What's wrong?" Hope demands.
"What is it? Lex!" Lucas yells.

"Migraine," Lex mumbles. The roar of noise recedes slightly as he concentrates on listening to his brother and his security.

"Migraines?" Lucas wraps an arm over his brother's waist and heaves Lex upright. "I didn't know you had migraine attacks. Do you have some drugs for it in your office?"

"Office," Lex tries to make the word an order. He needs to get out of the lobby. Out of public view. Away. He clears his throat and tries again. "Take me to my office."

"I had a girlfriend who had migraines," Hope tells Lucas. "We need to get him somewhere quiet and let him rest. Keep everyone out. Looks like you're still in charge for now."

"Great," Lucas mutters as they half-carry Lex into the elevator.

Lex leans against his brother. Perhaps if he stops trying to fight noise, stops resisting and begins treating the sounds as if they are something that he's using for meditation. He allows the sounds to wash over him and tries to relax into them. To be aware of the noises, but not focused on them. To allow the sounds to wash over him and away. His dad's voice rises out of the wash of sound like shark near the shore, 'Genevieve.' Oliver's voice floats past, 'his own good' and then Chloe's voice rings in his ears, 'doughnuts! I'll doughnut him!'

The unnatural silence of the Daily Planet newsroom is broken only by the hastily muffled snigger as Chloe stares at the boxes piled on her desk. The entire top is at least five boxes deep. White boxes. Blue boxes. Brown boxes. Green boxes. Striped boxes. Pink boxes. Yellow boxes. And mounted on the center of the pile is a sparkly green plastic Christmas tree with more doughnuts and and doughnut holes dangling from the spiky branches.

There's white tee shirt draped over the back of her chair with two big round doughnuts printed exactly where her breast would be. Pink frosted doughnuts with tiny shiny beads glued across the frosting like some many sprinkles. A beige tote printed with variety of doughnuts hangs from her desk drawer. Images of doughnuts flash imprudently across her computer monitor.

"Who knew that the way to Superman's heart was doughnuts." Cat Grant strolls past her and stares at the Christmas tree. She plucks a plain glazed doughnut from the tree and takes a bite. "I wonder how other superheroes feel about them?"

"Who doesn't like doughnuts?" Chloe takes a chocolate frosted doughnut from the tree and studies it. She can feel the weight of their gazes on her and she wonders if any of them have seen the photos of her and Lana yet. She bites the doughnut and makes uuuum-uumm-umm noises as she chews. "Personally, I loooove doughnuts."

Cat blinks. She turns to study Chloe more carefully. "You do?"

"Ooooh, yeah." Chloe licks frosting from her fingers. "Doughnuts are the best."

"So how does Miss Lang feel about doughnuts?" Cat asks. Her red hair snakes over the shoulders of her yellow sweater as she tosses her head. She smirks. "And the superheroes who like to eat them?"

They have seen the photos then. Chloe stuffs more doughnut into her mouth and chews slowly. After those pictures of her and Lana dancing together at the party, wrapped around each other like lovers, no one is going to buy that they are friends. But the relationship is so fresh and fragile new. Will it
shatter like a spent rose once people begin gossiping about it? Or will it blossom into a stainless steel rose with time?

She and Lana hadn't talked about what public line to walk. Last night Lana hadn't seemed to care who knew, but that was last night. In the cold light of a winter day, with time to think it over, Lana might change her mind about it. No. Chloe's eyes darken with determination. She's not going to allow past relationships and past mistakes weaken this new relationship. She's going to put her trust in their mutual strength. She swallows the last bite. "Lana's a sharp businesswoman. She knows which doughnuts are still on the market and which are privately held."

"Dear. God." Cat's head snaps around. "What have you done to yourself?"

Chloe turns sharply and stares at the tall golden blonde standing in front of her cousin's desk. A tall golden blonde who is holding a cup of coffee and a box of doughnuts. "Lois?"

Cat smirks as her gaze drops to the box in Lois' hand. "I didn't think that you liked doughnuts."

"I felt like a change." Lois frowns in puzzlement as smirks and sniggers spread around the room. "What?"

Chloe winces. Thank god that she's only here to clean out her desk and won't have to spend the rest of the month enduring doughnut jokes. "Help me lug this stuff down to my car and I'll explain it to you."

Why hadn't anyone ever warned him about downtown parking? After an endless three hour drive he'd spent a good forty minutes looking for a place to park on the street before giving up and then wasting another forty on touring public parking garages before he finally found one that wasn't cramped full. God. He doesn't care what his dad or anyone else is gonna say. He doesn't care how many blowjobs it takes. He's getting a LexCorp parking pass. No, he's getting a LexCorp parking pass and a parking slot with his name on it!

Clark trudges down the side walk toward the Daily Planet. Is he there yet? He lifts his head into the cold wind and stares at the building around him. He can see the tip of the golden globe gleaming in the distance. Shit. How many more blocks does he have to go? His feet hurt. His back aches. And he needs to pee. He hopes that Chloe is impressed enough by all he'd gone through just to deliver an apology that she doesn't make him suffer too much before accepting it.

He so misses being able to zip back and forth. And what's he gonna do next semester? Would Lex be willing to let him live at the penthouse? But then what about the farm? His dad's gonna need help. He better grab some of Met U's online classes. That will keep him in the game until his powers return. His stomach rumbles loudly as he smells hamburgers cooking. He looks at the Planet's globe; it's gotten closer even if he can't see the building yet.

Clark glances through the large plate glass window of the diner. The lunch crowd has gone and the about half the tables are empty. His gaze lingers enviously on the enormous burger surrounded by golden fries that a waiter is settling in front of a handsome redhead. He's suddenly aware of how little he's eaten so far today. He feels hollow and empty. His hand reaches for the door.

"Clark?"

He turns and smiles hopefully. "Chloe! I was coming to see you."

Chloe scans the horizon, her gaze settling pointedly on the Planet. "Did you decide to work in a tour
of the city on the way?"

"I drove three hours to see you! And why didn't you tell me about the parking?" Clark demands. "Do you know how many parking garages I had to drive through to find a place?"

Her mouth twitches at his outrage. "Welcome to Metropolis, Clark. Why did you drive instead of...you know."

"Because I can't you know!"

"What?" Chloe blinks at him. Her eyes round with comprehension. "Again? You lost your powers again?"

"It's not like planned it." Clark sighs. "Look, I'm hungry. Have you had lunch yet?"

Chloe shakes her head. "No. That's why I came here. They make the absolute best hamburgers in Metropolis. Well worth the walk from the Planet's parking garage."

"Let me buy you lunch then," Clark pulls the door open and ushers her inside with a hand against the small of her back. "It's the least I can do. Chloe...I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for the stuff that I said, you know the doughnuts and everything, to sound like it did. There were cameras and reporters and...well, I got anxious and...and..."

Chloe sighs as she looks into his big pleading eyes. "Get me the Ginormous Gobbler Burger with all the trimmings and a beer. I'll grab a table for us."

Clark grins radiantly at her. "Great!"

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Well, well, well. Would you look at that? It's a good thing that she'd decided to follow that lying bimbo. Dinah adjusts the snowman pin gleaming on her black coat's lapel. Her stare narrows on the gold and black heads leaning so closely together across the tabletop. She's glad that Oliver had excluded Little Miss Know It All from the last two meetings. Secrets would've been leaking left and right from the cozy looks of those two.

Has Oliver wised up about Chloe finally? Realized that her first loyalty is always going to be to Clark? If so, it's about time. Dinah sniffs. So much for her ladies room conversation with the blonde. Chloe had been all 'No, Dinah, I don't know where Clark is'. "No, I don't know why he isn't answering his phone. Maybe he's busy.' As if that isn't exactly what the whole Team is worried about. Clark getting busy with that prick, Lex Luthor. She flips open her phone and hits speed dial for Oliver.

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"Lex Luthor has your..." Chloe bites back the words with an effort as a dark-haired man sits down at the closest table to them. His back is turned to her and Clark, but Lex's name is always a certain attention grabber. "How?"

Clark blushes and stares down at his half-eaten burger. "I'm not exactly sure, but don't worry. It's temporary."

That's something, but as far as she's concerned five seconds of a super-powered Luthor on the loose is five seconds too many. What the hell had Lex been doing while she'd been cleaning out her desk, talking Lois out of a Cat Grant smackdown, giving away doughnuts, and applying to start Met U
next semester? Chloe drinks her beer. "How long?"

"Thirty-eight weeks."

"Thirty-eight weeks!"

Clark nods. "Give or take a week. That's what Lara and J said."

"Do you know how much damage he can do in that time?"

"Chloe." Clark gives her a reproachful glance as he reaches for his steaming mug of hot tea. "He wouldn't do that."

"The hell he wouldn't."

Clark sips his tea. "I'll get 'em back at the end of thirty-eight weeks. He knows that I won't like it if he does anything wrong with them."

Chloe munches on her french fries as she considers that one. She picks up the salt shaker and sprinkles a little more on the pile. "I'm sure he's aware of that. But are you sure that he cares?"

"Yeah, I am."

Chloe stares at the soft goofy smile spreading over her friend's face. Had she looked like that when she'd told Lois about Lana? Shit. No wonder Lois had been watching her with such amusement. She grabs the ketchup bottle and adds another squiggle of ketchup across her fries. "I hope you're right about that."

"Clark! Chloe!" Dinah beams at them. "Imagine finding you two here."

"Any reason why we shouldn't be?" Chloe asks acidly as Clark pops to his and offers the other woman a chair.

Dinah ignores the comment and sits down. "Did you see the thing with Lex Luthor on TV today?"

Clark pales. "What thing? Is he okay?"

"Luthor? Of course." Dinah snorts. "Isn't he always? I can't believe that he claims that the Green Arrow would do something so childish."

"The Green Arrow?" Clark narrows his eyes. "What did he do to Lex this time?"

"Oh. That." Chloe glances at her friend. "Lex met with a reporter on top of LexCorp to vent about a sign that the Green Arrow left glued to the roof. He's threatening the Arrow with his lawyer pack."

Dinah sniffs. "Alleged sign. Personally, I think Luthor did it himself. Either that or some so-called hero is jealous of the Arrow's rising prominence in the superhero community."

"What did the sign say?" Clark asks.

Chloe picks up her turkey burger. She gives Dinah a dubious look. "You think the Green Arrow was framed?"

Dinah lowers her voice, "It said that Lex could kiss his green fanny."

"Ass." Chloe rolls her eyes. "The sign had a close-up view of the Green Arrow's alleged green
leather ass and said that Lex should kiss his ass."

Clark scowls. "I see. I think I need to have a little chat with...someone."

"I told you, he didn't do it," Dinah snaps. "He was framed."

"Oh, this ougha be good. Who framed him and why?" Chloe takes a big bite of her burger.

"You aren't the only person who can put some facts together." Dinah leans back as the waiter sets her plate in front of her. She waits until he leaves and leans closer. "The Green Arrow is getting a lot of good press on his deeds. He's a real up and comer. He's very, very hot in all senses of the word. I figure one of those stogy old has-beens heroes got jealous. Wanted to make the G.A. look bad."

Chloe looks across the table to see that Clark is staring at Dinah with a bemused expression as he chews on his burger. Even the guy behind Clark is listening in, almost openly now. She raises her beer to her lips. "Don't keep us in suspense. Which stogy old has-been is so jealous of the hot young G.A.?"

Dinah smiles triumphantly. "Batman."

Chloe spits beer on her hamburger. "Batman?"

"Batman?" Clark hastily drops his napkin over the half-chewed bite that had landed on his plate.

The stranger behind Clark growls. "Damned prancing pretty boys." He shoves his chair back and slaps a substantial tip on the table before stalking out the door as A.C. strolls in.

"Hi!" A.C. waves cheerily. "You like this place too? The reviews have it right. This place makes the best burgers in town."

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Clark looks down at his food. His stomach roils with anger at the idea of golden Oliver chasing his Lex. What is it going to take to make Oliver accept that Lex is his now? His fists clench under the table. The diner's door clangs closed, closing on a breeze that brings a mix of smells with it. Traffic fumes, pizza, tacos, perfumes, and Chinese take-out mix with hamburger and whatever cologne A.C. is wearing. His stomach lurches and Clark shoves back from the table. "Excuse me."

"Clark? Clark!" Chloe calls after his fleeing figure.

Clark claps a hand over his mouth. He runs into the men's room and shoves open the nearest stall, not even bothering with closing the stall door. He hits the floor and gags over the toilet. Oh, god. What's wrong with him? His stomach is lurching about like it's trying to crawl up his throat. Plus he's been peeing like his bladder had shrunk by a half overnight.

Oh, god. He clutches the porcelain. How long is this weird new Red K stuff gonna linger in his system? Is this some kind of cosmic payback for all the times that he'd regarded his sick friends with a vague and distant sympathy?

The outer door opens and shuts. He hears footsteps and then A.C.'s voice. "Clark? Buddy? You okay?"

Couldn't A.C. see that he's kinda occupied right now? Oh, god. What's that awful cologne? His stomach shudders as he accidentally inhales as A.C. leans over him. Is his stomach ever gonna right itself?
"Boy, you sound like you're trying to chuck your whole stomach up and half your colon too," A.C. comments. There's the noise of the paper towel machine and then running water. "Here. Wipe your face with this."

Blessed dampness touches his hand. Clark grabs the wet paper and blots his hot face. He mumbles, "Thanks."

A.C. takes a step back, and then another as a fresh spasm grips Clark. "You look like you could use Chloe. I'll go get her."

"What?! No! 'm fine." Clark manages to get his wobbly legs working and levers himself up as the door closes behind A.C. Damn it! He hastily flushes the toilet and backs out of the stall.

"Clark?" Chloe eases around the door. "What's going on?"

"I dunno." Clark goes to the sink. He rinses his mouth out and splashes water over his face. "Not really. I was exposed to some sort of new Red K last night. Jor El said that's why I was sick this morning. I think it had something to do with the power switch up too."

Chloe frowns at him as she leans back against the door. "Does Lex know that?"

"He was there when Jor El and Lara told me." Clark pats his face with paper towels. "I haven't told him how sick I've been feeling all day. I didn't want to worry him. He's got enough to cope with, adjusting to my powers."

"Yeah, the poor baby." Chloe's eyes widen. She stares at him. "Clark...oh. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" Clark asks. He tosses the paper towels in the trash. His stomach stirs again and he rubs a hand over his abdomen.

"Thirty-eight weeks, Clark! Were you waiting to see how long it took the penny to drop?"

"What?"

"Oh, my god. Lex is the...the...other baby daddy, isn't he?"

"Baby?" Clark freezes as something shifts under his palm. As he presses more firmly, he can feel a tiny mass no, two separate masses where none should be. Not a baby. Babies. And in thirty-eight weeks...oh, god...his eyes roll up.

"Clark? Clark!" Chloe lunges for him as he falls. "CLARK! A.C. get your ass in here NOW!"
Chapter Summary

Oliver broods. Lex considers. Clark finally listens when Jor El and Lara talk.

Oliver steps out of the bathroom and looks suspiciously around his office. He could've sworn that he'd heard some strange fffoosh noises while he was in there, but he can't see so much as a paper out of place on his desk. Could it be some sound effect created by the wind blowing around the boarded up window? He walks over to the window and holds his hand around the edges. He can feel a coolness seeping around the edges. He shakes his head. He'll have to learn to live with the fffoosh until after Christmas since January is the earliest that it can be fixed.

Oliver turns and frowns at the door leading to his walk-in safe. What is he going to do about that? The last thing he needs is for anyone to catch him with that painting locked in his safe. Half of Metropolis must have seen the painting at the stupid Luthor auction. He's not sure which would annoy him more; people thinking that he was the winning bidder or people thinking that he'd stolen a porny painting of another guy because he was too spineless to openly buy it. He's been waiting all day for Lex to report the missing painting, but so far, Weirdo Angel is remaining worrisomely silent. He'd even stepped into his Green Arrow persona long enough to call his publicist to see if Luthor had attempted contact that way.

He could see Lex threatening him with lawyers in public while quietly letting it be known in private that it would be called off if the painting mysteriously reappeared. But his Green Arrow publicist had nothing to report except lots of calls from reporters wanting comments on Luthor's accusations and the delivery of a restraining order. He wonders dourly how long it will take Late Night Lite to find out about that.

Maybe he should find another place to put the damned painting. And maybe he should start lining his safes with lead while he's at it. What if Clark sees that painting and thinks that he wants Clark like that? Talk about awkward. Not that he hasn't had plenty of experience in making it clear to other people that he's not into them that way, but no way around it, something like that would make working with Clark difficult. More difficult. Clark's already pretty high maintenance for a guy who isn't even on the team yet. Always something with him. And now he's all into Luthor.

Kara might be a better prospect for membership. She's certainly much more delightful to look at and she seems like a perfect combo of Clark's powers and Chloe's crazy techie skills. She would be worth the extra trouble if she turned out to share Clark's trouble magnet qualities and general broodiness. Maybe she wouldn't have Clark's annoying tendency to question orders and talk back.

He hasn't talked to her much. Unfortunately the other Kents had picked up on his interests. Mrs. Kent had shown up in his office with a bag of blackberry muffins and a sternly worded warning. On his next visit to the farm, Clark had delivered a loft lecture on the importance of Kara getting to enjoy being a teenager without being overloaded with adult responsibilities, and when he'd escaped the barn, he'd found Mr. Kent staring thoughtfully at his new Ferrari while holding a pitchfork. Even the chickens and cows seemed to be taking an ominous interest in his car. He hadn't even needed The Lecture, Part Two from Mr. Kent, but he'd gotten it any way.

Oliver walks over to his desk as his gut twitches uneasily. He pulls open a drawer, hoping the
contents have changed. He has pain killers. He has stuff for headaches. Stuff for muscle aches. Stuff for fever. Stuff for burns. Stuff for cuts. Even stuff for PMS. PMS? Oliver picks up the bottle up and frowns at it. How the hell had that gotten in there? One of his girlfriends must have dropped it in his office. He tosses the bottle in the trash. He scrounges in the far back of the drawer and finally finds a stray packet of stomach stuff. He pops the capsules out and swallows them.

Oliver drinks the rest of his water and sets the glass on the edge of his desk. He picks up his cellphone and scrolls through the list of missed calls. Nothing from A.C. or Dinah. Is that good or bad? Had A.C. managed to change an 'accidental' lunch encounter with Clark into a date? The sooner they seduced Clark away from Luthor, the better. He needs to send Dinah a box of chocolate for spotting that opportunity and arranging for A.C. to seize it. Oliver glances at his watch, it's been a couple of hours. That's encouraging. Maybe A.C. had even managed a nooner with Clark.

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Fuck, his crash course into Clark World had been exhausting. Lex lands on his balcony and opens the glass doors to his penthouse. He strolls across the room, looping his tie back around his collar and refastening the strip of purple and silver silk. He's hungry again too, damn it. Lex veers into the kitchen and opens the freezer. He pulls out a carton of frozen lime yogurt and grabs a spoon. At this rate, his housekeeper is going to have to triple her orders. His amped up metabolism has him eating enough for a football team. Clark’s always had a big appetite, but he doesn't remember his lover eating like this.

Lex opens the fridge and checks the contents. He grabs a couple of tomatoes, lettuce, and a package of bacon. He washes the tomatoes and begins slicing them. How the fuck had Clark managed it? Not only managed, but made it seem so easy. Flying...he'd taken to that with an ease that had made him think that the rest of it would be nothing. Of course, he'd known about the flying. The hearing...Clark might have warned him about that. He sets the plate of tomato slices aside and washes the lettuce.

It had taken him hours of mediation, and a couple of Toby's blue pill specials for medication, to get his hearing back under his control. To relearn how to focus and direct his attention. But, fuck, had it paid off handsomely. In a single afternoon of directed eavesdropping on the global business community, the local business grapevine, and his enemies, he'd filled encrypted folders with a wealth of secrets, personal and business. And the beauty of it, is that collecting and benefiting financially from secret knowledge is something that the Kents would never think of doing. They would never make good fencers.

As far as he can determine, the Kents seem to favor big bold dramatical moves accompanied by lightening flashes and rolling thunder. Small, subtle precise strategies aimed at maneuvering an opponent into the most favorable position before lunging for the heart...it's something that's as alien to the Kents as their tight knit family is to him. Lex opens the bacon, dropping slices into the skillet to sizzle. He smirks at the thought of Mr. Kent braced for all sorts of brazen mayhem and cosmic disasters, and completely missing the delicate shifts of position and flows of power in the economic and academic worlds.

Martha would be the one most likely to notice, but he's done nothing publicly as the head of LexCorp that couldn't be attributed to his superior skills. Lex scraps his spoon over the bottom of the yogurt carton as he watches the bacon cook. He could have stayed on his office couch and listened all day, discovering all sorts of things and confirming suspicions, but Lucas wouldn't stop barging.
into and waving papers at him. Not that that hadn't been quite informative as well since the papers had belonged to LuthorCorp. PodDad had still had the business moves. All those New Age books hadn't completely rotted the old man's brain yet.

He sets the empty carton on the counter and opens a cabinet, pulling out a loaf of whole wheat bread. He glances out his window, at the late afternoon sun sliding downwards. Heat curls pleasantly in his groin as he thinks of how wild Clark had been for him last night. He's not expecting a replay. He probably needs to leave Clark unmolested tonight as difficult as that will be. For now, it's enough to know that he has Clark to go home to.

But once Clark's parents get back from their trip, that easy access may change and that's completely unacceptable. Lex frowns as he drops bread slices into the toaster. He wants Clark's clothes crowding his closet. He wants to see Clark's shaving cream and razer parked on his bathroom counter. He wants to wake-up to Clark every morning and look forward to going home to his lover every evening. He wants the Kents to accept him as a permanent part of Clark's life.

Lex broods over the skillet as he watches the bacon crisping. Incoming grandchildren, the more the better, would be the surest way to reconcile the Kents to his presence and prominence in their son's life. He's always wanted a big family. No repeat of his own lonely childhood for his kids. Perhaps he should consult the A.I. See what alien tech it might have to offer that would allow him and Clark to have their own children.

But first...he wants Oliver out of Clark's life. Lex smiles warmly at his reflection on the fridge's glossy surface. He doesn't look like a man on a mission to make Oliver Queen's life hell, but he is. Fuck, does he have plans for Ollie. Starting with curing the blond of PMS. His grin widens as he wonders how long it will take Oliver to find all the casually concealed bottles of PMS cures. And then, there are the codes to Queen's satellites. It will be interesting to see how Bruce Wayne feels about Queen satellites tracking his business activities.

Clark grumbles and pushes deeper into the couch, hunching his shoulder against the late afternoon sunlight sliding over his face and soft murmur of Christmas music playing on the radio. Just beneath the music, he can hear Chloe, Kara, and A.C. in the kitchen, planing a protest against water pollution, but it's not enough to drag him from him up from the comfort of cushions and the soft throws spread over him. He pulls the fleece over his face, shutting out the sunlight, but the alluring smell of warm gingerbread and sugar cookies creeps beneath, and he folds the blanket back to sniff at the air.

He opens his eyes to see Kara's pink and blue surfboard leaning against the red peonies that bloomed wildly across the sun-faded wallpaper of Chloe's living room. A pale blue canvas lunch bag is folded flat on top of a sandy pink beach towel. A.C.'s coat is flung over a chair that sits in the corner and Chloe's computer tote is shoved underneath. For a second, he can't remember how he came to be sleeping on Chloe's red couch, but a sharp pinching sensation lower on his left side brings it all back. His jeans feel much tighter than they had earlier.
Clark tugs his sweater back down his stomach and unfastens the top button on his jeans. Better, but now the elastic waistband of his boxers feels too snug. Suddenly he needs to pee very very badly. He shoves the beige and chocolate throws back and scurries into the bathroom. He finishes with a sigh of relief and moves to the sink to wash up. Clark turns sideways and hitches up the hem of his sweater. He stares at himself in the mirror. To someone who hadn't seen him naked last night, he probably looks perfectly normal.

A bit on the chunky side maybe, but that's all. To someone who had seen him naked last night...someone like Lex...would be wondering how the hell he managed to gain a couple of pounds between breakfast and dinner. He runs his hand over the softened lines of what had been a chiseled six-pack last night. His hand strays to his lower left side and his fingers ghost delicately over the skin, tracing the small oval shapes curving there. The pinching sensation in his side eases as if his touch comforts them in some way. Clark spreads his hand protectively over his side and steps back as a white swirling speck appears in the depths of the mirror. "Jor El?"

The speck enlarges and unfolds into a heavily tanned man in glossy white robes. Jor El pats his white hair back into place. "Humphf. I see you are ahead of schedule. Again."

"Again?" Clark asks. He stares suspiciously at the tanned face. What did Jor El mean by 'again'?

Lara spins into shape next to her husband. She stares at Clark's abdomen. "Hmmm. The yellow sun effect has a lot to answer for, but in this case...I'm sure he will appreciate it once the worst is over."

Clark's eyes go big and round. There's a worst? He's a pregnant alien guy who is doing some very hard NotThinking about possible baby delivery methods. Or the fact that he's an unwed alien baby daddy who hasn't broken the news to his parents or his lover yet. And there's a worst to come? "Wha-what?"

"They always tell you that once you hold that baby in your arms, you'll forget the rest of it. Lying bitches," Lara mutters. "Like trying shove a basketball through the eye of a needle."

"Lara." Jor El eyes his son's white face. "Dearest, now is not the time."

"What? Oh. Right." Lara smiles encouragingly. "Don't give it another thought, Kal El. Once the babies arrive, you'll forget all about how they got there."

"Just so." Jor El nods.
"Like you know anything about it," Lara whispers. "You weren't the one screaming for more drugs while a dozen people were staring up your..."

"Not. The. Time." Jor El smiles grimly. "Don't worry, Kal El. Kryptonian men have been giving birth for centuries. There's nothing to it."

Clark fidgets with his sweater, smoothing it back down over his stomach. "Did you ever do it?"

"No." Jor El avoids his son's eyes.

"Oh," Clark murmurs quietly. He stares at the red and beige towels hanging on the rack, feeling small and cold and more afraid than he's ever been in his life. He wants Lex with a desperate intensity.

"Kal El," Jor El gives his wife a wary look. "It's not too late if you want to...change your mind, but we would have to do it today. Now. With the yellow sun accelerating matters, after the next hour, it will be too late to choose differently."

"What? No!" Clark lifts his chin. His mouth flattens into a determined line. He instinctively turns his left side away from the mirror. "No. I want them. I just need time."

"Time is something that you have little of, Kal El." Lara's face softens as she watches him.

"You said that the sun was accelerating their development. Does that mean that I've got more like thirty weeks or thirty-four weeks to go?" Clark asks.

Lara shakes her head. "Oh, Kal El. No."

Clark swallows hard. "So how long do I have? Twenty nine weeks?"

"I told you that he got too much of his information from humans," Lara tells Jor El. "Look at him. He's confused humans with Kryptonians again."
"Thirty eight weeks isn't the term of your first delivery, my son." Jor El fluffs his sleeves. "Would Christmas be a good time for you? I believe you will be between semesters at ridiculous excuse of an educational institution that you chose to attend instead of coming to us."

"WHAT??"

There a tap on the door and A.C.'s voice. "Clark? Buddy? You okay? Need some help?"

"GO. AWAY." Clark leans closer to the mirror and whispers, "But that's only two weeks away! That's not enough time. I gotta get baby stuff...tell Lex. Tell my parents! Oh, god. Who's gonna deliver them? Ooooh, god. It's gonna have to be a homebirth."

"It's a little late to panic now." Jor El folds his arms over his chest. "It would be more helpful if you would talk to us beforehand, instead of recklessly jumping onto a rodersax without granting even a second of consideration to the possible ramifications."

Clark blinks. "The who what?"

"The rodersax," Jor El repeats, enunciating very clearly. "Don't try to pretend that you are unfamiliar with the concept. We have discussed this."

Lara pats her husband's shoulder. "Now, now, dearest. It's never too early to begin gestating the next generation of Els."

Jor El sighs. "Very well, I admit that I'm impressed that Kal El had the ingenuity to construct a rodersax with the primitive materials and tools available to him. To think that we accused him of lacking sufficient interest in his heritage."

Lara links her arm through Jor El's and beams at her son. "Congratulations, Kal El! Are you going to be...what's that human rite? Oh, yes. When's the baby shower going to be?"

Ohgod, he wants Lex. Only...how weird is this gonna get? They haven't even been lovers that long and he's already unloaded a whole lot of alien weirdness on Lex. What if he gets so weird that Lex decides that a certain cheating blond superhero looks good? Clark runs a hand through his hair. "But
could we go over the...umm...rodersax thing one more time? I wanna be sure that I got it."

Lara looks at her husband. "Jor El, I don't think he was listening to us."

"Of course, he was listening to us." Jor El frowns as he studies his son's expression. "Kal El? You were listening, weren't you?"

"Sure, I was. I just kinda...forgot what you said."

"You have a photographic memory," Lara reminds him. Her eyes narrow. "How could you forget my brilliant description of it as a superfertility clinic in a box? You always remember...unless you weren't paying attention in the first place."

"No." Jor El shakes his head. "Don't be ridiculous, Lara. It's not as if he could have constructed a rodersax accidentally. Or put it to the proper use by pure coincidence."

"Kal El," Lara taps her toe against the mirror's bottom. "Do you remember putting an object that looks like a crown, one of metal and flashing lights, on your head?"

"A what?" Who wears crowns these day? Clark freezes up in mid-eye roll. Wait. There had been that Project Intercept thing. Now that he thinks about it the headpiece part of it had looked sorta vaguely like a...ohshit. "Oh, yeah. Kinda."

Jor El adds encouragingly, "And was there a metal cradle that you shared with your chosen mate as he opened his mind to you?"

Clark leans against the wall. Now he's gotta explain that not only is he knocked up, but he got that way by sorta mentally molesting Lex? Maybe he could kinda leave that part out. Surely the impregnated alien part is more than enough to spring on Lex. "Ohshit."

Jor El frowns at him. "Kal El, I would think that you would be pleased at being so outstandingly successful on your first attempt."

"Yeah, I'll do that the next time I end up face to toilet."
"Indeed. Do try thinking of your symptoms positively," Lara advises. "You're successful, not sick! It's not like the symptoms won't ease with time. I can tell you that from personal experience, Kal El. Of course, it will be a tiny bit different for you than it was for me."

Clark looks from Lara to Jor El. "I thought you said that you hadn't used the...the roderish thing?"

Lara laughs. "Of course not. Jor El and I knew there would be no others for us from the time we were teenagers...isn't that right, my dearest?"

Jor El lifts her hand to his lips and kisses it. "Absolutely. We had no need for the rodersax."

"So we didn't really pay that much attention when the teachers discussed it in our technobiology class," Lara confesses. "How were we to know that our son would need it one day?"

"But I didn't build it. Lionel did." Clark frowns as he remembers the way that Lionel couldn't buckle him and Lex into the machine fast enough while protesting how dangerous it was the whole time. Had Lionel know what that it was a...a...roderwhatsit impregnating device?"

"Hmmm." Lara and Jor El trade thoughtful looks.

"Lionel told me that it was an experimental device."

Lara sniffs. "For a human, it would be."

"No, you don't understand. It was developed as an interrogation tool." Clark looks from Lara to Jor El. Had Lionel lied to him again? His anger softens at a stirring under his palm. "At least that's what he said."

"Interrogation tool?" Lara looks at her husband and both them snigger. "Humans."

"They tested it! Nobody got pregnant using it," Clark snaps.
Lara shrugs. "The rodersax, like any technology, it can be used incorrectly or applied to the wrong subjects. Besides its usage is only the first step in the process. Once the couple completes their mental bond, the rodersax alters the brain chemistry of the most suitable candidate. That person begins producing the proper biochemicals to make his vestigial organs fully functional again."

"And I believe we've already fully discussed the way that post-rodersax Red K exposure boosts a candidate's fertility levels even higher. I suppose I should not be surprised at an El acting so ambitiously." Jor El puffs out his chest. "Not many Kryptonian males would have the balls to go for the maximum thirty-eight week fertility cycle. How many grandchildren should we expect annually with that, Lara?"

"Assuming they don't opt to use birth control methods during the thirty-eight weeks," Lara purses her lips, "and with a theoretically possible range of two to six offspring per every two week delivery cycle..."

Jor El rubs his hands together. "A possible one hundred and fourteen baby Els a year! Excellent!"

"AAAAAAAAGGGHHHHHHH!" Clark collapses on the white tile floor.

The Els peer down from the mirror. "Kal El?"

"Do you think we shocked him?" Jor El asks.

"No, dearest." Lara pats her husband. "He fainted with joy, I'm sure of it."
Clark visits a pharmacy and A.C. tags along.

"Do you mind?" Clark turns with a box of condoms in his hand and almost bumps into A.C. If he'd known that A.C. was gonna be so annoying this evening, he would've asked Chloe for a ride instead. His first choice had been the bus, but Chloe had refused to let him leave unless he was with someone. And he completely refused to have his cousin toting him around like he's a sack of groceries.

"Sorry." A.C. takes a small step back.

"Stop crowding me."

"I want to be close enough to catch you if you faint again."

"I did not faint." Clark looks down at the box. It's his usual brand, but there's only twenty condoms to a box. Twenty had always seemed like plenty before, but now...considering the circumstances, maybe he should get a bigger box. "I fell."

"Okay, I want to be close enough to catch you if you should suddenly lose consciousness and hit the deck in a totally manly non-fainting sort of way."

Clark shoves the box back into it's place on the pharmacy's shelf. He frowns at the rows of other choices. "That's not funny, A.C."

"It's not meant to be. What's wrong, Clark?"

"Nothing." Clark gets down on one knee and studies the lowest shelf. Aha! He spots a promisingly large box in the back. He pulls it out and glances at the expiration date and then the name on the front. He's never tried that brand before, but how different could it be? What's more important is that each box holds sixty.
"Uh-huh." A.C. picks up a small box and holds it out. "I like these."

Clark glances at it and shakes his head. "I need something bigger."

"Bigger? Bigger than the jumbo max?" A.C. licks his lips. "What size do you usually buy?"

Clark chucks his box into the cart and reaches for next one. Sixty is a nice reassuring figure, but all the same, maybe he should grab a couple more boxes. Just in case. One for the castle and one for the penthouse and one extra. Clark adds more boxes to the cart. Maybe he should make that two for the castle, two for the penthouse. That would give him two emergency boxes in each location. And then one box to stash under his own bed at the farm and one to hide in the loft and one. He leans forward, reaching deep to grab the last one. Clark throws it on top of the others and then stands up.

"Uhhhh, Clark?"

Clark looks over the shelf to make sure that he hadn't missed any other sixty count boxes. A three pack of spermicidal lube snags his gaze. Oh, yeah. He needs some of that. Lots of that. He grabs a handful and drops them in the cart. "Yeah?"

"Are you sure that you're okay?"

"Uh-huh." Clark sweeps rest of the row of lube packs into his cart. There. That should be enough to divide between penthouse, castle and farm, and leave him with enough to always have a tube on him.

"You fainted twice."

Clark gives the other man a look. He turns around and wheels his cart down the pharmacy aisle without a word.

"Fine. Temporarily checked out of reality in a very manly man way. Don't you think we oughta take you to see a doctor?"
Clark pauses as a jar of pickles catches his eye. He can almost feel the crisp snap between his teeth. Taste the tart juiciness. Does Lex have pickles? Maybe he should grab a jar for the road. The jars aren't very big, but look, the pharmacy is having a two for one sale. He adds two jars to his cart and wheels on. "No doctors."

"You need to see somebody. Your manly brain took two unscheduled siestas today annnnnd you're being weird."

"Me?" Clark turns and scowls at his companion. "Me weird?"

"You. Weird."

Clark huffs. "I'm not weird. You're weird. You're the one who should go see a doctor."

"Name one weird thing that I've done. One." A.C. tilts his head back and looks down his nose.

"You've been giving me funny looks."

A.C. blinks. "Funny looks?"

"Yeah. Like," Clark gives A.C. a big-eyed intense stare, drops his gaze and then stares again. "Then there's the way you kept missing the shift and grabbing my knee instead, and you sound like you're coming down with a sore throat. Maybe you should pick up some throat stuff while we're here."

"Clark..." A.C. shakes his head.


"Never mind."
It's A Red K Christmas! (46/62)

Chapter Summary

Clark indulges a craving during a Justice Team meeting. Lois talks to Chloe and Lana.

He is a culinary genius. No question about it. Maybe he should forget about journalism and change his major to culinary arts. He's always enjoyed cooking, but this...Clark crunches in bliss...this pairing of chocolate chip mint and pickle is a clear sign that he has a gift for combining unexpected flavors. He mumbles, "So where's Dinah?"

"Late," Oliver responds in a curt voice. "Could you focus on the mission, Clark?"

"She'll be in eventually." Victor takes a drink from his beer. "You know she wouldn't miss a meeting."

"Yeah, eventually," Bart echoes. "Enjoy it while you can."

A.C. nods over his beer. "Yeah. She's got a date to ditch first."

A date? No wonder Oliver is so crabby. Still, it's no one's fault but Oliver's own. If his boyfriend had been leaving Kiss My Ass signs on an ex-lover's property, he'd be making a point of dating other people too. Clark drags a pickle spear through his pint of soft chocolate almond ice cream and takes a big bite, ignoring the looks of horror. They don't know what they are missing. He had offered to share even though he hadn't appreciated having his ride to the penthouse being turned into a ride to Queen Towers for some boring meeting.

His first impulse had been to stomp off, but by then, he'd needed to pee so badly that he would've agreed to anything that got him into a building with a working toilet. Any way Lex probably isn't back from the reception yet so he might as well sit in. A J Team meeting is certainly a good excuse for not returning dad's calls yet. Saving the world comes first. His dad can't argue with that. And Oliver's voice is almost as good background noise for thinking as having talk radio on while he's cooking.

Ummm...cooking. Maybe that's how he should tell Lex. He'll get back to the penthouse first and Lex is certain to be hungry after all that yakking and networking. He's never been to one, but the phrase 'cocktail reception' don't exactly scream food to him. Probably nothing there but bits of cheese and fancy crackers. Toasted bread and caviar. Olives. Radishes carved into swans. Booze. Clark brightens. More booze might be a very good idea. Plenty of it at the penthouse. He could serve Lex wine with dinner and then Irish coffee and a nightcap and...wait. He never gets drunk, but is that part of his alien metabolism or is it a super power?
If it's a super power, then he won't be able to get Lex good and relaxed no matter how much his lover drinks. Plus the question of why he isn't drinking might force him into precipitous explanation. Clark dips a fresh pickle into the chocolate almond and sucks the ice cream off the tart green length, pausing only as he notices that A.C. is staring at him with that weird expression again and that Oliver has finally shut up. "What?"

A.C. shakes his head. "Nothing."

"Are we done then?" Clark swirls his pickle across the caramel vanilla. He chews, crunching loudly. Oh, yeah. That's good. So far, each flavor of his ice cream pints had gone well with pickles. The vanilla caramel. The chocolate chip mint. The chocolate vanilla swirl. All good.

"Yeah." Bart jitters impatiently at the other side of the table. "Are we done yet?"

"No." Oliver stares at Bart. "You have somewhere else to be?"

"I'm hungry." Bart stares meaningfully at the beers in front of Oliver, Victor, and A.C. "And thirsty."

"Sure you don't want any pickles? Or ice cream?" Clark asks.

"No! I mean, no, thank you." Bart glances at Oliver and wheedles, "But beer...that would hit the spot."

Victor warns, "Don't do it. Voice of experience here. Give in once to the whine and you'll never hear the end of it."

"I am not whining," Bart snaps. He turns big pleading eyes on Oliver and slumps pitiably in his chair. "I'm hungry...and thirsty. I can't help it if I have a high metabolism."

Oliver sighs. "Go look in the fridge."

"Yesss!" Bart shoves back his chair and bounces out of the conference room.
"Oliver!" Clark scowls.

"You're gonna be sooorrrry," Victor sing-songs.

"Give it a rest." Oliver scowls back. "I stocked the fridge with sparkling grape juice and non-alcoholic beer."

"Non-alcoholic?" A.C. looks at the label on his bottle. "I wondered where the buzz was."

"And why it tasted odd," Victor adds.

"Where's Chloe?" Clark asks. He scoops more chocolate chip mint up. "Is she on a date too?"

"Chloe's..." A.C. glances at Victor and Oliver. "You see, she's..."

"Busy," Victor finishes.

"Taking a break before she comes back," Oliver puts in.

"Partying big time." Bart comes back triumphantly brandishing a cold bottle and a plate with two thick wedges of chocolate cake drizzled with white chocolate and raspberries. "I saw her earlier this evening all dolled up and sliding into a limo."

"She was?" Oliver blinks. "Did you see who she was with?"

"Caught a glimpse of an equally dolled up brunette in the back, but that's all." Bart sits down and takes a drink of his beer. "Ahhh. Beer. It does a body good."

Clark hides a smile behind a pickle loaded with chocolate vanilla swirl. "Could we maybe step it up, Oliver? I got stuff to do."

"You got somewhere else you need to be?" Bart asks in a near perfect imitation.
"Yeah." Clark grins. "I do."

"What could be more important than this?" Oliver challenges. "All J Team members should be..."

"I am not a J Team member." Clark bites the end off his pickle. He waves the stub. "And if this is a meeting is so damned important, why isn't the full team here? Huh? Answer that one."

"It's a...it's a make-up meeting," A.C. announces.

Oliver choking for a second on his beer. He coughs. "Yeah. It's a make-up meeting...the latest fad in business management. I thought I'd see how it did with the Team."

"Well, it sucks and it doesn't apply to me 'cause I'm not a one the J Team." Clark frowns at them. "Besides I got stuff."

A.C. glances at the collection of bags slumping against the wall behind the brunette. "I can vouch for that. He has lots of stuff. Enough to supply an army."

"I did not." Clark frowns at the other man. "I bought few extras. So what?"

"A whole brigade worth of extras." A.C. shakes his head. "If I'd known that walking into a pharmacy with you was like walking into a coffee supply place with Chloe, I would've waited in the car."

"Chloe's not that bad in a roastery." Clark smiles fondly as he remembers an afternoon back when he was still in high school. He’d dropped by the castle and gotten up in a debate about fabric samples that had stretched out for hours. It had been an eye-opener. He’d known vaguely that Lex’s perfect appearance wasn’t something that magically happened, but the amount of behind the scenes work that went into achieving the appearance of effortless fashionable perfection, that had never occurred to him.

The tailors had appreciated his willingness to express his own opinions or Lex’s willingness to listen. Even then he’d known what colors he liked to see Lex wearing and held that Lex wore way too much black. And Lex had added more tans, cinnamons, and caramels to his wardrobe selections after
that discussion as well as buying more plumy purples, cool lavenders, dark wines, and silvery grays. All of which made Lex look delectably eatable. Like a cinnamon roll sitting in splendor on baker's paper or a birthday cake marked with 'Clark Kent' in sweet buttercream icing. Clark frowns at Oliver. "You owe me an explanation."

Oliver leans back in his chair. "An explanation? For what?"

"Like you don't know." Clark jabs a pickle into the vanilla caramel and then the chocolate mint. He bites the end off with a sharp snap of white teeth.

"No, I don't know. Would I be asking if I did?"

Clark glowers at the blond. He might not have super powers any more, but he's got a few inches and a couple of pounds on the other man and if Oliver doesn't stay away from Lex, he will use it. "The sign. Explain telling MY boyfriend to kiss YOUR ass."

"Oh, that." Oliver sips his beer. "I thought you meant something serious."

Clark narrows his eyes. "I did."

"Oliver told us this morning that he didn't leave the sign." A.C. takes a sip from his beer.

"I already heard Dinah's theory that Batman did it." Clark scraps up the last of the vanilla caramel. He raises an eyebrow at A.C. "Don't tell me that you believe that."

"Batman?" Bart looks up from his cake.

Oliver pales beneath his tan. "Batman? Dinah is going around saying that Batman is the one who..."

"That's ridiculous," Victor interrupts. "Why would Batman frame Oliver?"

Clark shrugs. "She said that Batman is a washed-up fuddy-duddy who is jealous of your mad superhero skills and that's why he framed you."
"Oh. God." Oliver puts his face in his hands.

"Whoa." A.C. stares big-eyed at Clark. "She said that?"

"Uh-huh. Just ask Chloe. Me, Chloe, and anyone else who was having a late lunch, heard her loud and clear." Clark sucks the juice from another pickle and then dips it into the chocolate almond carton. "But who'd believe that? I mean...Batman."

"Yeah." Victor shakes his head. "Batman. Like he's gonna do something like that. He's a serious crime fighter not a prankster."

"Oh. God. Batman," Oliver mutters from behind his hands.

Bart drinks his beer. "Wonder if he's still in town."

"Why was he even in town in the first place?" Clark taps a pickle against the rim of the jar. "You'd think that Gotham would keep him pretty busy."

"I think that if you want to know who put that sign on top of LexCorp, you should look at your boyfriend." A.C. nods in LexCorp's direction.

"Lex?" Clark stares at the other man. "Are you suggesting that Lex put that sign on top of LexCorp to frame the Green Arrow? That's as ridiculous as Dinah claiming that Batman did it."

"Oh, really?" A.C. crosses his arms over his chest. "Why?"

"'Cause. For one thing, he couldn't have." Clark bites into his pickle. He gives Oliver a smug look. "Lex was with me last night. All night."

"Maybe he crept out while you were sleeping," Victor suggests.

Clark snorts. "I don't think so."
Oliver rubs his face and then drops his hands. "This discussion isn't getting us anywhere."

"Yeah?" A.C. challenges. "You know where he is at all times? Where is he right now? Can you tell me that?"

Clark glances down at the time glowing on his phone's screen. "Some stupid cocktail party reception thing for business people."

"What stupid cocktail party?" Oliver asks sharply.

Clark swoops his pickle through the chocolate vanilla as he tries to remember. He'd kinda stopped listening as soon as Lex had assured him that neither Victoria Hardwick nor Oliver would be there. What had the hostess' name been? Bates? Tates? Oh, yeah. Clark raises the pickle to his mouth. "Yates."

Oliver's jaw tightens. "I didn't know that Mrs. Yates was having one of her cocktail party this evening."

"It's in honor of some visiting VIP from Gotham." Clark swabs the rest of his pickle around the bottom of the chocolate almond carton. "I coulda gone, but Lex said that her cocktail receptions meant wearing a tux. I wasn't in the mood to get dressed up. Besides I wanted to have plenty of time to talk to Chloe."

"The Gotham bigwig...would that be Bruce Wayne?" Oliver flattens his hands on the conference table.

"I think that was the name." Clark finishes his last pickle and inspects the thin melted layers remaining in the bottoms of the ice cream cartons. Not worth taking back with him. Stomach comfortably full, he leans back in his chair and yawns.

"Bruce Wayne." Oliver's mouth flattens into an irritated line. "I've been trying to meet him for...never mind. We're digressing from the subject."

"That mean that we are done then?" Clark asks hopefully. "I need to talk to Lex about...well,
"Something important."

"Will you help out with this mission?" Oliver taps the map spread across the table.

Clark hides another yawn behind his hand. "I can't."

"Can't? Or won't?" Oliver asks coolly.

Clark gives the blond an annoyed look as he thinks of all the times that he's pitched in J Team missions and asked for nothing in return. "I lost my powers."

Victor sits up. "You...what?"

"Whoa." A.C. sets his beer down. "This stuff must have more kick than I thought. Or did you really say that you've lost your powers? I hallucinated that, didn't I?"

Bart stares over a forkful of cake and raspberries. "You lost your mojo?"

Oliver scowls. "That's ridiculous. How could you lose your powers? They're innate. That's like claiming that your kidney fell off on the way to work."

"What you think doesn't change what happened." Clark folds his arms over his chest and glowers. "I no longer have powers, okay?"

"Forever and ever?" Bart asks softly, his eyes big with horrified sympathy.

"No." Clark gives him a reassuring smile. "It's okay, Bart. My powers will return. They only been...well, it's a temporary thing."

"Temporary?" Victor watches him with concern. "You're sure?"
"Uh-huh."

Oliver narrows his brown eyes. "If you want to sit this mission out so you can play footsie with your new boyfriend..."

Clark announces grandly, "Lex and I do not play footsie. We have wild hanging from swinging chandeliers hot and crazy sex. So there."

Bart drops his fork. "I so did not need to know that."

"It's gonna that something stronger than this to get me through the rest of this meeting. Excuse me a second." Victor stands up. "Oliver, your bar is about to get raided."

"Brandy," Oliver mutters as Victor walks behind him.

"Rum for me," A.C. calls.

"I could use another beer," Bart chimes in.

Clark gets up and dumps his pickle jars and ice cream cartons in the trash. Maybe that comment will get through Oliver's thick head that he and Lex are lovers and whatever Oliver had with Lex is over. The rest of the team will eventually get used to idea of him and Lex. He's not going anywhere. Clark touches his stomach, feeling a stirring behind the unfastened waistband of his jeans. He's going to need a bigger size by tomorrow. As soon as he gets to the penthouse, he's gonna change into pajamas and a robe. For now, his coat should conceal everything. He turns and Oliver is behind him. "Do you mind?"

"Yeah. I do." Oliver punches Clark in the face.

"Ow!" Clark steps back. His hand goes to his eye as he touches it disbelievingly. "Oliver!"

A.C. jumps to his feet. "What the hell are you doing?"
"Oliver, stop it!" Bart zips rounds the table to get between them.

"Shit. Clark, I'm sorry. I didn't believe that you...ow!" Oliver rocks back as the brunette punches him over Bart's head. He instinctively cups his nose as blood trickles over his lip and chin.

"Lex is mine now. Stay away from him." Clark glares at Oliver. He's not the liar in this room. Oliver can blame that punch on anything the blond wants to, but he knows the truth...Oliver is jealous of him and Lex. He snatches up his bags and stomps out the door, ignoring the calls coming from behind him.

"Clark?" Victor steps deftly backwards as the door barely misses him. "What's..."

"I'm outta here." Clark stalks past the other man and steps into the elevator.

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Lois turns down the hallway, her red heels tap-tapping on the tile covering the Planet's floors. Apparently Mr. Red Blue hadn't been in the mood for blondes bearing doughnuts today, but some else had. She smirks as she glances down at the empty orange plate in her hands. Apparently her face time on Late Nite Lite had been enough exposure to catch a cape's eye. Plus she'd had the power of doughnuts on her side as well. Too bad her cousin hadn't clued her in sooner to the magical superhero attracting powers of doughnuts.

She pauses outside the frosted glass doors leading to the bullpen. Who is that? Someone...no, two someones are standing next to her desk. Is someone snooping through her stuff? Chloe had warned her that some of the other reporters weren't above that sort of thing. Lois slams dramatically through the door and rocks to a halt as she stares at the two women in evening dress.

Lana is wrapped in strapless gown of black lace over taupe satin. A black pearl choker circles her throat and matching earrings gleam in her ears. Her long hair is a tumble of black over her slender shoulders. Chloe stands close, the folds of her black velvet gown overlapping her date's. Sapphires glitter at her ears and more sapphires drape gracefully over the swells exposed by her sweetheart neckline.

"How did you get in?" Lois asks as she walks forward. "At this hour, you'd have to have a key card and I saw you surrender yours to security."
"I know people who know people." Lana slithers off Lois' desk. She pulls a compact from her purse and inspects her reflection.

"Of course you do." Lois rolls her eyes. "And the best thing you could think of to do with it was to sneak into the Planet and makeout on my desk?"

"I wanted to give you these." Chloe steps aside, revealing a short pile of colorful files on the desk. "Without anyone knowing that I had. Officially Lana and I are still at a party."

"And if anyone sees you?" Lois asks as she sits down, setting the empty plate on her desk. "The front doors may be locked down to keep wandering weirdos out, but it's not like the Planet's deserted."

"Then I dropped in to see my ex." Lana reapplys lipstick to her mouth and then drops the tube and her compact back into her purse.

Lois gives her cousin's sapphires an admiring look. "Nice bling."

"Isn't it beautiful?" Chloe squints down at her necklace. "Lana insisted on loaning them to me. She didn't want me to feel under dressed at the party. Wasn't that wonderful of her?"

"Wonderful." Lois repeats as she gives the slim brunette a stare full of warning about what will happen if the other woman is messing with her cousin.

Lana's return stare and slightly raised eyebrow says that she's not worried. She turns to Chloe and rubs her fingertip around the bottom curve of Chloe's mouth. "There. Your lipstick smudged a bit."

"Thanks." Chloe smiles brightly at her date. "Is the smudge all gone now?"

"Almost." Lana leans closer, her gaze intend on the full curves of the other woman's mouth.

Lois clicks open her favorite word processor as the two women kiss. "Get a room, girls. Some of us have work to do. In fact, some of us have the interview of the year, burning a hole in our notepad."
"Interview of the year?" Chloe turns to her cousin. She raises her eyebrows. "I did the interview of the year."

"I don't say that this will top your nailing the first Red Blue Blur interview, but it's close, and I bet it sells as many copies of the Planet."

"Sounds big. Who did you get?" Chloe asks.

"Chlo, I gotta say, you did a magnificent job of making sure that no one else will discover that the secret to nabbing superhero interviews is doughnuts. Sitting on the roof with a plate of hot doughnuts is like walking out to a duck pond with a bag of bread. God. Talk about getting mobbed. Being blonde didn't seem to hurt either." Lois flicks a strand of golden hair out of her eyes.

Chloe blinks. "I...really?"

"Uh-huh. I chatted with all kinds of heroes tonight. I've got three interviews and several will think about its and even one supervillain paused on my roof. Damn, I'm smoking hot tonight. I'm gonna make the planet sizzle." Lois waves her hand and almost knocks over the bright files on the edge of her desk. "Oops! What are these exactly?"

"I wanted you to have my files. The stuff that I was working on when I decided to quit." Chloe pats the pile. "I've decided to go back to Met U full time so I won't be able to follow-up on these or have time to freelance report."

"Oh." Like she needs her cousin's hand me down stories. At one time, she might have. She'd even 'borrowed' a few story ideas from Chloe, but now she's a real reporter and she has the interviews to prove it. Lois smiles at her cousin. "Thank you, Chloe."

"Good luck," Chloe hugs her cousin and then steps back. "I guess we should be getting back to the party. Lois, you know my curiosity will drive me crazy all night. Come on. Which interviews did you land? Was it the Green Arrow?"

"Who?" Lana asks as she slips an arm around Chloe's waist.

"You said mentioned a supervillain." Chloe gives her a worried look. "You didn't get hurt, did you? You have to be really careful with..."

"I'm fine," Lois cuts her cousin off with a dismissive wave. "Catwoman and I halved a chocolate cream filled doughnut and chatted about how annoying men can be. That's all. She didn't want to be interviewed, so it was all off the record, but she did take my card."

"Catwoman. Wow," Chloe sighs. "I know that she's a villain, but she's so amazing. I want every detail."

"Buy me lunch tomorrow and I'll spill all."

"Done." Chloe grins at her cousin.

"Lois." Lana nods to Lois. "We better go."

"Bye Lois," Chloe calls as they walk out.

Lois glances curiously at the thick accordion file on top. It's labeled 'Missing Bodyguards'. Boooring. She starts to dump it in the trash and then pauses. Maybe she should run the rejects through the shredder instead. No point in giving free stories to her rivals. She sets the folder aside. She look through the others later. Right now, she has a Batman article to write.
Victor steps into the conference room with two beers tucked between his arm and ribs, and glasses in each hand. He stares at Oliver. "What happened? I only stepped out of the room for a second. What did I miss?"

"Thanks." A.C. takes his glass of rum. "Clark punched Oliver."

"For real?" Victor places a bottle of non-alcoholic beer next Bart's plate of cake. "Why?"

Bart zips back inside and hands Oliver a damp towel. "Because Oliver punched him."

Victor slides the brandy snifter across the table to Oliver. "Damn."

"I didn't believe him," Oliver mumbles behind the towel. He tilts his head back and breathes through his mouth. "How am I supposed to believe that Clark lost his powers? It's crazy."

"I admit it doesn't make much sense." A.C. broods over his drink. He glances at Victor. "Have you ever lost your powers?"

"Hell, no." Victor drops into his seat. He pops open his bottle of beer. "You?"

A.C. shakes his head. "Never. Bart?"

"No way." Bart sits down and takes a drink. He looks at Oliver.

"Don't look at me," Oliver snaps. "I don't have any super powers to lose."
Victor snorts. "Massive amounts of money is a super power, Oliver."

"Then no, my powers are intact at the moment." Oliver cautiously sits up right. He scrubs his face clean with a corner of the towel.

A.C. drinks more of his rum. "Maybe it's an alien thing."

"That would make sense." Bart gravely over his beer bottle. "He is an alien. But why would being an alien make him suddenly lose his powers? And why now?"

"It's winter," Oliver suggests after a moment. "And you saw how he was huffing down that ice cream."

A.C. frowns. "So?"

"Ice cream's high calorie. 'S what bears do before they hibernate." Oliver picks up his drink. "It would explain the aggression."

"You biffing him one in the face is aggressive, but I don't see you curling up with a blankie." A.C. shakes his head. "That's not it."

"Clark's been off his game lately. That's for certain." Victor frowns. "And he's been bad tempered. It's not like Clark. Moody, yes. Cranky, no. But a hibernation cycle? I think people would've noticed if he disappeared for the winter every year."

"It could be a sudden on-set thing. Age related, you know." Oliver touches his swelling nose. "Like girls and boobs. One day they don't have them and then, bam, they do."

"There's some other stuff that I haven't had chance to tell you," A.C. announces.

"More weird?" Bart asks.
"Weirder," Victor corrects. He looks at A.C. "Clark's gotten weirder? Weirder than turning pickles into a dessert?"

Oliver demands, "What stuff?"

"He fainted twice today." A.C. looks around the table. "He didn't want to admit it or talk about it. On the drive over here, I tried to get him to let Oliver hook him up with a doctor, but he got real pissy and refused to even consider it."

"Clark fainted?" Oliver frowns. "Twice in one day? That's not good. He needs to see a doctor."

"Twice is all that I know about. There may have been other times." A.C. shrugs. "As touchy as he was about it, I don't think he would've admitted it to me. Chloe was there both times. She was as worried as I was, but Clark was determined to act like it was no big deal."

Victor asks, "What happened?"

"I don't really know. I 'accidentally' ran into Clark having lunch with Chloe," A.C. explains. "Dinah spotted them and called me so I could start laying the groundwork for seducing him away from that bastard Luthor."

Victor nods. "We gotta break that up."

"Lex does not need to be in a position to influence alien powers. All we need is for Clark to decide giving that lunatic alien tech for Christmas is a wonderful idea. We have to stop it. Whatever it takes," Oliver orders grimly.

"Whatever it takes," Bart echoes. "Clark deserves better than that bald asshat."

"No pressure, guys, okay?" A.C. frowns at them.

Victor grins. "Is Mr. Beach Stud having a little performance anxiety?"
"Don't make me flash The Pecs," A.C. warns.

"Not The Pecs!" Victor cringes in mock horror. "Anything, but The Pecs."

A.C. smirks. "Anything?"

"Guys." Oliver frowns at them. "A.C., you were talking about Clark."

"Yeah. As soon as I got there, he had to make a run for the restroom. I followed him in and...man, was he sick. Barf city, ya' know? I got Chloe. She was in there with him while I was guarding the door. Next thing I knew, she was yelling for me to get in there. I went in and Clark was out cold in her lap."

"Huh." Victor tears off the edge of his bottle's label. "What about the second faint? Any common factors?"

"Aside from being out cold in a bathroom? No." A.C. shakes his head. "I helped Chloe get him back to her apartment. We got him on the couch and she called Kara. Kara said that Clark was fine. Nothing wrong. Nothing to worry about...but later, I heard Clark get up and go inside the bathroom. I checked on him and I could hear him talking to himself and he sounded upset. Then I heard this yell and a thunk. I forced the door, and there Clark was, sprawled on the floor. Again."

Bart pokes a raspberry dubiously with his fork. "That's odd."

"There's more," A.C. tells them. "Clark was determined to leave, so I offered him a ride. Get this...he wanted to go to a pharmacy."

"And he bought pickles and ice cream?" Oliver frowns. "That's weird alright, but he is an alien. Maybe his tastebud processes pickles and ice cream differently. Maybe it tastes delicious to him."

"I've never seen him eat them before," Bart offers. "He loves apple pie, cinnamon rolls, ice cream, and cereal. I've never seen him nosh on pickles before."

"Maybe he's experiencing a shortage of some nutritional need that pickles can supplement," Victor
suggests. "There are studies that suggest that someone craves a particular food, like steak, what they actually need is iron, for example, and the craving is their brain's way of processing the nutritional need."

"Pickles and ice cream aren't all that he bought. Look at what else he got," A.C. slides a rectangular slip of paper across the table. "I stole the receipt."

Oliver picks it up and stares at it. "Shit!"

"What?" Victor asks.

"He bought 10 sixty count boxes of condoms," Oliver drops the receipt and grabs his snifter. He takes a gulp of brandy and then stares at the paper again in disbelief. "That's six hundred condoms. What the hell does he need that many for?"

"Don't forget the fifty tubes of..." A.C. catches Bart's curious gaze, "uhm, stuff."

"Damn." Victor shakes his head. "I guess he wasn't kidding about the chandeliers. But six hundred...daaammn."

"And with Lex," Oliver grimaces. "I don't understand. Clark's not exactly ugly. Why he suddenly settled on Lex...I can't wrap my mind around it."

"Shit!" Bart drops his beer bottle. He stares at the others with shocked eyes. "Oh, shit! I got it! It's...Clark...he's..."

"Bart?" Victor reaches across and rights the dropped bottle. "Calm down. What is it?"

"He's an alien!" Bart grabs his beer and downs the few inches left in the bottle while the other guys trade questioning looks and shrugs. He thumps the bottle back on the table. "Don't you get it? A.C., you watch as much scifi as I do...what's the first thing that aliens do after getting to earth?"

A.C. frowns. "Conquer the world?"
"No! Not that one. The other one."


Oliver blinks. "The what?"

"Is that like beriberi?" Victor asks.


"Oh, Star Trek." Victor shrugs. "I've heard of it."

"I'm not into scifi either, but yeah, I'm aware of the franchise." Oliver sips his brandy. "What does some sixties TV show have to do with anything?"

Bart trades a long suffering look with A.C. "You have heard of Spock, haven't you? He's an alien too, you see. And there's this episode where he starts acting all weird so his best buddy, Captain Kirk goes to him. And Kirk's all 'Dude, weird much? What's up?' and Spock's all, 'Go stuff yourself, earth boy' and then..."

"Bart," A.C. interrupts, "they don't need a summery of the entire episode."

"Thank you," Victor mutters.

A.C. leans forward. "The point, as Bart mentioned, is that Spock is an alien. In that episode, he exhibited violent and moody behavior. He withdrew from his friends and wouldn't talk to them. He stopped eating..."

"You can't say that Clark's not eating." Oliver touches his tender nose, "But the violent and moody, I'll give you."
"Spock's a Vulcan." A.C. frowns at Oliver. "And Clark's a...well, something different. That would explain any minor differences."

"Annnnd," Bart adds, "our theory would explain why Clark's suddenly so interested in doing the naughty with Luthor. Plus it also explains why Clark lost his powers and why the loss is temporary."

Victor raises an eyebrow. "The pon Farr?"

A.C. nods. "Exactly!"

Oliver trades a look with Victor. "And that would be?"

"Mr. Spock had to mate or die," Bart announces dramatically.

"You're saying that Clark's experiencing some sort of rut?" Oliver stares down at his brandy and sighs. He takes a drink. "Bart, A.C., that's a really...interesting idea, but it seems a little on the extreme side. Do you have any facts that couldn't be interpreted by a less..."

A.C. lifts his chin. "I think you are forgetting something that completely supports our theory, Oliver."

"Yeah." Bart nods.

"And what's that?" Oliver asks.

"Six hundred condoms. Try arguing with that," A.C. adds triumphantly. "Annnnd there's the fifty tubes of...additional supplies."

"Shit. You're right." Oliver drains his snifter. "We're going to have to save Clark from Lex and himself."

A.C. asks. "But how?"
Oliver stares at him. "I don't see any reason why the original plan wouldn't work with a few minor modifications."

"MINOR..." A.C. scowls. "Easy for you to say. It's not your ass on the line. I like Clark as much as the rest of you, more maybe, but..."

"You said you were willing to 'tap that' as you put it," Oliver reminds him. "You volunteered to seduce..."

"That was before he bought six hundred freaking condoms!" A. C. swallows the rest of his rum. "I don't see you stepping up to bat. Aren't you always saying that you wouldn't ask us to do anything that you aren't willing to do?"

"For one thing, I'm straight," Oliver snaps. "If Clark was a girl, then yes, I'd do it."

Victor snorts. "Six hundred times? And you said you didn't have any super powers."
Chapter Summary

Clark sets the stage for seduction.

The penthouse elevator opens on the sexily intertwining notes of sax, piano, guitars, and the softly suggestive thump of drums. Beeswax Santa candles standing on gold holders mark the borders of a white rose petal path. Lex steps out into the dimness of the candlelit room and follows the petals around the couch to discover a warm red blanket spread in front of the lit fireplace. Gold, silver, and red cushions are scattered across the blanket. One corner is weighted down with a silver tray that holds a crystal bowl filled with chilled and sugar-dusted grapes, a bowl of dark chocolate-dipped strawberries, and a golden plate with pineapple wedges and kiwi slices fanned across it. He peers at red dish that has oblong green slices of...what the fuck is that? Cucumbers? No, it's pickles. He blinks. Pickles?

He's never had anyone try to seduce him with pickles before, but since this is Clark, he'll roll with it. Lex toes off his shoes and steps onto the cashmere. He takes off his tuxedo jacket and folds it over the couch's arm. Lex settles comfortably, propped on the fat pillows. He glances at the two goblets and pitchers sitting on a neighboring gold tray. There's a silver and crystal bowl mounded with orange and green melon balls and a silver dish holding dark chocolates. Both goblets and pitchers are frosted with cold. He studies his choices. One goblet is filled with pale yellow liquid, ice, and lemon slices. The other holds pale green liquid, ice, lime slices, pineapple cubes, and honeydew melon balls. Lex takes a curious sip of the yellow liquid and tastes the sweet tartness of virgin lemonade. His eyebrows rise. He had been expecting something more alcoholic. He samples the other glass...sangria. A very strong sangria.

Interesting. Apparently one of them is needs to be sober and the other needs to very drunk for whatever Clark has in mind. Or possibly drunker in his case, considering how much he's already had this evening. And he'd thought that his evening couldn't get any better. Lex grins. It had already gone very well, starting with piquing Selina's temper with the information that Oliver Queen had the last two pieces of her pearl set tucked away in his safe. How crazy will it make Oliver to have someone break into his walk-in safe of Green Arrow paraphernalia and apparently take nothing? Or at least nothing that Oliver can report. Oliver will know that he's behind the missing painting, but trying to figure out the when and how of it...that should keep Oliver occupied for a few hours. Will it occur to Oliver to wonder if he'd left something else behind also? Or will Oliver be too busy fretting over the knowledge that he had to have seen all the Green Arrow paraphernalia while stealing his painting back? He hasn't had a good game of 'do you know that I know that you know I know' since his dad had discovered that quack Dr. Dawn. And the best part...Oliver will have no clue why the Green Arrow is on Catwoman's hiss list. Or Batman's annoying sonofabitch list.
Lex stares dreamily into the fire burning in the fireplace. He hadn't been as drunk as he had appeared when he tipped up to Bruce with a herd of sycophants and set them to dissing Oliver Queen's boring Robin Hood costume, but after the way that Bruce kept summoning the closest waiter over, he's close to it now. He had tried to pace himself, but Bruce apparently believed in vino veritas. By time he'd discreetly worked a few of his chosen crew into speculating that Queen had the hots for Selina, and gossiping about Oliver's interest in archery, he'd been feeling all the booze. Lex shakes his head and the room sloshes side to side. Fuck! He blinks rapidly as his vision suddenly grays out and he finds himself staring at the infrastructure of his penthouse.

Looking down is a mistake. His stomach chills with instinctive dread as he looks down, seeing the layers upon layers of offices sitting like pancakes on top of each other, all stacked on the garage far beneath. Lex sternly reminds himself that no matter how tissue delicate his new vision makes it look, that he is standing on a good solid floor. Swallowing back the vertigo, Lex turns his head, scanning the rest of the place until he sees a skeleton moving around in his bedroom. Ah, so that's where Clark is.

Booze and freak vision...not a good combo. Besides he wants to see his lover, not his lover's skeleton when Clark to springs the big seduction scene on him. Lex closes his eyes and leans against the couch. Perhaps if he keeps them closed for a few seconds and thinks about something else. What is Clark wearing or not wearing? Too bad the Santa suit that Clark had worn yesterday been beyond saving. First thing tomorrow, he's going to order another one. No, a dozen. No harm in having a few extras. But the Santa candles have him hoping that Clark's got a theme going that will extend to a little costumed role play.

He stretches and his toes brush against something smooth that makes a crinkly sound. What's that? Lex cautiously opens his eyes and finds his surroundings reassuringly solid again. He peeks beneath the couch and discovers plastic bags. Has Clark bought a surprise for them? He pulls them out and frowns at the name of the pharmacy printed on the bags. Clark couldn't have purchased anything exciting there. Lex pokes through the first bag and then the next and the next and the next.

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Clark looks at the mirror. He can feel his face turning red as his throng as he stares at his reflection. He'd heard Lex get off the elevator, but hadn't quite been able to make himself go out there. When he'd gotten home and seen the new beach Santa painting hanging in the bedroom, it had seemed like a brilliant idea to abandon his romantic dinner in favor of a tropical Christmas seduction. He would be able to drink lemonade and get Lex nicely softened up with sangria and sidestep an suspicions about why he wasn't drinking something stronger. He'd have plenty of time to lead up to his announcement and get Lex relaxed.

He'd been congratulating himself on his genius all through the raid on Lex's kitchen and bar, and the quick googling of local stores that delivered. But now that he's face to throng with his costume for
the evening, he can't do it. Clark tugs at the back of his red throng again. God, that's annoying. He turns to consider his profile again. He looks like he's acquired the beginnings of a beer belly overnight. How the hell is he supposed to feel sexy when the damned throng is giving him major wedgie? Clark touches the softened lines of his stomach and tries holding his breath. Nope. He still can't look down and see anything but his stomach.

He pulls the throng off and flings it across the closet in a fit of annoyance. Thank goodness that he'd had few other options delivered. He dives back into the box and pulls out a pair of green trunks printed with saucy kiss-blowing Santas. Clark pulls the swim trunks on and sighs with relief. The looser fit feels much better and the new roundness of his stomach isn't so obvious. He studies his reflection with more satisfaction. Clark takes out the Santa hat. He fluffs it into shape and sets it on his head. Now, he's ready. He walks out of the bedroom and strolls down the hall to the living area.

"Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la. Deck the halls with boughs of," Clark falls silent, his eyes widening as he rounds the couch and sees Lex surrounded by a neat pile condom boxes and lube packets. Shit. He pastes a smile on his face. "So how was the party? Talk to anyone interesting?"

Lex looks up from the box in his hand. "Six hundred condoms, Clark? Should I be flattered or worried?"

Clark grabs the box and glowers at his lover. "There was a sale, okay?"

"Six hundred?"

"It was a...ummm...buy two, get one free." Clark throws the box on the floor and kicks all his supplies back under the couch. "Would you forget about the condoms?"

"It's a little difficult to forget about the six hundred skulking under my couch." Lex leans back against his pile of pillows. "Is there an orgy on my calender that I've forgotten about?"

"Lex."

"No? Oh, I know. The farm's in trouble again and you're going to save it by hosting those parties where you sell sex toys and supplies?"

"Lex."
"That's not it either? Alright. You're experimenting with new materials to create a stunning centerpiece for our next dinner?"

"No." Clark narrows his eyes at his lover.

"Okay, now I've got it. You're going to fill them with water and throw them at the J Team. Am I right?"

"It's a thought. I had a meeting with them while you were drinking cocktails." Clark sinks down on his own heap of pillows. "They can be kind of irritating some times."

"Kind of?" Lex sneers. His gaze sharpens. "I thought that you planned to spend the evening with Chloe."

"We had a late lunch and hung out for awhile, but she had a date this evening."

"Chloe?"

"Uh-huh."

"Chloe Sullivan?"

"How many Chloes do you think I know?"

Lex shrugs. "No accounting for taste."

"That's good, coming from a guy who eats fish eggs on toast and gets off on Santa porn."

"So says the guy who is enabling my Santa habit." Lex smiles sensually as he looks Clark over from hat to trunks to big bare feet. "Nice trunks."
"Leave my trunks out of it. Why wouldn't someone want to date Chloe?" Clark frowns sternly. "She's smart. She's beautiful. She's..."

"Blonde," Lex interrupts. "And what do you have against caviar?"

"It's creepy."

"Creepy?"

"Yeah. It looks like crowd of tiny beady eyeballs watching me, double-daring me to just try and eat them. What do you have against blonds? That didn't seem to be an issue for you when you were dating Oliver."

"Trust me. Oliver is enough to put anyone off the entire species for life." Lex reaches for the glass of lemonade. "Why do you think I prefer brunettes?"

Clark takes the goblet of lemonade and pushes the sangria into Lex's hand. "Try this."

Lex drinks. "It's good. Where did you learn how to mix sangria?"

"The summer that I ran away, I hung around a lot bars. I picked up some stuff."

"Very nice." Lex smiles as he looks at Clark. "I almost feel like I'm on a beach somewhere."

Clark grins. "That's what I was going for."

"Does that make you my pool boy?"

"Try pool Santa."
"Thank you, I believe I will." Lex leans forward and kisses the brunette lightly. "Ummm. The pool Santa is excellent this year."

"Glad you approve." Clark takes his lover's mouth in a longer, deeper kiss. He pulls back slightly, looking deep into the hazy sleepy gray of the other man's eyes. "Lex? How much did you have to drink at that reception?"

"I'm not sure. Bruce kept handing me drinks and I lost track. Why?" Lex grins. "Worried I won't be able to get it up? Maybe not six hundred times, but I should be able to make your Christmas lights blink a few times."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

Clark laughs as he eases his lover back against the cushions and straddles him. "You know what I think?"

"That you're getting some tonight?"

"Yeah, that too, and that I better go to the next cocktail reception with you. But mostly, I'm thinking that you have too many clothes on." Clark pulls the black tie loose and throws the strip of fabric over his shoulder. He unbuttons the black vest, pausing after each button to brush a soft kiss over his lover's mouth. "How did your first day of being super-powered go?"

"You might have warned me."

"Would you have believed me if I had told you that it's not as much fun as it looks from the outside?" Clark smooths the vest open and starts work on the crisp white shirt. He grins. "How much stuff have you broken so far?"

Lex gives him an arrogant look. "Are you forgetting that I am a fencer and a martial artist?"

"That and two dollars buys you what exactly?"
"Both require a high degree of body awareness, precision of movement, and control."

"Uh-huh," Clark murmurs disbelievingly as he tugs the shirt's hem from his lover's black trousers.

Lex sighs loudly. "Fine. Seven coffee mugs, two coffee pots, three glasses, four remotes, two mp3 players, one laptop, and five phones. Happy?"

"That might make a song. Seeeeven coffeeee mugs...five cell phones, four remotes, three glaaassses, twoooo players," Clark carols experimentally.

"Shut up."

"Make me, sweetie bear." Clark gasps as the other man's hand cups his cock and squeezes gently.

Lex grins. "You were saying, sugar stick?"

"Huh?" Clark pushes into his lover's teasing strokes. "Uhhhh, powers. What else did you do today?"

'I didn't knock-over any ATMs if that's what you're getting at."

Clark looks down at Lex's smirk. Uh-oh. How the heck had Lex found out that he's the Metropolis ATM Bandit? Should he admit it? He adopts a haughty expression. "We can't all be criminal masterminds."

"God that gets me hot."

"Hotter than Santa?"

"What could be hotter than a criminal mastermind in a Santa suit?" Lex asks as he flicks the fuzzy white ball dangling from Clark's hat.
Chapter Summary

Clark continues the seduction and then tells Lex the big news.

"A bald guy in a tux. Maybe I should make that a bald guy who's barely wearing a tux." Clark pulls open his lover's shirt. He stares down at lean muscles, smooth skin, and tight nipples. He touches the hoop threaded through one nipple. "No. Make that a bald guy who's barely wearing a tux and has my initials on his chest. Yeah, that's way hotter."

"Ummmm." Lex slides his hands over the hard muscles of the brunette's thighs. "I beg to differ. Who knows about your brief sortie as ATM knock-over artist?"

"My parents." Clark frowns. "Martin Edge. That summer, I wasn't as careful as I usually am about concealing my powers. I hope that he never notices that Kal that's the name that I went by and the Red Blue Blur have the same powers."

"Martin Edge," Lex repeats quietly. His eyes glint gun metal gray beneath his copper lashes. "The name sounds vaguely familiar. Do you think he suspects?"

"About the Blur? I don't know. He hasn't approached me again."

Lex prompts, "Again?"

"He figured out that I'm Kal. He came to the farm and roughed up my parents and used Kryptonite against me. Lex," Clark leans closer, his eyes urgent, "you've got to be careful around that stuff. I know that you aren't used to avoiding it, but if it affects you like it does me...god. I don't want to think of you hurting like that."

"Worse than getting shot?"

Clark shivers. "It's really bad. Really, really, really, really bad."
"Ssssh." Lex pets the brunette soothingly. "I'm not an actual alien so perhaps it won't have the same effect, but I'll do my best to avoid it all the same. What did Edge want?"

"To use me. He liked the arrangement that he had with Kal. He wanted to force me back. I was using Red K regularly that summer." Clark avoids the other man's waiting eyes, keeping his gaze focused on Lex's chest. He traces the smooth thin circle of the hoop, making his initials wiggle. "My dad and Jor El...kinda combined forces to do an intervention and bring me back home, but I was still Kal enough to...convince Edge and his men to walk away."

"Who was with him?"

"Two of his goons. They tried to kill me earlier that summer. I was renting a fancy penthouse of my own then. I was sleeping late, but I heard them breaking in and whispering about what to do. They opened fire on the bed and then I hopped up and..." Clark sighs. "I thought that it was funny. Then. I made them tell me who had sent them, and then, I sent them back to Edge with an offer. Thinking of Edge lurking around out there still...it worries me. I keep waiting, you know?"

Lex sits up and hooks his fingers into the other man's soft hair. He brings Clark in for a quick, hard kiss. "Don't. That was years ago. If he was going to make a move, he would have done it by now."

"You thinks so?" Clark looks hopefully at his lover.

"I know so."

"Good. Ummm, Lex?" Clark parts his lips. All he has to do is say it. Just say it. Exactly like he'd practiced the whole time he was chopping, slicing, mixing, and arranging. Open his mouth and say it. Say it, say it, say it. "Lex, I'm...I'm..." He sighs and slides his hands over his lover's shoulders, stroking away the fabric, "I'm going to take your shirt off."

Lex sniggers as the fabric lumps up stubbornly around his wrists. "You forgot the cufflinks."

"Did I? You're forgetting that I'm a criminal mastermind Santa. Maybe I want you at my mercy."

"Is this where you tell me what happens to naughty boys?"
Clark tugs the tiny hoop threaded through his lover's tight nipple. He smiles at the soft gasp escaping Lex's lips and the arch of smooth chest. "Have you been bad, Lex? Tell Santa all about it."

"Since you're a criminal mastermind Santa...does that mean that you reward bad boys and punish good ones?"

"Tell me and find out."

"I helped a friend find something that she's been searching for. Ouch!" Lex twitches as his nipple gets a hard pinch.

"Which friend? Victoria?"

"Selina."

Selina? Oh, the blonde girl. That's probably okay since Lex prefers brunettes...except for Oliver. Clark frowns at the thought of that particular exception. "I don't think Oliver is ever going to accept that we're together now."

"Tough." Lex steals a fast kiss. "You're mine whether he likes it or not."

"Are you mine?"

"Absolutely."

Clark pounces on Lex and pushes him down amid the cushions. He claims the scarred mouth, urging his lover's lips wide. He loses himself in the velvet heat of the other man's mouth and sleek silken flex of Lex's body beneath his. His hands side greedily over the hard lines of his lover's torso, pausing with dissatisfaction on the fabric of Lex's black trousers. Too bad he can no longer simply rip the impediment off. Clark pulls back, kneeling between his lover's long legs.

"Get back here," Lex demands.
"Is that any way to talk to an evil pool Santa?" Clark smirks. He draws a finger slowly over the straining front of his lover's trousers. "Evil Santas don't take orders, we give them."

"What if I throw in a please?"

"I expect to hear a lot of pleases before the evening is over. You will have to do better than that."

"As long as the next order involves somebody removing something, I'm open to that."

"You want these off?" Clark slides his hands over his swim trucks, drawing the loose fabric snug over his swollen cock. "It's gonna cost you."

"What did you have in mind?"

What should he demand? What would an evil Santa want? The keys to one of Lex's cars for a week? Breakfast in bed every weekend for a month? His own reserved parking spot in LexCorp's garage? Clark soars, his teasing grin drooping, as his fingers touch his stomach. His own personal physician? A team of babysitters? Oh, god. Where is he going to...how is he going to...ohgod! Where are they going to come out? Clark sucks in a panicky breath. It's not like there are a lot of options. Ohgod. His chest feels tighter and tighter as he thinks about it.

"Clark? What is it?" Lex sits up, yanking his shirt off. He cups his lover's worried face. "What's wrong? Tell me."

"I...Lex...I'm...I'm." Clark pants, breathing faster and faster. Why can't he get his breathing under control? How can he possibly be breathing so rapidly and still feel like he can't catch his breath? Suddenly Lex is gone from his clutching hands and abruptly back.

"Here." Lex presses a small paper bag to his lover's face. "Breath into this. Slow. Come on, Clark. Slow down."

He pants into the bag, the brown sides flexing in and puffing out with his breathing. He tries to bat it away. "Lex...I...oh, god."
"Sssh. Don't try to talk right now. Breath. Slow and easy. Don't think about what's upsetting you."

Clark gives the other man a disbelieving look over the edges of the paper bag. How the hell is he not supposed to think about a major life changing event? How is he not supposed to think about about...oh, god. Is Jor El gonna cut him open to get the babies out? Are they gonna shoot out his...OHGOD!


He'd like to see Lex relax and breath slow while wondering exactly what's going to be happening to him in a few weeks. Oh, god. He's actually reduced to hoping that he's got a few things in common with chickens. OHGODOHGOD. He's bigger than a chicken. He's...he's...ostrich big! Or is that Emu big? Which is biggest? Clark squeaks. "Ostrich!"

Lex blinks, mystified. "Ostrich? Did you say..ostrich?"

"Ostrich!" Clark nods sharply. "Emu!"

Lex opens and closes his mouth. He takes a deep breath. "Clark, what the hell did you put in that lemonade? I thought it was virgin."

"Emmmuuuuuu." Clark moans. "I'm an emu."

"I'm calling Toby." Lex reaches for his phone.

"No!" Clark drops the bag and lunges across Lex, grabbing for the phone. He holds the tiny silver phone against his chest. "No doctors."

"Alright," Lex murmurs soothingly. He rubs Clark's shoulders "No doctors. So, you're an emu? How did that happen,and did it have anything to do with the lemonade that you've been sucking down?"
Clark leans back and studies the bland calmness of the other man's face and the rapid pulse beating beneath the smooth throat. He scowls. "I'm not one of your addled clubbing buddies. I don't think that I'm really an emu! Jeez, Lex. There's nothing in the lemonade except lemons, water, sugar, and ice."

"That's good to know."

Great. Lex is still aiming for soothing the crazy farmer. Clark narrows his eyes at his lover. "I know that I'm not a bird, okay?"

"Okay."

"And if I was a bird, I'd probably be more of an ostrich. They're bigger, aren't they? Or is that a cassowary? I wasn't really paying attention when my biology teacher was talking about it, I was thinking about football and..."

"Is there some reason that you've developed a sudden fixation on large flightless birds? Oh." Lex frowns. "Do you missing flying, Clark? You'll have that and all your powers back in thirty-eight weeks. It's not like it's forever."

"This isn't about flying! It's about..." Clark licks his lips nervously. "It's...it's about reproduction."

"Reproduction?"

Maybe not. Clark tosses the cell phone onto the couch. "Uh-huh. You know...like little ostrich-emus."

"Ostrich-emus?" Lex raises his eyebrows. His eyes gleam with interest. "Were you thinking attempting a genetic cross-breeding program? Some of my scientist might be interested. We could call it Project Emtrich or Project Ostmu. Which do you like better? It's good to see you showing an interest in science. Jor El will be impressed."

This is so not going down the way that he'd hoped. Clark flicks a longing glance at the pitcher of sangria, wishing he could have a big glass. He picks up a pickle slice and bites into the satisfying tartness. "Would you stop it with the birds."
"Me? You're the one who was wheezing and groaning about them."

"I was not wheezing about them."

Lex stares at Clark, managing to make his silence as loud as a shout.

"Okay, so I was wheezing, but it wasn't about them." Clark folds the other half of his pickle slice into his mouth. "Not really." He reaches for his lemonade and takes a big drink, ignoring the way his lover's face is scrunching up as Lex watches. Maybe he should add a few pickle slices to his pitcher of lemonade. Is there anything that pickles don't complement? He puts the glass down and looks at his boyfriend. "Lex, look at me. Don't you see anything different?"

"You're wearing a Santa hat."

Clark snatches the hat off his head and flings it over his shoulder at the couch. "Try again."

Lex smirks. "You're wearing Santa trunks."

Clark narrows his eyes. "Nice try. The trunks stay on until you give me a reason to remove them."

"What about if you will take yours off," Lex unfastens his waistband, "then I will take mine off? Will that motivate you?"

"I'm pregnant."

"You're..." Lex's lips try to shape the word. He reaches blindly for the goblet of sangria.

"Pregnant." Clark hands the goblet to his stunned lover.

"But...but you're a guy." Lex downs the goblet in a gulp. He grabs the pitcher and pours more. He tosses back the liquid and puts the empty goblet down. He stares hard at Clark's waist.
"Maybe I should bring the entire bar over here for you." Clark folds his arms defensively over his rounded waist. He glowers at Lex. He'd known that Lex might need a little something to soften the shock, but he hadn't thought that massive quantities had been required. "Do we need to airlift the castle wine cellar to the penthouse?"

"You don't understand." Lex crawls closer, staring still. "I gotta be drunk."

"I hoped that you would be happy about it. It's a long walk back to my truck. I better get started."

"No!" Lex grabs Clark, tugging him gently back down. His hands spread along the brunette's sides. "I can't see them unless I'm smashed."

Clark relaxes back with a grin. "You have to be drunk for x-ray vision? I could do that in high school. All it took was a fall in the gym. Lex, can you see both of them? Do they look okay?"

"I'm not a doctor. I don't even play one on TV."

Clark grabs a pillow and hits his lover with it. "Not. Funny."

"They're beautiful." Lex leans closer, smiling softly as he stares at his lover's abdomen. "Beautiful. And they're all ours."

"All two of them." Clark smiles indulgently as he watches the other man's growing excitement.

"Two?" Lex looks up at the brunette. "Why do you think there's only two?"

Oh, god. Clark stares down at his stomach, wishing mightily for his x-ray back. "That's all I felt when I touched my stomach. Jor El said that could be more. How...how many do you see?"

"Hmmm. Four."
Four! Well, that's only two. He supposes he can manage four. It's a nice round sort of number. His parents will be thrilled to get four grandkids at a...okay, he's not thinking about that part of it. "Four."

"Wait a second."

"Wait?"

"I think I see...yes!"

"What?" Clark demands. "You see what?"

"Four. Five. Six." Lex tenderly kisses the ivory skin stretching over his lover's abdomen. "Six."

"Six!" Ooooohgod. Okay. Okay. Six. Clark rubs his chest. He can feel the muscles tightening up. Lara had said that six was the max. Six. How is he and Lex going to manage six? Even with his parents...

"No. Wait. I think...wait a second." Lex stares harder.

"Wait! Wait?" Clark snatches the brown paper bag and wheezes into it. But...but he'd only felt two and Lara had said two to six...if she'd been wrong about that, what else might she have been wrong on? They had said something about the yellow sun factor. Ohgodohgodohgod. What if he really has less than two weeks to delivery? What if his fertility cycle is longer than thirty eight weeks? Clark whimpers into the bag. Thank god, he'd stocked up on birth control. He's never leaving the house without a pocketful of condoms again. Never.

"Oh, Clark." Lex leans up and kisses the brunette's forehead. "You're amazing. I've never been so happy in my life. We'll start on a nursery immediately. I will paint some nice cheery murals on the wall for them, and for the base color...hmmm. Something neutral. What about a soft creamy yellow? You like yellow."

"Lex." Clark lowers the bag. What has his life come to that he's desperately hoping that the next words out of Lex's mouth is either 'oops, I miscounted' or 'psych'? He'll even settle for 'seven' at this point. Clark looks at the other man. "Yellow is fine. Murals are fine. But Lex, how many cradles are we going to need?"
"I need to get the paperwork started for trust funds tomorrow," Lex murmurs to himself. "We'll have to claim that we paid surrogates...no. Someone will talk no matter what papers they sign or how much I pay them. No, better to say that LexCorp has been developing artificial surrogate units because we desperately wanted..."

"Lex!" Clark glares. "How many?"

Lex smiles blissfully. "My favorite lucky number...thirteen."

"Thirteen? Thirteen! JOR EL!"
It's A Red K Christmas! (50/62)

Chapter Summary

Oliver hires Zatanna and the pair go after Lex.

Crap. Not again. Oliver squints through his swollen eye at the big hole in his window, next to the freshly replaced glass door. There's a spray of glittering glass shards on the floor. Cracks spiderweb the jagged hole in his glass. Next time, he's getting shatter-proof glass, damnit. Let some fucker break that. But who the hell had broken it this time?

He sits up, bracing one hand against his overturned desk. He'd returned home after a Green Arrow patrol and spotted a black-clad figure in front of his office safe. Had she been entering or exiting? He turns his head to look at the still open door to his secret room. Who had she been? Her face had been covered, and admittedly he'd been distracted by the figure filling out all that black leather and the bullwhip. His first thought had been that one of the team had sent him a little something to cheer him up. Then he'd noticed the open safe.

Oliver heaves himself to his feet, wincing at the post-fight soreness of his stiffening muscles and bruises. Why does his chest burn like...oh. He stares down at the five bloody slashes across his green leather chest. Goddamnit. That had been a brand new vest. Another thing that claw-happy bitch owed him. She could fight. He's gotta give her that. He hasn't had a dust-up with anyone who fought that vicious and dirty since that last time at Excelsior when he'd cornered little man Luthor in the stairwell.

But he'd given as got as he'd gotten until he managed to get in under her guard and knocked her flat and breathless. He'd been standing over her when he'd heard the glass smash. He'd glimpsed a flutter of black against the blackness of the night and then a big black boot slamming toward his face and then nothing. Maybe if he turns the lights on, he can find something to tell him who cat bitch and her buddy are. Cat. Could it be Catwoman?

Oliver's eyes widen at the thought. According to Late Nite Lite, her home town is Gotham, but he's gotten the impression that she roams pretty widely. He frowns. But he doesn't have any jewelry and everyone knows that jewelry is what she's mad for. Maybe his attacker was a wannabee. It's not like anyone can't go out to a costume shop and rent a kitty costume or sew one at home. He'd bet on that one being handsewn 'cause that had been one freaky looking cat suit.

He scrounges around his desk, finds his remote and hits the button for lights. Oliver blinks in the sudden brightness. Maybe this is it. He's been looking for an excuse to approach Batman. Something
that would intrigue the Bat enough to finally agree to a meeting. Everyone knows that Batman has
been trying to get the goods on Catwoman for years. She must be damned tricky if Batman hasn't
gotten evidence on her yet, and by now, Bats must want her so bad that he can taste her. And this
wannabee might know something.

It's a long shot, but he specializes in those. It's nothing to him whether his thief knows or not, but she
might be his ticket to a rooftop encounter with Batman. The night is finally looking up. Oliver adjusts
his quiver and walks toward the safe. What had Ms Kitty taken? He studies the familiar contents.
must have gotten her before she'd had time to walk into the safe. So nothing missing and no worries
that a crazy cape wannabe is strolling around Metropolis with the knowledge that he's the G.A. He
can almost forgive her for rattling his arrows so hard. How to get word to Batman now that he has an
excuse to request a meet?

Oliver starts to walk out and pauses. Why does he have a nagging sensation that something is
missing? He turns and stares at the contents again. There's not so much as an arrow missing from
what he can see. There's not anything...Oliver sucks in a painful breath. Shit! The painting! Where's
that smutty Santa thing? He had left it right there. He pushes aside a row of spare vests and leather
pants. Right there. And it's gone. Nothing there but a thin line in the carpet.

He swallows hard. Quadruple crap. There's only two people that would want that painting. Clark
doesn't even know that he has it, and even if Clark found out, the other guy would confront him and
demand it back. But Lex...Weirdo Angel would have no qualms about stealing it back. And that
means that Lex has seen...Oliver stares around at all his G.A. stuff. He can't allow that. Luthor can't
know. God knows what evil Luthor things Weirdo Angel would do with that.

Panic twists in his aching chest as he stumbles back to his desk and gropes around on the floor,
picking up and tossing aside business card after card. Here it is. He opens his cell and dials the
number on it, tapping his toes as he listens to the rings. Where the hell is she when he finally needs
her? Shit. What if she's doing a show? He needs her now and he's willing to pay top rates for it.
Thank god. "Zatanna? It's Oliver."

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This is fucking best day ever. He's got temporary custody of Clark's powers, which has no only
deepened his understanding of Clark World, but has been incredibly useful in taking care of
business. He's acquired access to an alien A.I. And, top fucking best of all, he's going to have Clark
in his bed tonight and in the rest of life forever, and there are thirteen little Luthors on the way.
Where had his pitcher of...oh, that's right. Clark had taken it away and poured it out. What a fucking
waste. That had been some damned tasty sangria. Lex looks toward the hallway that leads to their
bedroom as he hears his lover's voice roar down the hall.
"Thirteen, Jor El! Thirteen!"

Is Clark still hung-up on that? Personally, he thinks thirteen is a wonderful number. It's his lucky, lucky, lucky ducky number. Lex frowns at the plate of pineapple wedges that Clark had shoved at him and ordered him to eat before disappearing into the bedroom to talk to the A.I. He's not in the mood for pineapple and nobody fucking orders him to do fucking anything. He gives the fucking orders, he doesn't take them. Fucking Clark.

Hmmm. Fucking Clark. Now there's an idea. Lex sniggers. Awesome fucking idea. All he has to do is get off the couch. Clark's already in the bedroom. Which of the end tables should he put the the plate on? Not like it fucking matters, is it? What the hell? Lex peers down at the broken plate and wedges on the floor. How the fuck had that happened? He glowers at the table and shakes his finger at it. "Bad table. Bad!"

"Lex?" Clark calls. "Are you okay?"

"I bet you're a fucking mutant table. Don't you dare fuck with me. I have goldfish." Lex growls at it. He leans toward the hallway and yells, "I'm fucking awesome!"

Now about fucking Clark. Lex fumbles at the front of his pants and gets his zipper undone. Damned zippers. Maybe he should start his own clothing line of easily removable emergency fuck gear. Damned trousers. Why should strippers have all the fun? He needs some of those rip away trousers so that when the moment is right he doesn't have to wrestle with these fucking chastity pants. Fuck it. Lex yanks and the front of his trousers goes flying across the room to wrap around the two figures that shimmer into existence. "What the fuck?"

"That's him. Get him," Oliver orders the scantily dressed brunette next to him.

"What. The. Fuck!" Lex pops off the couch just as the girl waves a stick at him.

She mutters, "SrewoTneeQot."

There's a soft poof and the couch disappears. Lex staggers back into the suddenly empty space. "Fucking mutants every fucking where. Crawling out of the fucking woodwork. Get the fuck out!"
"Damn it, Zatanna. I'm paying for Luthor, not his couch," Oliver snaps.

The busty brunette glowers at him. "Consider the couch a freebie."

"Lex?" Clark calls. "You okay in there?"

"I don't need ahhhh!" Oliver grunts as Lex shoves him into the wall.

"Fucking fucker!" Lex snaps a knee into the other man's ribs and grins with satisfaction at the crunching sound.

"Zat! Please!" Oliver gasps.

Fuck! Lex turns his head and sees the girl point her stick at them.

"SrewoTneeuQot!"
Chapter Summary

The fight between Lex, Oliver and Zatanna continues.

Ow! Fuck!” His head bounces off the floor as he falls from the ceiling. Lex manages to elbow Oliver as the other man stirs next to him. Urgency floods his nerves. Where the fuck is the brunette? He grabs the back of his couch and hauls himself upwards.

Lex blinks against the dizzying surge of x-ray as he stares out across the infrastructure of Oliver's clock balcony to see three LexCorps swaying in the wind across from him. Three skeletons appear in front of him and lunge toward him, waving sticks. He steps back as something hard slams over his head with a loud BOOOONG! Lex collapses to the floor, his ears ringing with noise.

"Oh, shit," Oliver whispers. "What am I going to tell Clark?"

A woman whispers, "My God, Oliver, what have you done?"

"I...I...I didn't mean to. I didn't even realize that I'd grabbed this solid steel statue."

That lying fuckwad. Lex scowls at the bottom of his couch. If he didn't have Clark's powers that blow would have killed him. As it is, it had knocked the x-ray vision out of his head. He blinks at a world once again reassuringly solid and singular. Are those dust bunnies clinging to the underside of his couch? Fuck it, they are. He's going to have a few words for his housekeeping staff tomorrow morning. Luthors do not have dust bunnies. Ever. He stays limp and still as Oliver's foot nudges his side with a decided lack of gentleness.

"Is he dead?" the woman asks.

"I hit him pretty hard. I think I caught him on the temple."

His lips curl back in a silent snarl. That bastard had fucking aimed for his temple. Sonofabitch. He waits until fingers touch his throat and pops upwards. "Liar!"
"Shit!" Oliver flings himself backward and away. He drops the dented statue onto the floor with a clang.

"He's alive!" The girl vaults over the couch, putting it between her and the two men as she brings her wand back up.

"FUCKIT! That hurt." Lex sits up, watching as Oliver looks in disbelief from his head to the big dent in the center of the sculpture. He rubs his aching head. First space aliens and now magic. What the fuck is next on the It's Really Real List? Zombies? Vampires? Bigfoot?

"Get him!" Oliver yells.

Fuck. Lex hops up and kicks off the back of his couch as the brunette aims her wand at him. She didn't seem to want him dead, but he doesn't want to find out the hard way what Oliver had paid her to do to him. He goes careening upwards, crashing into the ceiling and then slamming back into the floor with the girl's white wand vainly trying to match the speed of his movements.

"Zat! Get him!"

Lex bounces over his couch and jumps onto Oliver's desk, smashing it flat into the floor. Whee! His feet skitter on debris and he tucks into a roll, barreling across the floor to smash through the bar and into the cabinets behind. He brushes smashed glass fragments from his bare shoulders. Great. Now he smells like he drank the bar dry. Clark is not going to be pleased when he goes back to the penthouse.

"I don't see him." Oliver demands breathlessly. "Zat? Do you see him?"

Lex pops up from behind the bar, a bottle of tequila in each hand. He throws one at Oliver just as the blond scrambles to his knees. Strike! He grins as Oliver hits the floor again. He flings the other bottle at the brunette as her wand lifts, but she ducks behind his couch. Lex zips out from behind the bar and scoops up Oliver's laptop.

"No! Not my laptop!" Oliver lunges toward him.
Lex sidesteps, smirking as blond slips on a pile of loose pens and goes down. He rips the laptop in half and throws it on the floor and stomps on it. He darts across the the room and slams through the wall between Oliver's office and conference room with a gratifying crunch. Lex smirks over the wrecked remains of the wall.

God that felt good. He's been wanting to trash Queen Tower ever since Ollie dared build it. God, this is fun. What shall he break next? Lex bangs through the locked door, knocking it flat and eyes the clock window with calculation. One panel is boarded up again. Apparently he isn't the only one who hates the stupid thing.

"Shit!" Oliver climbs to his feet. "Stop fooling around and zap him now, Zat!"

Lex zooms through the door, knocking it flat. He leaps lightly over the couch and snatches the white wand from the brunette. Now he's got them. Or maybe not, he backs away as he notices the smirk forming on her red mouth.

"My power isn't in the wand, Luthor."

"I'll give your wand back," Lex offers, "And I'll double whatever he's paying you."

Her dark blue eyes spark with interest. "Double?"

"Don't fall for it, Zat! It's a trick." Oliver winces as he leans heavily against the back of the couch.

Lex smiles evilly at him. "I fucked Clark all over that couch. Every inch of it is covering with essence of –"

"God!" Oliver yanks his hand away so fast that he wobbles backward. "That's disgusting."

"You're the one who stole my couch." Lex looks at the brunette. "Do you really want to work for a cretin who calls you 'Zat'?"

"Maybe that is my name."
"I don't think so. You're too beautiful to have a name that makes you sound like a bug zapper and far too powerful to be wasted on a couch-napping. Who wants to work for the kind of perv steals a man's couch?" Lex smiles slowly at her. "I bet Oliver hasn't even said the magic word."

Oliver snorts. "Please? Of course, I've said 'please' to her."

Lex holds the young magician's gaze as he purrs. "I was thinking more of 'retainer'. It's much more interesting word. A much more profitable word."

"Retainer." She smiles. "I like that word. I like it a lot."

"I thought that you might." Lex smiles back.

"Zatanna, no." Oliver hurries around the end of the couch. "You don't want to do that."

"Oh, yes, she does. Catch." Lex tosses the wand back to her. "There you go...a sign of good faith."

Oliver sneers at him. "Good faith? You wouldn't know good faith if it –"

Lex hits Oliver on the chin. After a moment's consideration, he picks the blond up and drapes him over the couch. He steps back to look Oliver over with a smirk. Too bad he won't be here to see Ollie's face when the blond came to on his fucking couch. "What was he paying you to do and?"

"Three spells. One to get you to a place of his choosing." Zatanna folds her arms, tucking the wand between her bicep and her black satin jacket. "One to make you forget about his other identity and one to make you forget someone called Clark Kent."

Lex turns his head and stares at Oliver. Where are his goldfish when he needs them? This is what he gets for choosing to build the ponds in his office and at Luthor Manor first. He clenches and unclenches his fists as he tries to think through the tidal surge of rage. But all he can think about is Clark, hurt and seemingly betrayed. Clark, left to deal with a pregnancy without his help. Clark, struggling to raise potentially super-powered children alone. Their children growing up without him. There a fffffffpt sound and the ends of Oliver's hair spark and flame.
Zatanna gasps and hastily points her wand, "Tuo Eirf! What happened?"

"I'm not sure." He can set shit on fire by being pissed and glaring? Yes! Lex blinks the strange red haze away. "Perhaps Oliver needs to change hair products."

"Lex?" Clark glances at the closed door of the bathroom. That last crash had been pretty loud, but that's the typical pattern for a Luthor temper storm. Small crashes escalating to big crashes that eventually give way to a sullen lull. Had Lex trashed the TV? He'd heard voices earlier, but it's all quiet now. He'll go out in a few minutes and stuff his lover in bed and clean up whatever mess Lex had created. What had set Lex's temper off?

When he'd left the room, Lex had been sulking on the couch and eating pineapple wedges. Maybe he should see if Lex's anger management group has a spouses and partners section. Maybe he should encourage Lex to spend more time with communing with goldfish. His lover always seemed so much calmer after spending time with the fish. Will their children inherit Lex's temper?

Clark sets his hands on the bathroom counter and leans closer to the blue and gray image pulsing on the mirror. His insides had never been so fascinating before. The shapes of his heart, lungs, and the loops of intestines are easy enough to make out, but he can only catch glimpses of the other organ that twists along the loops as if it's using his intestines as some sort of protective cushioning. How the heck had Lex been able to spout off so confidently about the number of their offspring? He can barely see the curves of organ much less anything inside it. "Jor El?"

"Yes, my son?"

"Can you make the image clearer? I can't see them." Clark watches as the image of his intestines thins and disappears, giving him a clear view of a curvy snaky length that is highlighted with four glowing blue spots. He touches his finger to the images, tracing the shapes crouched in shrimpish curls along the curves of large round yolks. His finger circles the small heads tucked between the softness of yolks and jelly jiggle of albumen encircling both yolks and developing babies. He's an ostrich after all. He can live with that. Clark tenderly strokes each tiny curling shape. They look so small compared to the massive roundness of yolk and surrounding albumen. He admires the delicate frond-like clutch of minute limbs along the yolks. Already he can see Lex in the neat curves of heads and the determined, possessive clutches of hands. "I don't see shells."
"The shells form last. They will remain soft as you lay the eggs."

"Then they turn hard like chicken eggs?"

"No. The shells will be soft and leathery. Tough enough to protect the contents, but flexible enough to be able to expand as development continues. By the first of January, they should be ready to hatch."

January. Clark strokes his stomach. January seems both too far and too near. He can't wait to hold his babies, but there's so much to do first. Where should he even begin? It won't be long until they are here and then they'll hatch and...and there will be diapers and bottles and baby beds and...oh, god. He's filled with an overwhelming need for a man who always has a plan. He opens the bathroom door. "Lex?"

Clark marches through the bedroom and down the short hall. He stops there and frowns. Something is different about the room. He frowns as he looks around. His mock tropical picnic feast is still spread in front of the fire. The candles are glowing along the rose petal path. Wait. Where's the couch? And where the hell is Lex?

He walks cautiously over the empty space where the couch should have been. Could it have turned invisible? He pokes the air with a finger and his hand moves easily through the space. The two end tables are still there, framing the long rectangular imprint of the couch on the rug. Had Lex chucked the couch outside in a fit of temper? Clark hurries over to the row of windows that face Queen Tower. The windows are solid and unbroken. That's good.

He can see bright lights glowing in Oliver's office. Is there a meeting or is Oliver working late on some secret project? Either way it's not his problem any longer. Clark heads toward the dark kitchen. Is Lex in there brewing coffee or getting a snack? "Lex? You won't believe what Jor El just told me. Ouch! Damn it, Lex! You can't throw stuff everywhere and leave it once we have..."

Clark picks up a cell phone. It's a dark green cell phone. His is red and Lex's is black so who does this one belong to? He turns the rectangular flatness of it over in his hand. Had one of Lex's staff dropped it? It might be Lucas', but Lucas would probably prefer something with more flash and dazzle than this phone's plain green exterior. He turns it on and blinks as blank screen turns hunter green and lights up with rows and rows of teeny icons.

It's Oliver's phone! When had Oliver been in the penthouse and why hadn't Lex mentioned it to him? Clark grimly taps up a list of Oliver's calls. There's him. And A.C. Dinah. Victor. Bart. Chloe. His eyebrows rise as he spots Lana's number. He doesn't see any of Lex's numbers. Most of the phone
calls are to numbers that he doesn't know, including the last one. That's reassuring, but how did
Oliver's phone get here? Had Lex stolen it? But why?

He looks up from the phone and his eyes widen as he stares at the dent in the wall dividing the
kitchen from the breakfast room. It's a big dent. A guy sized dent. A guy sized dent that hadn't been
there when he had prepared his fireside tropical picnic. Clark touches the wall and the cracks
radiating outward from the impact zone. Had Lex punched the wall? Shoved something into the
wall? Uneasy, he calls softly into the darkness of the kitchen, "Lex? You in there?"

His toes catch on something soft and he looks down to see a dark patch of something puddled on the
floor. Clark hold it up, frowning at the neatly tailored pockets and silvery gleam of closed zipper on
the front half of dark trousers. Clark turns and glances around. Where's the rest of his lover's
trousers? Why had Lex ripped them off? What the heck is going on? His hand fists around the fabric
as he looks from it to the phone in his other hand. Oliver had been here and...what had Oliver done?
Had Oliver finally realized that Lex was moving on and gotten desperate for one more chance?
"Lex? Lex!"

If Oliver had managed to somehow kidnap Lex where would he have taken the other man? How had
Oliver taken Lex? Lex is powered up now so it's not like Oliver could've wrestled Lex out of the
penthouse against his will. Unless...had Oliver used Kryptonite? If Oliver had dared use that on his
baby daddy...Clark runs to the windows and presses his face against the glass, straining to see
anything. He gasps as his lover suddenly comes into view, looking sleekly sexy in a pair of black silk
boxers.

Why is Lex standing there instead of zipping back to him? Where's Oliver? He sucks in a breath as a
slim brunette moves to stand across from his Lex. Her raven curls tumble fetching over a white satin
vest that strains to hold back her boobs. Black fishnets stretch up her long legs to vanish beneath the
tight tiny scrap of black satin that covers her fanny. Who the hell is that? He does not like this at all.
Not one little bit. His eyes narrows and his mouth tightens. Somebody has a lot of explaining to do.
A lot of explaining.

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She gives her own luxuriant curls a wary pat and then adjusts the brim of her top hat. "Oliver paid
me for three spells. You're paying me double to not do those particular spells." She gives him a big
smile, but her blue eyes are wary. "Tell you what...I'll do three spells for you as a show of good faith.
What would you like done?"

Lex raises an eyebrow. Does she really think that he doesn't know that this is a test instead of a sign
of good faith? She wants to see what he would choose to do before agreeing to work for him. Fuck
it. He can't do anything fatal to Oliver or she might back out. Fuck. He'll have to settle for fucking up
Oliver as much as possible for the rest of the prick's life. Not a bad consolation prize.

What does he want for the first spell? He thinks of Clark and of the concealed fear that he'd seen in his lover's beautiful eyes as they talked about the pregnancy. He can't tell Zatanna about that, but there might be another possibility. Something that he can do to help Clark. An augmentation of his own meteor-gifted powers. Lex adopts an expression of noble resolve. "I want..."

"Yes?" Zatanna steps closer, watching him carefully. "What do you want, Lex Luthor?"

"I have the power of healing."

"What?" She gives him a dubious stare.

Lex holds back a grin. He can almost see the word 'crackpot' glowing over her head in a thought balloon. "I know what that sounds like, but since I was a child, I've been able to heal myself. I had asthma as a young child; it completely disappeared. I've been shot...even took one directly to the head this year." He smooths a hand over the curve of his skull. "I healed when the doctors had given me up for dead. Look at my chest. I've been shot and cut, but you can't see any sign of it."

Zatanna frowns. She moves closer and reaches out to touch curious fingers to the smooth skin covering his shoulder. "I remember reading about that. It was near Christmas, wasn't it? A mugger shot you in the chest. You were rushed to the hospital."

"They didn't expect me to survive." Lex shiver in the coolness of the room as he remembers the dark shape and muzzle flash. Hitting the dirty wet street and watching the stars whirl overhead as he passed out.

"I saw this on TV. You had been found in a ditch and rushed back here by your father."

"Anyone else would've died. I was up and at home the next day." Lex forces himself to stand still as she touches the bald bareness of his head. "My power applies only to me. I can heal myself only."

Zatanna takes a step back and gives him a considering look. "You want to be able to heal other people?"
The idea of playing god appeals strongly to him, but if there's one thing that his experience with meteor has taught...one thing that every fairy tale and myth warns about, it's being very careful what you ask for. If he could heal anyone anywhere any time, would he control the gift or would it control him? His own healing ability was not an entirely conscious and willful process.

And what would such a gift cost? Healing himself has a cost in energy. Then too, if he could heal everyone and Clark found out that he wasn't running around hospitals, healing right and left...Clark would not take that well. He wants to be able to protect his children, assuming they did not inherit his power, and Clark. Lex shakes his head. "I don't want to be able to heal everyone. I want to be able to temporarily transfer my own healing abilities to my family."

Zatanna points her wand at him and whispers softly.

He's engulf in a shimmering green glitter and then it's gone. Lex rubs his chest. He doesn't feel any different on the outside, but he can feel an interior shift. The same sense of inward motion and warmth that he senses when his healing abilities kick on. He smiles at Zatanna. "That's one."

"What next?"

Lex studies the magician. Her return smile is more open than the first one that she'd given him and her shoulders are relaxed beneath the snug jacket. Apparently she's decided that despite his reputation, he's not so dangerously bad after all. Her mistake, but it's one that he will have to cultivate if he wants to keep her on retainer. "I owe Oliver something for what he tried to do to me."

Her navy eyes turn wary again. "What did you have in mind?"

"I've known who he is for some time. I could expose him as the Green Arrow if I chose and make further heroics," Lex fights to keep bitterness from lacing the word, "impossible. Did he tell you who the man that he wanted me to forget is?"

"Clark Kent?" Zatanna touches the brim of her hat. "No."

"Clark is my lover. The man that I'm going to marry. Oliver," Lex sighs heavily and watches her from beneath his lashes, "didn't approve."

Zatanna's eyes round in surprise and then narrow in disapproval as she glances at Oliver. "That's
why he wanted you to forget about this Clark?"

Lex nods. His hands clench. "And when I think of Clark wondering why I've suddenly turned away from him after he's trusted me with everything...wondering why I act like I don't know him. He would be so hurt."

"Because he would remember everything," Zatanna murmurs. She glowers at Oliver. "While you wouldn't. That's horrible."

Lex looks at Oliver as the blond snuggles into the couch. He smirks. "I want this couch to stalk Oliver like Freddy Krueger. No matter where he moves or where he goes, this couch will appear at whatever place he resides. No matter what he does to it, it will reappear exactly as it is now. He can't cover it up. He can't destroy it. He can't sell it or give it away. He can never be rid of it."

Zatanna sniggers. "And the last spell?"

"Oliver's superhero act could use a little help." Lex grins viciously as he looking at the blond. "I don't think green is Oliver's most flattering color. We should help him with that."

"What did you have in mind?"

"I don't care what color his costumes are when he puts them on or what colors he fletches his arrows in, but the second he puts on his Green Arrow gear, I want it to turn pink...hot pink...and stay that color. Late Nite Lite News is going to love the new Hot Pink Arrow." He'll have to arrange to drop a word to them to expect a forthcoming change in the Green Arrow’s appearance. His grin widens. Watching that and Oliver trying to figure it out. That's going to be even more fun that watching Oliver pounding against the shatterproof glass of his indoor ponds.

"I can see that being on your retainer is going to be very interesting."

"And profitable." Lex turns to look at her. "You're accepting my offer then?"

Zatanna pulls a business card from her white vest and tucks it beneath the waistband of his boxers. "On a trial basis. We'll see how it goes. Call me when you need me. My agent can provide you with bank account numbers and handle the contract."
"Good." Lex glances toward the windows, deciding which one he wants to shatter. "I'm going back to Clark while you finish up with Oliver."
Lex returns to the penthouse, a jealous Clark has locked him out. Meanwhile Batman drops in on Oliver.

Lex lands on his balcony, the tiles icy cold under his bare feet. He vigorously rubs his goose-bumped arms and hurries toward the beckoning warmth of his penthouse. He smiles as he sees Clark standing in front of the doors, watching him. Now there's something to heat him up.

He comes to a puzzled halt in front of the glass doors. Why is Clark standing there, blocking the way instead of pulling the doors open? Oh, now. Clark's reaching for the door handle. Lex frowns as he hears the soft snick of the lock. What the fuck? "Clark? Clark!"

Clark reaches up and yanks the insulating drapes shut across the frosted windows.

"Clark!" Lex huffs as he listens to the sound of his lover's footsteps moving away from him. It's his house, damn it. How dare Clark lock him out? He reaches for the door and pauses, his hand on the cold metal handle. If he forces the door, he will be taking this to another level; a level that he has no desire to visit with his lover. Particularly not while Clark is...could that be it? He's heard plenty of comments about pregnant women and how sensitive they were. Perhaps pregnant aliens were the same.

He sighs and leans his head against the chilly glass, watching the frost clear and reform with his breathing. Perhaps he should turn this around and look at it from another angle. If Clark's locking him out of his own place, that means on some level that Clark's come to consider the penthouse his place as well. A place where Clark is comfortable and confident enough to start setting some rules. First chocolate ice cream and Fruittitoots, and now locking him out. That's progress of a sorts, isn't it?

Lex takes his hand off the handle and taps softly on the frame. "Clark? Come on, open the door."

Oliver snuggles deeper into the soft leather. He must've had quite the time. His head hurts. His body aches. And he can smell tequila. He stretches and then freezes into stillness at the pain radiating from
his ribs. With the pain, memory comes flooding back and his eyes snap open. He gasps in horror as he finds himself eyeball to cushion with the Luthor couch. He shoves off the couch and lands on the floor with a jarring thump. "Zat?"

Oliver gives the couch a disgusted look. That thing is going to a garbage dump where it and it's gross Luthor germs belong. Why is it so damned cold in here? Had the boards come lose from the panel that the Catwoman wannbee's buddy had broken? He looks toward his windows and sucks in an outraged breath as he stares at row of shattered panels.

There's only one left standing smooth and whole in it's frame. What's...he has a second's impression of something big and black getting bigger and blacker and then his last window is shattering around it. He instinctively cover his face with his arms. "Shit! Shit! What hell is wrong with you, you freak? Did mommy decided that you were too ugly to breastfeed?"

Oliver lowers his arms, expecting to see Luthor and instead finds himself staring up at a large black-clad shape with pointy ears. Oh, crap. Had he just dissed Batman and Batmom? Crapcrapcrap. Word was that you just didn't make comments of any kind about Batmom and Batdad. Ever. He smiles weakly. "Sorry, man. I thought that you were someone else."

Batman stares at him. Dark pits of eyes glare from the famous cowl. Thin mouth, shut tight and scowling beneath the shadowing loom of his suit's batsnout. The stiff fabric of his cape falls over his elbows, making him seem even bigger as he hooks his hands over his utility belt. The tilt of alert batears conveys his complete disbelief.

"Honestly." Oliver manages to work his way to his feet, hyperaware of every sore muscles and pained rib. "I had a bit of a problem in here earlier as you can see. I thought that he was coming back for more. I would never insult you or your...I wouldn't. Really."

Batman stalks around the room, pausing to give the flattened desk and extra hard stare. He picks up both halves of the torn laptop and inspects them.

"You see, what happened," Oliver relaxes and starts to take a step forward. He freezes as the batears turn towards him and hard dark eyes focus on him. He holds up his empty hands. How does the other man do that with a mere stare, he wonders enviously. One stare and he feels like he's alone deep in a forest with a grizzly bear watching him. "Okay. Okay. I'll stay here. But you see what that bastard did. He's got to be stopped."

Batman peers at the broken laptop again.
"He's going to claim that this is all about his boyfriend, but it's not true at all." Oliver eyes the stiffening line of Batman's body. Is he getting through to the other hero? Luthor has always been dangerous, even back at Excelsior, but now that Weirdo Angel has managed to acquire powers...goddamnit, he'd been right, the whole damned time!

He should have trusted his satellite images. Luthor did have super powers. How long had Weirdo Angel been concealing them? Had Luthor had them at Excelsior? Had Lex been born with them or acquired them along the way? If so, how had Lex gotten them? It's massively unfair that wicked Weirdo Angel had gotten powers and a hero like him hadn't. Olivier takes a step toward Batman, determined to make the other hero understand that he's trying to save Clark. "I'm only doing this because I care about him...not like that, you know, but as a friend. I'm a girl kind of guy...I mean I like girls. Shit. I'm babbling. Sorry, but I mean...damn, the Batman in my office. The guys aren't going to believe it. Hell, I don't believe it."

Batman discards one of the laptop halves and tucks the other under his arm.

"Wait." Oliver frowns as he notices the gleam of the undamaged edge of the hard drive. "What are you doing? That's my property. I thought that you were here because you got my message about having info on catching Catwoman."

The edges of the cape snap as Batman stalks toward him and stares long and hard at him. The thin lips curl back and a low growl rumbles deep in the wide chest.

"Pisses you off, does she? I can see that. She's one sneaky puss" Oliver's head rocks back as a gauntleted fist smacks into his face and he collapses unconscious onto the couch.

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CRUNCH! Clark chews angrily as he stabs his frozen peach yogurt with the remaining half of his pickle. How dare Lex let that fishnet floozy touch him! He shoves the other half of the pickle in his mouth and ignores the distant sound of tap-tap-tap against the balcony doors. He hopes Lex freezes his sexy ass off out there.

"Clark?" Lex calls. "Clark?"

Clark grabs a fresh pickle from the jar, stabs the yogurt, and then bites hard into the green flesh. He
pauses to enunciate clearly, "Dickhead", and the resumes the stab, crunch, stab rhythm.

"What? Clark, did you just call me a "

"You heard me. Dick. Head."

"Clark, come on."

Crunch, stab, crunch. Clark ignores the sound of the balcony doors rattling.

"It's cold out here."

"I'm sure Miss Fishnets would be happy to do something about that!"

"What? Clark "

"What's next, Lex? Am I gonna come home and find French Maids and a Butler in a throng?"

"Fuck it, Clark! Nothing happened!"

"Ha!" Clark waves a peach yogurt loaded pickle in the air. "I saw her reach for your boxers!"

"She gave me a fucking business card! That was it. I was on the couch, plotting to fuck you, when Oliver and Fishnets showed up and kidnapped me. Now open the fucking door! It's cold out here."

Clark jabs his pickle back into the yogurt and strides to the balcony doors. He turns the lock and then opens the door a tiny crack. "Let's see it."

"See what?" Lex scowls at him.
"The card."

"Here. Take it." Lex shoves the card into his lover's hand and pushes past him into the warmth. He stomps past the kitchen and to the fireplace and plants himself in front of it. "God, it's cold out there."

Clark closes the door and follows, yogurt in one hand and card in the other. He sneers. "Zatanna? What kind of name is that?"

"I wouldn't recommend commenting on it to her. She might turn you into an alien space toad. Why is there a jar of pickles on the mantel?"

"I like pickles." Clark drops the card on the mantel. He pulls his pickle stub from the yogurt and takes a bite. "How did Oliver get past your security and kidnap you?"

Lex turns his backside to the fire. He inches closer to the wonderful heat. "It was magic."

"Right. Magic." Clark rolls his eyes. "They just poofed in, poofed your trousers off, and poofed out."

"Something like that. I can't blame the trousers on Oliver and Zatanna. After you stomped off, I was sitting on the couch and thinking about you." Lex purrs as he strokes his fingertips along the brunette's shoulder. "I was thinking about all the ways that I had fucked you on that couch and which ways I wanted to fuck you tonight."

"You...you were?" Clark whispers hoarsely. He blushes as he thinks about the things that Lex had done to him on that couch and the things that he'd done to Lex as they worked their way through their joint collection of porn and sex manuals. He opens his mouth to ask what Lex has decided on and then frowns as he realizes that he's being expertly distracted.

"I was, indeed." Lex edges closer and his hand slides up to tease the dark curls at his lover's nape. "I got so hot thinking about you and what I was going to do to you...I ripped my trouser off."

"And then Oliver and Zatanna showed up?" Clark tilts his head into the stroking fingers. "And it all went poof?"
"Magic. It's apparently as real as space aliens." Lex eases the yogurt carton out of Clark's hand and sets it on the mantel. "Poof. Me and the couch."

"I wondered where the couch went." Clark looks at the empty couch-free air space and the litter of pharmacy bags across the floor beneath. Is that some sort of message...the way that Oliver had stole Lex and their couch, but not the condoms and lube? Insult or oversight? Maybe Oliver already had a closet full of condom boxes. Clark scowls. "I complete get why Oliver wants you, but our couch?"

Lex plants a kiss on his lover's throat. "It is Italian."

"I don't think that's it." Clark's eyes narrow as he stares at the rectangular imprint on the rug. It had been a great couch. Soft and comfortable but firm in all the right spots. Long enough that he could rest easily on it and wide enough that he and Lex had the perfect amount of space to...that's why Oliver wants it! "It's a trophy, isn't it? God, what's he gonna do next...infiltrate your laundry service and steal your sheets? Snatch your coffee cup?"

"It's as close as he's ever going to get to me again." Lex shrugs. "I can only hope that after tonight, he will accept that."

"I liked that couch." Clark frowns. He doesn't like the idea of Oliver sprawled on the couch where Lex had made love to him so many times.

Lex glances sidelong at him. "I could call Oliver, tell him to return "

"No." Clark slides a protective arm around his lover. "That will only encourage him. I'll talk to Oliver and tell him to send our couch back. Are you okay? He...didn't use magic to hurt you, did he?"

"He planned to hurt both of us." Lex kisses the other man's shoulder. He looks downward and his hands slide tenderly over the brunette's rounding stomach. "All of us."

"But you stopped him? How?"

"I convinced Zatanna to trade sides. Oliver was paying for her services on a case by case basis. I offered her a retainer."
"What was he going to do?" Clark's hands firm possessively on his lover's lean body. "Was he going to make you fall in love with him?"

"He wanted to make me forget you."

"He what?!" Clark hugs Lex tighter as he thinks of the horror of discovering that his lover doesn't remember him. Would he have been able to convince his paranoid lover of the truth? What if he hadn't been able to? He would've had to stand back and watch helplessly as Lex went from lover to lover, and maybe even married one of them. He would've had to raise their children with his parents, and what would he have told his children about their other daddy? "God. Lex."

"Sssh. It didn't happen." Lex smiles into the heavy muscles of the brunette's shoulder as Clark presses him close. "But I think that you should reconsider working with Oliver."

"There's no way that I'm every joining his team." Clark growls. "Not after this."

"He might try again. This isn't the first time that he's kidnapped me."

"What?" Clark moves back, looking into his lover's face. "When?"

"There were a couple of times at Excelsior when he and his crew of cretins snatched me. One winter, they blindfolded me and dumped me in a forest outside of the city. Another time, they left me at...it doesn't matter now." Lex looks away, staring into the fireplace. "Then after Zod...Oliver had satellite images of Zod doing...things."

Clark pats the sleek shoulders soothingly, knowing how much his lover hates talking and thinking about being possessed by Zod. "Did Oliver know?"

"Not about Zod. He thought that it was me...that I had super powers. He hired some goons to...keep an eye on me and find out if I really did have powers. They threatened Lana, and shot me in the shoulder, and threatened to shot me in the groin. All in an attempt to force me to manifest super powers that I didn't have."

Clark gasps as he remembers seeing Lex and Lana trapped in the burning warehouse. He'd used his
newly discovered freeze breath to stop the fire so that his friends could escape. "Oliver did that?"

"Not personally." Lex sneers. "He outsourced it to Orlando Block."

"I wonder if the J Team knows that Oliver did that." Clark frowns. Would they have condoned it? Did they know about Oliver's plan to make Lex forget him? "The team didn't form until afterwards."

"You said earlier that you had been to a meeting with them." Lex sinks down onto the piles of pillows scattered across the red blanket. He picks up a chocolate-dipped strawberry and bites into it. "What was on the J Team's tiny collective brain?"

"The usual." Clark shrugs. "I opted out of the mission this time."

"Good."

"They didn't like it."

"Tough."

"They don't like us being a couple either."

"You were expecting them to stand up and cheer?" Lex licks strawberry juice from his fingers. "Oliver isn't going to like my being happy with anyone."

"I know." Clark sits down, next to his lover. He leans over and presses a quick kiss to the bare curve of Lex's head. He hadn't cared how Oliver felt about it. But it would be nice if just one of his friends would be happy for him instead of full of dire warnings. Even his parents...his mouth tightens. "I don't think Oliver was happy about not being invited to the cocktail reception that you went to. He wanted to meet that Wayne guy."

Lex smirks. "I expect that Oliver will. Sooner or later."

"Good. Maybe that will cheer him up."
"I wouldn't bet on it," Lex mutters.

Clark slides down, making himself comfortable on the pillows. "What?"

"Nothing."

"I have something for you." Clark slides a hand under one of his pillows.

"I saw." Lex glances at the pharmacy bags, huddled between the lines outlining where the couch had been. "Six hundred somethings to be exact. I hope you aren't planning to use all of them tonight."

"Jerk. Here."

"What's this?" Lex takes the envelope, glancing at the Kent Farm address stamped in the upper corner in royal blue.

"Open it and find out."

Lex lifts the flap and pulls out a white card stamped with a green tree. He reads aloud, "The Kent family invites you to join them for a festive tree-trimming evening tomorrow at seven o'clock." He raises an eyebrow at his lover. "Is that going to be followed by cow-tipping cocktails?"

"Lex. For my parents this is a damned big olive branch. They know that you will be going as my date. I expect you to go and play nice."

"Take all the fun out of it." Lex props the card against the dish of chocolate-covered strawberries. He picks up a strawberry and offers it to his lover.

Clark smiles and leans forward. He bites the berry in half.

"Casual dress?" Lex asks.
"Uh-huh." Clark eats the other half of the berry and takes his lover's hand in his own, slowly licking Lex's fingers clean of juice. "It'll be fun. Kara's counting down the hours and minutes."

"So Kara, your parents, and who else?"

Clark plants a kiss in the center of the other man's palm. "Chloe, Pete, Lois, and their dates if they want to bring one. There may be some other people. My mom invites her father every year, but he hardly ever shows up. Judge Ross. But she's a pretty popular guest, so she can't always make it. Mr. Sullivan usually goes."

"I'll bring a bottle of wine."

"My mom will like that."

"And your dad won't," Lex murmurs with satisfaction.

"He's strictly a beer man."

"More wine for the more discriminating palates. I'll have to think of something to bring for your father. Something...special."

"Lex," Clark warns. He leans over the other man.

Lex widens his eyes, trying to look innocent. "Something nice."

Clark sighs. Great. He can see it now...his dad pushing platters of fruitcake and Lex doing something 'special' and 'nice'. Maybe they'll get used to each other and settle down, but for the next couple of years, he and his mom are going to be doing a lot of refereeing. Oh, who is he kidding? He's gonna be refereeing still when their kids are ready for the university. He grins at the vision of their kids rolling their eyes and muttering about their dads and grandad. "Lex?"

"Ummm?"
"How are we gonna tell my parents?"

Lex grins happily. "About the thirteen little Luthor-Kents that we are going to unleash on the world?"

"No. About the four little Kent-Luthors that we are bringing into the world," Clark corrects. "Promise me to stay awaaaway from spreadsheets when you're drunk."

"What? But I saw..."

"Jor El showed me. There's four."

"Oh."

Clark traces the curve of his lover's upper lip with the tip of a strawberry. "Something wrong with four?"

"No, no, four's great. I'm delighted that we're having four. It's only that," Lex bites into the ripe berry.

"That what?" Clark eats the rest of the berry.

"I always wanted a big family. I was so happy when Julian was born." Lex sighs. "I wanted brothers and sisters. Lots of them. I always planned that one day, I would have that big family."

"Me too." Clark leans down for a kiss. "I know my parents would be thrilled to have grandkids overrunning the farm. We can have more later. Jor El said something about a possible one hundred and fourteen."

Lex's eyes light up. "One hundred and fourteen?"
"Not that we are going to have that many." Clark gives the other man a stern look. "We are going to stop at a reasonable number."

"One hundred?"

"You need to revise your definition of reasonable."

"Ninety?"

"Keep revising."

"Eighty?"

"Lex."

"Alright. Sixty."

"No."

"Forty?"

"Read my lips. No. Way."

"Make me a counteroffer then," Lex orders. "What about...twenty?"

"What about five," Clark suggests.

"Eighteen?"
"That's a big hell, no." Clark weakens as he looks into the soft gray of the other man's eyes and thinks of children with that same beautiful shade coloring their irises. "Okay. Six."

"Ten?"

"Six."

"Nine?" Lex asks. "Nine's a good number."

"Six."

Lex pulls the brunette down and carefully hugs him. He stares thoughtfully at the bags of condoms as he nuzzles his lover's throat. "Six would be good."

Clark eases onto his back and shifts about trying to get comfortable on the floor. "We're going to need names."

"Here. Try this one." Lex tucks a pillow under the brunette's back and a second under the knees. "Better?"

"Umm." Clark relaxes as the beginning ache dissipates. He smiles as his lover adjusts more pillows around him. "Nice."

"Wait. I'll be back in a second."

Clark yawns. The growing darkness of the room spreads seductively around him as the fire burns lower and the last of the wax candles burn out. He breathes in the scent of the burning wood and the heavy sweetness of the dried rose petals. He gropes across to the closest plate and snags a strawberry. The tastes of berry and dark chocolate fill his mouth. It's not pickles and ice cream, but it's pretty good all the same. He blinks sleepily as Lex reappears at his feet with a bottle of oil. "What's that?"

"Massage oil." Lex pours some into the palm of his hand and warms it. "Did Jor El say what we're having?"
"No." Clark moans with pleasure as Lex's oiled hands move over his foot, finding every achy spot and soothing the aches away. "God. That feels good. I wanted it to be a surprise. Do you mind? Would you rather know?"

"I would like to know."

"Ask Jor El then and don't tell me."

"I won't." Lex starts on Clark's other foot.

"What are you gonna do? With Zatanna, I mean." Clark yawns again and cuddles against his nest of pillows. "I'm not going to walk into the Planet and find a frog sitting on Lois' chair, am I?"

"I think Lois is more likely to turn into a crow than a frog."

Clark sniggers. He can easily imagine Crow Lois screaming, 'CAW! CAW! CAW!' at Lex and pecking at his bald head. "You are not allowed to turn my friends and family into animals. Got it?"

"Got it. What about Oliver?"

"If I wasn't pregnant, I'd kick his ass from here to Hawaii."

"You're tensing up again. Relax," Lex orders.

"What are you really going to do with Zatanna?"

"Use her. That's what I'm paying her for...services rendered on demand. If Zod or Brainaic return, for example...I don't know about you, but I think they would make lovely blow-up dolls in a universe far, far away. Or perhaps bookends for my Warrior Angel collection. I will have to think about that one. In the meantime, I could use a little more help with my eels...magic could make for some interesting options there."
Clark smiles as he watches the familiar Mad Scientist At Work expression slip over Lex's face. It used to scare him, but now...it's hard to be worried about a man who is massaging his achy feet. Will some of their children inherit Lex's science skills or business bent or artistic talents? He hopes so. And that some of them want to be journalists and farmers. Will they want to play football like him and his dad? Or will they want to fence like Luthors? He rubs his stomach. What will their faces look like? Will they have his mouth and Lex's eyes? His eyes and Lex's nose? He falls asleep, imagining little faces.
It's A Red K Christmas! (53/62)

Chapter Summary

Clark goes to see Oliver.

Oliver puts his coffee cup down on the bar counter. He looks over the edge of his new laptop as the last of his janitorial staff gets on an elevator already crammed with garage bags, booms, vacs, and cleaning products. God knows what they thought had happened in his office, or what they thought of the fact that he'd pulled a stool up behind the bar and watched them from his perch instead of clearing out. But he hadn't wanted to risk the possibility of some curious worker discovering his safe full of Green Arrow supplies and costumes. So he had sat behind the remains of his bar as broken furnishings had been hauled out and windows boarded up. He'd tried to concentrate on email and reports as the rooms were cleaned, dusted, polished, and otherwise rendered as tidy as possible.

He sighs as he looks at the large hole in the wall of his conference room. Should he have the hole filled in or made into second door? A window? He could simply take out the rest of the wall and make his conference room open onto his office area. He needs to order another desk and have carpenters in to repair his bar and have that damned Luthor couch removed. Fortunately he has a secretary that he can delegate all that to, leaving him free to deal with the important stuff.

Oliver reaches behind him and grabs a bottle of whiskey. He pours a little into his coffee cup and drinks as he calls up the Green Arrow board hosted by his publicist. He leans forward, doing his best to ignore the Abominable Luthor Couch lurking in the center of the room. He studies the images coming up on his screen. His publicist had told him that she intended to change the page to reflect the season. The familiar green banner is now gold with rows of white snowmen transfixed with a multitude of green arrows.

Underneath is a large photo. He stands 'outdoors' with 'snow' piled around his boots and a red cape swirling over his shoulders in the air provided by a fan as he aims his arrow at the viewer. A painted backdrop behind him shows snowy mountains. He'd been concerned that the picture would look staged and cheesy, but it looks as good as his publicist had promised when she'd talked him into posing. Nice and seasonal. Below his photo are holly sprig letters spelling out 'Enter Here'.

He clicks through and then picks 'GA Board'. He'll catch the photo gallery on the way out and see what's new there. Oliver looks over the list of thread topics and number of posts. The 'Arrow Wear' thread seems to be particularly active today. He hasn't seen that many new posts on his costume since some members of the public had taken exception to the information that his costume was mostly leather. There had been a serious flame war going before his publicist had managed to restore peace to the board. Is that starting up again? He clicks on the thread and begins scanning the posts. What? New costume? Where did they get that from?
Oh, shit...there's the anti-leather group saying that it's about time that he stopped wearing leather. Other posters are voting on whether he should stick with leather or choose pleather. Other posters are speculating on whether he will pull on spandex. What's this 'Under Arrow' thread? ArrowItToMeBaby had started a vote on what he wears under his Arrow Wear. And 65% of them think that he goes commando while the rest are divided between boxers, briefs, thong, and jockstrap. It's been a few months since he's posted anything to his board. Oliver smirks as he clicks on reply and types, 'Nothing gets between me and my leathers.'

He returns to the main Arrow Wear page and looks at the rest of threads. What's this Red Cape thread? Oliver opens it and frowns at the first post where ArrowMe2 had breathlessly speculated that his Christmas photo means that he's thinking of finally adding a cape to his costume. Several other posters had responded enthusiastically to the idea. Oliver shakes his head. So much for his publicist's assurances that the red would give that Christmas touch to his picture and that he'd look like he was making a clever playful reference to being a Cape.

And how the hell did they expect him to manage a quiver of arrows, a bow, a concealing hood, and a cape? He skims down to HeartGreen's excited post with a link to the Late Nite Lite's Super Board. Oliver pours more whiskey into his coffee. Late Nite Lite...he might have known. He takes a bracing sip before clicking on the link. It takes him to a video. He clicks on it and watches impatiently as the obligatory commercial plays. His impatience fades as he watches Candi's national weather forecast for day.

That woman ought to get more recognition. He doesn't care what other weather people say, Oliver thinks as Candi leans toward the camera as she points toward a line of triangles swooping over the northwest, she's a great weather girl. Suddenly the camera switches from Candi's cleavage to Jennifer Hills' face as the anchor announces that the Green Arrow will be changing his costume and that Late Nite Lite is offering a prize to the first viewers to submit video footage or photos of the Arrow's brand new costume.

"Great. Thanks Late Nite." Oliver growls. Now he's going to have even more people following him around and gawking while he's trying to save lives. He looks up from the screen as his private elevator dings. The J Team are the only ones authorized to use that particular entrance and his girlfriend...is Dinah stopping by for a quickie on her way to the Planet? Oliver straightens hopefully and smiles as the elevator door opens. Oh.

"What the hell did you think you were pulling last night?!!" Clark demands as he stomps into the room.

Oliver watches as the brunette stops abruptly and looks around, turning in a slow circle to take in the scope of the damage. His eyes narrow as the other man's mouth curves upwards into a smile. Clark's
pleased that Luthor trashed his office? Oliver scowls. "My job."


"Yeah. My. Job. As a Super Hero I have an obligation to..."

"Kidnap my boyfriend?" Outrage flushes Clark's face pink. He touches the back of the couch. "Steal my couch?"

"I did not steal the damned couch!"

"Oliver...it's right here and when I first met you, you were stealing stuff. What are you trying to claim? That it followed you home?"

"You know why I steal."

"Lex bought this couch from some fancy Italian custom design place, Oliver. He didn't steal it from a museum or get it on the stolen art black market like that necklace you yanked off my mom's throat...Oh, my god!" Clark glowers at the blond. "You think that mom is hot too?! My mom! Oh. My. God."

What? How the hell had Clark gone from stolen Luthor couch to hot mom? And what did he mean by 'too'? No matter how long he's worked with Clark, he still can't get used to the way that other man's thoughts zip from topic to topic like startled hummingbirds. What's he supposed to say to that? Yeah, Clark's mom is a looker, but she's like...Clark's mom. Oliver takes a sip of his coffee. "I stole that necklace from Lionel Luthor, not your mom."

"Lionel probably had that necklace for years. He probably bought it for Lilian. You could have stolen it any time, but you wait until my mom is wearing that necklace," Clark's face darkens, "with a low-cut evening gown to steal it?"

"I didn't trace that necklace to Lionel until recently," Oliver snaps. "Jesus. Have you seen the security at LuthorCorp? Of course, it was easier to steal at party that I was invited to! I would've stolen it that night if Lionel Luthor had been wearing the necklace and a tutu. What the hell does your mom and her evening gown have to do with anything?"
"That's what I want to know! You have some weird klepto fetish thing going on, don't you? All that stuff about stealing stolen property back from the people that you claim stole it and returning it to original owners...that's all horse hooey!"

Horse hooey? Oliver sets his coffee cup down on the bar. "It's not horse shit, Clark. It's the truth, but I guess you've been hanging with Lex too long to know the truth if it bit you on the ass."

"I want my couch back."

"It's not like I want a skanky Luthor couch. I'll have someone deliver it."

"Now."

"Fine." Oliver types out a quick email to his janitorial department. "I've told my people to move the thing to the penthouse, but someone needs to be there to take delivery. It will be done in the next thirty minutes. That soon enough for you?"

"I'll be there." Clark pats the couch. "And it better not have so much as a scuff mark on it."

Oliver sweeps a speaking look over his office. "Unlike your boyfriend, I don't trash stuff for the sheer joy of destruction."

"This?" Clark glances around the office and smirks. "This is nothing. Personally, I don't blame him...you stole our couch. That's stooping pretty damned low."

"How many times do I have to tell you that I didn't steal the goddamned couch?! If I wanted an Italian couch, I could buy my own."

"But then, it wouldn't be Lex's would it?"

Oliver narrows his eyes. "What's that supposed to mean?"
"You stay away from my boyfriend." Clark glares back. "And my mom!"

"Your mom?" Oliver asks, bewildered. What does Clark's mom have to do with any of this? It's not like he'd accidentally taken that battered fifth hand couch in Clark's loft or the second hand number from the Kents' living room? "Who said anything about your mom?"

Clark points two fingers at his eyes and then points at Oliver. "I'll be watching you."

"I'm not the one who needs watching!"

"That's a matter of opinion."

"Why didn't you tell me that Lex had powers?" Oliver demands. "How long has he had them? Since Dark Thursday? Since his first visit to Smallville?"

Clark's face tightens and then goes blank. "Smallville? What's my home town got to do with anything?"

"Oh, come on, Clark. It's only the weirdo capital of the world."

"Smallville is a very nice town. It has the best farmers' market for miles around and everyone knows it. People come from Grandville and Metropolis to buy our produce. And Met U's coach always attend the Crows' games. Do you know how many guys from Smallville are on the Met U team?" Clark draws himself up. "And Smallville is home to the very first Talon, and we have the lowest crime rate in..."

"God. You sound like the chamber of commerce spokesman."

"What do you know about Lex's first trip to Smallville anyway? How long have you been spying on him?"

Oliver snorts. "I didn't even know Lex then, much less spy on him. This freaky bald kid shows up at my school with some lame story about losing his hair in a chemical lab accident. Of course, I checked it out, and then I found out that he'd been hit by a meteorite shower. It made perfect sense
that Little Weirdo Angel would have visited the World Weirdo Capital."

"What did you call him?" Clark demands sharply.

"Weirdo Angel...after all those stupid Warrior Angel comic books that he read. It's what we all called him at Excelsior. Okay, I started it. I'll admit that. Weirdo Angel or Little Man." Oliver smiles. "He, of course, had to call me, Mr. Queen."

"That's not funny, Oliver."

Oliver wipes the lingering smile off his face and assumes a grave expression. "Of course not. I told you that I've changed. That was back then, before I knew that bullying was bad. You can tell me, Clark...is Lex one of those...what do you guys call them...meteor freaks?"

"Lex is the man that I love. The man that I will be making a family and home with. That's all you need to know." Clark steps back and slaps the elevator button. "I expect my couch to be back at the penthouse within thirty minutes."

"Damn it, Clark...Lex is dangerous! You can't slide out of here without telling me about his powers. What's he got besides being super strong, super fast, and flying?" Oliver's eyes round and his jaw drops. "Oh, my freaking god! Those are the same as your powers and you're lovers...goddamnit...he's...he's...one of your people, isn't he? But how? God. No wonder he's such a freak. Wait! Clark! Wait! I didn't mean it like," Oliver sighs as the elevator door shuts on a scowling, glaring Clark, "that. Great. Maybe if I send flowers with the couch."
"Did you find him? Tell me that you found him alive 'cause these people are driving me fucking insane." Lucas stalks into his brother's LuthorCorp office, slamming the door shut. He frowns as he sees Lex sitting behind a desk with a large pad of some sort and what appears to be three million colored pencils. "What are you doing?"

"Sketching. What does it look like?"

"Sketching." Lucas rolls his eyes. "I'm being hounded from one end of the building to the other by people with stacks of graphs, charts, and spreadsheets. Not to mention all those lawyers with mile thick stacks of papers that they want me to read. God, I want to shove them all out the nearest window."

Lex trades a pale yellow pencil for a darker one. "You can't."

"I know." Lucas sighs regretfully. "Too damned many witnesses."

"Oh, there are ways around that. I meant that the windows are shatter-proof."

"Huh." Lucas looks down, his attention drawn by the impression of movement beneath his boring brown dress shoes. He takes a hasty step back as he realizes that he's standing square on top of his brother's glass-topped goldfish pond. "Why do you supposed dad did that? To keep from being tempted?"

"I suspect it had a great more with removing temptation from his employees."

"There is that." Lucas frowns as he watches the colorful fish skimming through the water. A few were gathering on his end of the pond, but the rest were lazily swimming about, flirting with the drifty leaves of aquatic plants and dropping down to mouth the green beads of a long necklace wrapped around the stump end of...Lucas tilts his head. Is that a spine?
"You aren't enjoying being in charge of LuthorCorp?"

"Hell, no. Why did dad do it?" Lucas asks as the fish move away from him to nibble on the ragged end of the spine. "Does he hate me that much? I mean, you're the big suit guy...why did he name me to be in charge of LuthorCorp if he disappeared? I almost fell out of the damned window when the lawyers told us."

"Several reasons. One, the likelihood that if he disappeared, I was more likely to have something to do with that than you were."

"Did you..." Lucas slices the edge of a hand across the front of his throat.

"No."

"So, this isn't..." Lucas taps the glass top of the fish pond with his toe.

Lex looks up from his artwork. "Have you ever known our dad to wear worrybeads?"

"Well, no. But god knows what he might do now that he's been exposed to large doses of Dr. Dawn. He keeps a fucking Truth Journal, Lex!"

"Dr. Dawn isn't going to be a problem for much longer."

"Oh?" Lucas stares downwards, trying to remember if he's ever seen Dr. Dawn wearing green beads. There's something familiar about that necklace. Something prickling at the edges of his mind. "She have a fish problem?"

"She lives in Montana, Lucas. Do you know how far from an ocean that is? How could she possibly have a fish problem?"

"People in Kansas seem to be having a lot of fish problems and it's not exactly ocean front property."
"Only the ones that ask for it." Lex drops his yellow pencil and picks up a dark red one. He bends over his sketch pad.

"You said that dad had several reasons for putting me in charge."

"There's confusion to the enemy. If a third party disappeared dad, they would be watching you after the news that you were left in charge; they would be wondering what unexpected depths you had."

"Fuck you."

"And that way, if there were any suspiciously bloody bits left behind, the police would be focused on you, leaving me free to...take whatever action the situation demanded."

"Fuck both of you."

"Language, Lucas." Lex smirks. "Dad would be appalled."

"Fuck my fucking language."

"I didn't say that you wouldn't get to make a contribution or that dad didn't think that you would have both the ability and desire to do so."

"Fucking right. He might be a mean sonofabitch, but he's our sonofabitch."

"He feels the same way about us, you know." Lex considers his collection of pencils and trades the red one out for a teal. "Makes you feel all warm and fuzzy inside, doesn't it?"

"Jerkwad."

"I love you too, baby brother."
"Shut the fuck up."

"And, of course, with dad being the particular variety of sonofabitch that he is...he could have left you in charge, merely to see if you had the balls to really run LuthorCorp. Or," Lex puts the teal pencil back and takes a white one, "he could have been interested in seeing whether we would work together or attack each other."

"I don't want to run a stupid business where I have to wear stupid suits and I can't shoot stupidfuckers who get on my nerves," Lucas snaps. "Have you heard anything from dad? The sooner he reappears the better."

"Hold that thought," Lex murmurs dryly.

"So have you heard from him?"

"He hasn't sent me any messages."

"So while I'm running my ass off with LuthorCorp, you're busy doing...what exactly? Regressing to your preschool days?" Lucas walks around the desk and looks over his brother's shoulder. He frowns as he eyes the cheerful yellow farmhouse. Snow drapes the roof and yard. There's a twinkling Christmas tree framed by a big downstairs window.

And at an upstairs window, a toddler with dark, curly hair is pressing against the frosted glass for a better view of the yard below, where group of reindeer preen in the gilt harness that hitches them to an ornate sleigh. A short, round Santa is stomping snow off his boots on the front steps and beside him there is big red bag, fat with gifts. Lucas shakes his head. "What is wrong with you?"

"Any number of things...ask anyone."

"I keep telling you, Lex, if you've gotta draw, at least draw something interesting...you know, like girls with gigantic honkers." Lucas walks over to the bar and considers the selection. "If you didn't have a message from dad, why did you want me to trot over to your office?"

"I have a suggestion."
Lucas pours himself a shot of tequila. "A suggestion?"

"Hmmm." Lex studies his sketch and then the rows of purple shaded pencils. After a moment, he picks up a soft smoky lavender signs his work.

Lucas tosses back his drink and pours a second and drinks it as well. He puts his glass down. "Okay, I'm braced...what is it?"

"There's a position that recently came open that would suit your talents and inclinations," Lex begins.

"Fucking hell, no. I'd throw myself out a window before taking dad's job on a permanent basis. Be a lot faster than drowning in a sea of paperwork." Lucas pours another shot. "Besides, I thought from what you said that the old bastard was okay."

"I don't know that I would say that he's okay precisely, but I would rate his chances of survival very high." Lex closes his sketch pad. "It's clear that the constraints of business world left you frustrated."

"You can't fuck your staff or shove the more annoying ones out windows. Where's the fun in that?" Lucas shrugs. He looks thoughtfully down at his shot glass. "Giving crazy orders and watching people trying to figure where the fuck you are going with that, now that's kinda fun. But it's not fun enough. When dad drags his ass back...I think I'm gonna leave for awhile. See what I can find."

"What if there's something fun to do in Metropolis?" Lex asks as he captures his loose pencils and sharpens them before placing each one back into the wooden box. "A throne that's waiting for the next king to claim it. Would that be enough to persuade you to stay?"

"A throne, huh?" Lucas tosses back the tequila and slaps his glass down on the bar. "Thrones are your style, not mine."

"You want this one. I've been watching you circling the perimeter of Martin Edge's turf. Don't tell me that you haven't considered taking it."

"It's an interesting turf, but there are other equally interesting turfs out there." Lucas walks away from the bar, taking the bottle with him. "Metropolis does have it's attractions, I'll admit that. It's got disadvantages too. Fuck." Lucas stops abruptly as he remembers where he had seen those beads. He looks at his brother's serene face. "Fuck. Dad's gonna be pissed if he finds out. They were childhood
friends or something, weren't they?"

"Not that good of a friend...he knows things that Dad will be happy to have safely buried." Lex closes his pencil case and places it on top of his sketch pad. "Assuming that dad does find out."

Lucas scowls. "Tell me that you didn't do this 'cause you thought that I couldn't make my own move if I decided to go for it."

"I didn't."

"Good."

Lucas gestures at the fish clustered around the rapidly vanishing spine. "So why did you?"

"I couldn't very well push him out the window, could I?" Lex stretches lazily.

"Good point." Lucas nods. "Not tell you your business or anything...but people will have seen him come here."

"I told you that there were ways. Didn't you ever steal the real blueprints for LuthorCorp from dad's safe and take a good hard look at them?" Lex yawns. "I could use some coffee. Would you like a cup?"

"I'm good." Lucas takes a drink from his bottle. He drops into a chair and sprawls out as he watches the fish. "You were right. This is sorta restful. Could that fish wrangler guy of yours help me set up a tank? No goldfish. I want something...bigger."

"I'll loan Todd to you, but please no sharks or piranha...that's so boringly pedestrian."

"What the fuck!" Lucas surges to his feet as a section of wall slides silently aside and Hope walks in.

She ignores him and looks at his brother. "I have the box that you wanted."
Lucas walks past her to poke his head inside the narrow corridor. There's a fading row of dim lights on the floor, leading into darkness. He steps into the passage and the lights closest to him brighten. Motion sensitive lights. Good choice. He steps back into his brother's office in time to see his brother scurrying across to the coffeepot at the bar. Lex must have been serious about needing that coffee.

He watches with interest as Hope leans over the pond, her nipples pressing against the soft green wool of her sweater. Sweet. Her dark green miniskirt rides up her thighs as she twists around to look at his brother.

Hope asks, "Are you ready for me to remove the cover, Mr. Luthor?"

"Do it."

"I will be as quick as I can."

God, they should like a dentist and patient. Too bad his dentist doesn't wear miniskirts and tight shirts. He'd certainly go to her more often if she did. Lucas moves closer to the fish pond. Now that he's considering having something similar, it's much more interesting than it had been. He frowns at the glass as it slides back. What's with that odd blue-greenish that it has? Mere decoration or something else? "Lex?"

"Yes?"

The strained tone and the sound of a clatter brings his attention back to his brother. Lucas studies his brother's hunched back. Had Lex burned himself on the pot? "Lex?"

Hope grabs the necklace with the tongs and drops it into the dull metal box, snapping the lid closed. "Will there be anything else?"

Lex straightens and takes a deep breath. "Not at the moment. Thank you, Hope."

Lucas ignores Hope as she closes the pond cover and walks past him, disappearing into the passage with the box. He moves toward the bar. "Did you burn your hand?"
"No." Lex pours coffee and then turns, face tight and pale. "I dropped my cup. That's all."

"What's with the fish pond cover?" Lucas leans against the bar, placing his tequila bottle on it.

Lex takes a drink of his coffee. "What do you mean?"

"It used to be clear shatter-proof glass. Why did you change to that weird blue-green shade?"

"That's a recent modification."

Lucas looks over his shoulder at the pond. "Any particular reason for it?"

"Don't you think that the way that tint heightens the color of my fish is attractive?"

"I liked the clear glass better." Lucas looks back at his brother. "I would rather have that on mine."

Lex leans heavily against the other side of the bar, staring down into his coffee. "Tell Todd. He will arrange it once you have a location." He looks up at Lucas. "Have you decided to take over Martin's organization?"

Lucas nods. "Yeah. I may need a little extra firepower initially."

"That can be arranged. It's always important to make a big impression your first day on the job." Lex drinks. "Martin's second lives in an apartment on the fortieth floor of Madison Heights. It's an older building that has been refurbished."

"I know." Lucas gets to his feet. He smiles at his brother. "I need to go talk to a man about his windows. See you later."
Chapter Summary

Clark and Lex consider nursery room designs. A.C. and Bart chill on the beach.

"What do you think?" Clark curls comfortably on the bed as he considers the choices spread in front of him.

Lex peers over his lover's shoulder, blinking back the urge to spend the rest of his lunch hour, napping against Clark's warmth. He glances at the collection of glossy brochures, pamphlets, and catalogs gleaming in full color glory across the charcoal gray blankets. His hand smooths down the other man's side, sleepy interest stirring at the feel Clark tucked against his front. "Ummm."

"Ummm is not one of the choices," Clark warns. "If I spent the morning going from shop to shop, looking for the best deals, you can at least look at them."

"Best deals?" Lex caresses the other man's flank, his hand slipping lower. He frowns as Clark's determined thigh blocks him from claiming the prize. "Get whatever you want."

"We're going halves on this, Lex."

Lex sighs as he considers the Kent Farm's perpetually shaky finances. He could make some suggestions regarding ways to improve that, but Jonathan Kent would dance naked down Main Street before taking any suggestion of his. His fingers tap dance up and down his lover's hard thigh. "We could hire a decorator."

"No, we couldn't." Clark stares at him, narrow-eyed. His thigh remains in position, firmly blocking access to the goods. "I can't pay for half of a designer, Lex."

Lex imagines Clark clambering around on a ladder, insisting on doing half of the painting. He promptly lies, "Of course, you can."

"I can?" Clark eyes him suspiciously. "You're sure about that?"
"Completely. Besides, it's December...the off season for designers," Lex announces casually, gambling that his lover probably as much about the habits of designers as he knows about the habits of dairy cows.

"So they give discounts to get business?"

"Very good discounts. It's a hard time of year for them. Speaking of hard." Lex's hand darts over the blocking line of his lover's thigh. He palms the velvety heat of Clark's semi-hard cock.

"Oh. Ooooh." Clark pushes into the touch. "I didn't know they had an off season."

"Think of the time a designer would save us," Lex tempts. "We need to get the nursery set up as soon as possible."

"I don't know. Even with off season rates...oh!"

"If you agree to let me deal with the hiring process, we could get some additional discounts for allowing photos of the finished rooms to be published and mentioning who did them." Lex pumps faster as Clark trembles and pants against him. "Before you know it, your half of the cost will be quite low."

"If you're sure...aaaaaaahhhh!"

A.C. lounges on his beach towel, watching a Brazilian beauty sway past. "Are you sure you're old enough to be here?"

"Uh-huh." Bart stares after the young woman, forgotten beer lifted halfway to his mouth. His head swivels the other way as a trio of giggling women begin splashing each other in the water.

"I'm trying to imagine Clark agreeing to meet with you here, and I can't see it. Or Chloe."

"Hey!" A.C. smacks Bart on the head with a fold newspaper. "She's our teammate. Teammates don't get the hots for other teammates."

"Oh, that's rich. You were the one staring at that painting of Clark's nearly nekkid ass and talking about tapping it."

"It was a very fine ass," A.C. protests, "and I didn't know that the ass was Clark's at the time."

Bart looks at him, worried. "Does that mean that you're gonna quit the team after...treating Clark's pon farr?"

"About that," A.C. leans forward and plucks his beer bottle from the sand. He drinks and then turns to Bart. "I'm rethinking it."

"But Clark might die if..."

"I don't know what the hell Clark is since he never talks about it, but I think it's safe to say that he's not a Vulcan." A.C. waves his beer. "We should ask him instead of making assumptions. There might not even be anything wrong with him."

"I dunno. He's been awfully snappish lately, and he eats a lot. Have you noticed that he's getting sorta portly looking?"

"Stress eating. I had a girlfriend who did that during that special time of the month." A.C. nods wisely at Bart.

Bart's eyes round. "Are you saying that you think Clark's PMSing instead of pon farring? But...but...he's a guy!"

"He's an alien guy. So who knows? Maybe it's delayed puberty. Maybe it's an attack of blue balls."
Maybe he's getting ready to hibernate or spin a giant cocoon or something of the kind. My point is that we don't know or have any way of knowing. I think we should try talking to him first. Kidnapping him and locking him up with a case of condoms and lube and me...that seems a little extreme."

"I don't really feel comfortable with the plan either," Bart admits quietly. "Kidnapping, double-crossing...I expect that sort of thing from Luthor, but Oliver's supposed to be a friend and team leader."

"And Clark's not even officially part of the team. If Oliver is willing to do that to Clark...it makes me wonder what he'd do to a team member." A.C. drinks his beer and watches as a handsome man in a throng struts by. "There's another thing...a little something that Oliver either doesn't know or hasn't mentioned."

"What?"

"If Clark's got pon farr, it looks to me like he's already made his choice about who he wants to get down and pon farry with. I've been following him around and he's shaking up with Luthor."

"Luthor? Ewww."

"I know." A.C. grimaces. "But if Luthor is Clark's choice..."

"Yeah," Bart agrees reluctantly. "Wouldn't be right to try to force him to be with someone else just 'cause we hate Lex Luthor's bald guts."

"Seems to me that Oliver's been acting as weird as Clark lately."

"Breaking up with Lois. Taking up with Dinah."

"Putting Dinah on the team without so much as putting it to a vote," A.C. grumbles. "He's not the only one that's gotta work with her, you know? We shoulda all gotten to vote on it."

"Making Chloe unhappy." Bart frowns. "She doesn't like Dinah being part of the team either. Why
didn't Oliver put it to a vote?"

A.C. snorts. "'Cause it woulda gotten voted down and he knows it. What happens when he and Dinah get tired of each other? How's that gonna play out? It's gonna be a mess and we'll all get yanked into it. Add into that whole mess waiting to happen...the G.A. did something to piss the Bat off."

"What?" Bart stares at A.C. "Why?"

"Oliver's not talking and nobody's got the nerve to ask Bats, but word is that Bats says that the G.A. is to stay outta Gotham and away from the Cat. Or else."

"Oh, for crying out loud." Bart sighs heavily. "Catwoman? Ollie tried to get horizontal with her?"

"Makes my balls shrink two sizes just thinking about it."

"Someone needs to superglue the G.A.'s codpiece closed before he gets into anymore trouble."

A.C. takes a drink from his bottle. "What's he gonna do next? Tell Wonder Woman to suck his dick? I don't think that Clark's the one who needs to be locked up for his own good. If he's got pon farr, he's keeping it between him and Luthor."

"'Strue," Bart mumbles. He taps the rim of his bottle against his lips. "Clark's keeping it away from the team and team business."

"Much as I hate to admit it, having an in with Luthor might not be a bad idea." A.C. jams his bottle back down in the sand. "He's a ruthless and sly SOB. If anybody comes along who can take Clark down, the teams gonna go down with him, so I wouldn't mind having Luthor pissed off and aimed at them."

Bart brightens. "Yeah. That might be some consolation, if something or someone manages to take out the whole group. Gonna be real sad for them when Luthor gets 'em."

"Might as well look for the positives 'cause from what I saw of them together," A.C. sighs. "Neither
one of them plans on going anywhere. So if we want Clark on the team, Luthor's gonna be lurking backstage."

"Oh, my god." Bart gasps. "Oliver's got one of those sex addictions!"

"What? Oh, fuck."

"Yeah. That about sums it up. What are we gonna do?"

"I dunno. Break out the superglue?" A.C. asks as he reaches for his beer. He drains the bottle in one long swallow and then flops back down on his towel.

"I think that he's been hitting the booze again too."

"We've already got an isolated farmhouse rented," A.C. suggests. "It might do Oliver good to get away from the booze and other distractions. We'd need to remove the case of condoms and lube first."

Bart nods. "We could all chip in and hire a shrink."

A.C. digs out his cell phone. "We'll take a vote on it."

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Clark yawns and rolls over. He wiggles as something pokes him in the back and not in a good way. He shifts over and pats the bed. His hand flattens against a catalog hidden beneath the folds of their rumpled blankets. He pulls it out and flips it open to section on borders and stencils. There's school of colorful fish on the first page. Below that is a cheerful flotilla of sailboats cruising along the waves. He kinda likes the boats, but Lex has been quite interested in fish lately. He turns the page to find barns and farm animals. The opposite page features cars and trucks. He shifts again, trying to find a comfortable spot for his aching back.

"What are you looking at?" Lex punches up the pillows and arranges them around Clark. "How is that? Better?"
"Ummm." Clark settles into the perfect spot. "Yeah. Thanks. What do you think? Fish, farms, sailboats, or race cars?"

Lex glances at the proffered picture of clown fish and angel fish with little interest. "Boring composition."

"Okay. I'm not sold on that either. I like this one best." Clark flips back to the farm scene.

"You want our children to think that cows come in green or that pigs have angel wings?" Lex strokes back the dark waves of the other man's hair. "I don't think so."

"Like their first visit to grandpa's farm won't cure them of that." Clark rolls his eyes. "We can go for the realism if you want. Surely our designer can find something similar with Holsteins. I'd rather have chickens than pigs on it. We could have some Wyandottes. Maybe some Bourbon Red turkeys."

"The designer will find anything you want."

His stomach rumbles reminding him that neither he nor his lover had gotten around to eating lunch yet. "How about some soup and sandwiches?"

"Sounds good." Lex sits up. He leans over Clark and kisses him. "Give me a second to shower and get office ready again."

Clark waits until his lover vanishes behind into the bathroom before pushing himself out of his nest of pillows and lumbering upright. If he follows Lex into that bathroom, the other man will never make it back down to the office and get caught up enough on work to go to the party tonight with him. He picks up the royal blue robe that had been delivered shortly before Lex arrived, along with a selection of clothes that fit his new figure. Clark walks into one of the guest rooms and quickly cleans up. He slides the terrycloth around him, enjoying the soft warmth of the fabric. Clark wraps the lapels closed and starts as his pocket rings.
Chapter Summary

Clark is outraged when the returned couch disappears again.

Chapter Notes

For those not into DCU; Harleen Quinzel is Harley Quinn. Dr. Quinzel is a psychologist who fell in love with the Joker and broke him out of Arkham Asylum. She creates her own villain persona of Harley Quinn and has an off and on relationship with the Joker.

Lex briskly towels off and pulls on a fresh pair of boxers as he considers the changes that four kids will make to his lifestyle. For one thing, he's going to new more security and that's something that he hasn't talked to Clark about yet. He's already assigned Mercy and Hope to interviewing and weeding through the first round of applicants. The new round will consist of field trials and then assignments to his suite at Luthor Manor. Then he'll interview the remaining survivors. He pulls on a white dress shirt and reaches for the tie.

"WHAT THE HELL??"

At the sound of Clark's yell, Lex drops the tie and charges down the hall and into the living area. He relaxes as he sees Clark standing alone in the center of the room. He takes a second to admire the way the other man's favorite royal blue outlines heavily muscled shoulders and the firm arc of excellent ass. Lex walks up behind his lover. "Clark? What's the problem?"

"Look!" Clark points to an empty spot in front of the fireplace. "I can't believe he stole our couch again."

"Hmmm." Lex hides a grin. He needs to send Zatanna a bonus box of gourmet chocolate. "It was here when I stepped off the elevator."

"He came in here when we were," Clark turns and stares at him, face going pink with outrage, "making love and stole our couch!"
Lex adopts a concerned frown. "You don't think think that he...no, of course not. That would be crazy."

"And stealing our couch, isn't?" Clark reaches out and begins buttoning up Lex's shirt. "What?"

"You don't think that he watched, do you?"

Clark sucks in a deep breath and turns even pinker. He looks at Lex and then looks at the empty spot where the couch had been. He growls as he buttons the collar closed. "He better not have."

Which way shall he play this? He can encourage Clark to keep demanding the couch back and becoming progressively more pissed with Oliver as it keeps disappearing, or he can persuade Clark to let Oliver 'have' the couch and be constantly reminded of Oliver's fixation on him every time Oliver accuses him of something. Lex kisses the other man lightly. "Forget it. If Oliver likes the couch that much, perhaps we should allow him to have it."

"I like that couch, and there's the principle of the thing."

"Oliver steals stuff, Clark. He's been klepto as long as I've known him."

"What did he steal at Excelsior?" Clark scowls at the reminder. "Your school jacket?"

"Mostly the master copies of exams. Occasionally my trousers." Lex strokes back his lover's hair as he thinks of the public depantsifications that Ollie's band of cronies had inflicted on him. "Or my towel in the showers."

"He..." Clark flattens his lips tightly together. He takes a deep breath. His hands tighten around the other man's lean waist.

"Forget it. I have," Lex lies. "It was a long time ago."

"And you want to let him have our couch?"
"There are other couches out there. Better couches. I've had that one for several years." Lex shrugs. "It's probably time for a new couch anyway.

"He stole our couch. Twice!" Clark glances down the hallway that leads to the bedrooms. His eyes narrow grimly. "Are you suggesting that we reward that sort of behavior?"

"It's only a couch."

"No, it's not. It's your couch."

"It's not like he's stealing my boxers."

"Yet."

"Besides," Lex gently touches the tight roundness of his lover's stomach, "that couch was built for seduction. We need a different kind of couch now. We need a family couch."

"A family couch," Clark repeats, liking the sound of the words and the images of him and Lex curled up with a handful of kids watching cartoons. Or, knowing his lover, documentaries on Alexander the Great and the World Conqueror's Channel. He kisses Lex's forehead. "Something sturdy and practical. Easy to clean. My mom would probably enjoy helping us pick something out. I still don't know about letting Oliver keep the other one."

"Oliver needs help. Professional help. Before his kleptomania gets worse."

"It's not the klepto part that worries me. I've already talked to Oliver. I warned him to stay away from you." Clark's face tightens. "And my mom."

Lex blinks. "Your mom?"

"I don't know what else to do."

"Your mom?"
"Do you think that my mom's...hot?"

"Your mom?" Lex frowns, trying to adjust his thoughts to this new tangent. No way to answer that one except very carefully. "I never thought about it, but yes, your mom is a very attractive woman. What's that got to do with..."

"Oliver thinks that my mom is hot."

Lex stares wide-eyed at the brunette. What on earth had Oliver said to Clark to plant that idea? And how can he use it to widen the growing gap forming between Clark and Ollie? He bites back a grin as he thinks of Jonathan's reaction to an 'accidentally' dropped comment on Oliver's newfound interest in Martha. His own dad won't take it well either since Lionel's had a crush on Martha for years. "He does? How do you know?"

"Oliver stole stuff from my mom."

Lex blinks, trying to imagine what and why. There had been that diamond necklace, but although Martha had been wearing it, the diamonds belonged to his dad. "He did? What?"

Clark frowns. "The necklace that your dad loaned her. How could you have forgotten that?"

"I didn't. I thought that perhaps there had been something else."

"Oh." Mollified, Clark smooths the shirt over his lover's shoulders. "Think about it. Oliver could've swiped that necklace from your dad any time, but he waits until my mom is wearing it."

"I hadn't thought about it in that light." Lex nods. "You have a point."

"Plus..." Clark sighs. "A.C. called me while you were in the shower."

"Oh?" Lex prompts. "Is there a problem?"
"The team thinks that Oliver is a sex addict. I...I told A.C. about Oliver stealing from us and my mom." Clark searches his lover's face. "I hope you don't mind. I thought...under the circumstances...they should know that his stealing may be tied into that."

Lex fights down a snigger. "Normally I prefer to keep my private life private, but if you think that talking about the couch theft will help Oliver...you can tell them about the couch, but I want the rest of it to remain between us."

"I know this might be asking too much considering...but do you know a psychologist who might be suitable for Oliver? The team wants to isolate Oliver with one, but none of them knew which ones to contact. Do you have any ideas?"

Oh, god does he have ideas. Lex frowns, pretending to think about it. "There is one person that I've heard of. She used to work at Arkham Asylum so she's familiar with the issues facing capes, although she doesn't focus on sexual disorders."

"What's her name?"

"Harleen Quinzel. I'll be happy to get her contact information for you."

"Thanks, Lex. That's very generous of you." Clark rewards him with a long kiss.

"Any time," Lex murmurs breathlessly.
Chapter Summary

The Justice Team decides that Oliver needs help.

Where are the people on his GA board getting this costume change crap? No, he is not putting going to add a Robin Hood hat. No, he is not going to splatter GA on his chest. Or his back. Or his backside as one sicko had suggested. No, his boots are not going thigh high. No, he is not trading his Arrowcycle in for an Arrowcar or Arrowboat or Arrowcopter. No, the GA does not carry a man purse. Oliver strides out of the elevator, head down, texting away. No, no, no, and no. Where the hell "Ouch!" Oliver tumbles forward, automatically grabbing for balance. What the...gross! Oliver scrambles back from the waiting clutches of the Luthor couch. What is that doing back here? Maybe Clark had given it to him by way of an apology. He's willing to accept the apology, but he hardly wants a couch teeming with Luthor germs. His brown eyes narrow. What if it wasn't Clark. What if that sneaky bastard Lex had sent the couch back? Send it back so that he'd think it was from Clark and not be suspicious. But what is there to be suspicious of? His eyes widen. What if it's bugged?

Oliver kneels before the couch and studies the carved wooden legs. He kneels his slow way back and forth, closely examining the leather and the polished wood. He drops and rolls over onto his back, elbowing his way beneath the couch. There's just enough height to the thing that he can wiggle his head beneath without his nose touching, but it's a near thing. Oliver holds his breath as long as he can, before resorting to short shallow breathing. Nothing. Damn it.

He reluctantly braces one hand on the back as he leans down, peering at the cushions and folds of leather along the seams. He's still not seeing anything, but there might be something hidden beneath the cushions or even in the cushions. He could slash the couch up, but Clark had seemed pretty damned attached to the thing. The snap of his private elevator opening startles him and his foot slips, he crashes face first into the couch. "Shit!" He's going to have to touch it. Oliver carefully slides out and gets up.

"Oliver?" Victor asks.


"Hey, Oliver," Bart calls with exaggerated cheer. "How ya feeling today?"
"Give me a second." Oliver ignores his gathering crew. He might as well be through about it while he's spread across the cushions. He can go decootify himself as soon as he's done. And burn his suit. His hands grope among the cracks and crevices of leather covered cushions.

"Oliver? Are you...okay?" Dinah asks.

"Just a second. Almost done." He's determined to find the damned bug and then never touch this putrid couch again. Had he felt something there? Oliver shifts his body against the couch, ignoring the rude leathery raspberry noises that ensue.

"I thought I could deal with this, but...I can't," Dinah announces. "I have to go, but I'll chip in."

Victor clears his throat. "Oliver...umm, where did you get that couch? It looks like a nice one."

"It's not a nice one. It's a damned Luthor couch," Oliver snaps. Oh, wait. There it is. He snakes a hand beneath him.

"Okay." Victor sighs. "I'm in."

"AHA!" Oliver pops up triumphantly clutching a blue ink pen. His face falls as he looks at it. No way would Luthor be caught using something as common as a generic pen used by millions. It must be Clark's. He drops the pen with a sigh. "Aw, crap." He looks at the three guys standing well back from him. "What?"

"Nothing," Bart answers promptly.

A.C. and Victor trade looks and then Victor shrugs. "I wanted to make sure that we're still on for tonight. The mission, I mean."

"Yeah." A.C. nods. "We wanted to see if you were having any second thoughts about kidnapping Clark, instead of just...I dunno...talking to him. It seems sorta harsh. He is a friend, you know."
"It's not harsh." Oliver stands up. He gives them a stern look. "It's for his own good, and we are kidnapping him precisely so that we can talk some sense into him."

"While he's all pon farrish?" Bart asks. "Do you really think that's the best time for talking?"

Oliver sighs as he looks down at the short brunette. "Why are you so hung up on that?"

"Me?!" Bart's eyes round indigently. "I'm not the one who sent A.C. off to buy a case of condoms and lube."

"Yeah." A.C. frowns at Oliver. "Why me? Why did I have to go to the Super Sex Surplus store?"

"Because they wouldn't recognize you," Oliver snaps. God, why are they whining at him? He's proven that he's willing to do anything that he asks them to do, but he's got a known face. No one will think twice about a surfer guy like A.C. going in and buying supplies, but if he went in, it would be all over the tabloids that Oliver Queen bought his condoms in bulk and on the cheap.

Victor, Bart, and A.C. trade looks. A.C. nods, "So they know you there."

"Of course." Oliver lifts his chin. Who doesn't know him? His face has been plastered across enough papers, not to mention online media. He can't help it if he's a handsome and famous millionaire who can't step onto the sidewalk without being noticed.

"Right. So you don't think that grabbing a friend and locking him up is a bad thing as long as it's for his own good?" Victor asks. "Just want to be clear on that."

"I know you all have doubts about the idea." Oliver sweeps a look over the three guys standing in front of him. "I'm not happy about snatching Clark either, but it's not like a real kidnapping. We're all friends here. Clark knows that we won't hurt him. And in the long run, he'll be better off for it. He might even be grateful one day."

A.C. nods. "I see. So how are we supposed to get Clark somewhere isolated and snatchable?"

Oliver holds in a sigh. Easy to see that none of these guys had his experience in setting up a selected victim. It always amazed him how helpful his past as a reformed bully was in the superhero game. "Easy. We find out his schedule and look for opportunities in it. If we can't find an opportunity, we
create one. If I have to, I'll give him a call. Tell him that I need help and then when he shows up, we
snatch him."

"Suppose that could work," Victor murmurs.

"We better set it up ASAP." A.C. sticks his hands in the pockets of his orange coat. "No way to
know when the powers might return. I'll call Clark, see about setting up a meet to find out about his
schedule for the rest of the week."

Bart stares down at his sneakers. "I'll get with Dinah. Finish getting the house set up."

"Great." Oliver grimaces as he looks down at his cootie contaminated suit. "If you'll excuse me, I
need a shower."
Clark and Lex discuss how to tell Martha and Jonathan the big news.

Clark twists on the soft gray leather seat of a black BMW sedan as Lex pulls out of the castle gates. He glances over his shoulder at the two pairs of headlights following them. "Do we really need two cars of guards to drive to the farm?"

Lex glances at the rounded bulge of the brunette's stomach. "Have you told your dad yet? Or your mom?"

"Not yet. I decided that we should tell them together."

"In that case, no, two carloads of security are not enough. I better call for more backup."

Clark gives the other man an annoyed look. "Not funny. I've been trying to decide how to tell them."

"Decide fast."

"It's not that easy. I don't know what to say."

"What about...Mom, Dad, I'm pregnant," Lex suggests. "Neat, short, and straightforward."

"Blunt."

"I thought that blunt was a point of pride for your father."

"Not helping, Lex."
"How do you want to play it?"

"I thought that we'd go in the back door. I'll wait in the kitchen while you get my parents. That way we can have a few minutes of privacy. I talked to Chloe and Kara; they'll keep the other guests herded away from the kitchen."

Lex gives him a disbelieving look. "You want me to stand around in a room that has knives while you tell your parents that I knocked you up?"

"We knocked me up. It took both of us."

"I don't think that your parents are going to see it that way."

"And the kitchen is where I usually told them about...alien stuff. That way when they hear that I need to have a kitchen talk, it won't be such a shock when I tell them."

Lex sighs. "I wonder how many times your dad will stab me with the closest carving knife before remembering that I'm temporarily stab-proof."

"Zero. No stabbing."

"Don't tell me. Tell him."

"And while we're discussing telling parents, what about your dad? When do you want to tell him?"

"Never."

"Maybe 'want to' was the wrong phrase, but you need to be thinking about it, Lex. He's going to notice us carting four infants around the castle."

"What about a nice card? I could order my secretary to pick one out."
"We can tell him together one day if you like." Clark strokes the leather seat as he looks around the interior. He doesn't remember noticing this car in the castle's garage before, but then his attention had always been focused on the sexy shapes of Lex's Porsche collection. He sniffs. It smells new. "Is this a new car? When did you get it?"

"It occurred to me recently that perhaps my couch isn't the only thing that could use a family friendly makeover." Lex shrugs. "So I added a couple of sedans."

"It is easier to get into right now than your other cars." Clark smiles. Will his parents see and appreciate Lex's willingness to begin making his surroundings more family friendly? He studies his lover's sleek elegance wistfully, admiring the fit of charcoal cashmere sweater peeking out between the lapels of Lex's long wool coat, and the flex of hard thighs beneath the gray trousers.

Clark looks down at his own sweater and the mound of tummy rounding outwards between the sides of his old favorite fleece-lined corduroy coat. White might have been a mistake. The white bulge looming between the faded beige of his coat makes him look he's carrying his personal ski slope around. He skates a finger down the firm curve and smiles as he feels an inward shift in response.
"Do I look as big as I think I do?"

Lex glances warily at him. "How big do you think you look?"

"Elephantine."

"Hardly."

"You could put a ski lodge on this thing," Clark pats his stomach, "and charge admission."

"Admission had better be restricted to one."

"Of course. It's a very select and exclusive mountain top lodge."

"The best ones are." Lex reaches over for a quick caressing stroke. "But that doesn't feel like a mountain."
"No?" Clark captures his lover's hand and brings it to his mouth, planting a fast kiss to the wrist. "Mountain with a white elephant standing on top of a snow-covered godzilla?"

"That doesn't even qualify as a hill, much less a mountain. I've seen bigger cakes."

"Yeah." Clark snorts. "The kind that strippers jump out of."

"Ummm..." Lex's gray eyes glaze over. "Any chance of my getting a stripping Santa cake next Christmas?"

"Maybe." Clark grins. He might've known. He looks at the wrapped gifts sitting on the backseat. "You know, you didn't have to bring anything. It's only a tree trimming party."

"Consider it my contribution to decorating the tree."

"You aren't getting off that easily."

"I know. I have the kitchen knife discussion to look forward too."

"Not to mention popcorn garlands and gingerbread houses to make." Clark smiles as he wonders if their children will build gingerbread houses. Or maybe gingerbread castles.

"I've never done that. Until this year, my Dad's only interest in Christmas was how it impacted his business dealings."

"Lucky for you, I'm a master of gingerbread construction." Clark glances over his shoulder again, trying to guess the contents of the boxes. He's pretty sure that the long red and gold striped box holds a bottle of wine. The other boxes are more difficult to guess. There's a small rectangular box that could be anything.

He reaches back and snags the box. His dad's name on the tag. He frowns. It's about the right size, weight, and shape for a watch. That won't go over well. There's no way that his dad will wear a Luthor watch instead of the one that his own father had worn. Clark shakes it and hears a faint metallic rattle. "What's this?"
"It's a gift."

"No? Really? I would've never guessed. What kind of gift? And don't you dare say that it's a Christmas gift."

"It's a gift for your dad."

Clark taps a finger against the name tag. "Oddly enough, I got that. It's not a watch, is it?"

"No. Why? Is he in the market for a new one?"

"His father gave him the one that he wears."

Lex smiles. "Then it's a good thing I didn't buy him a watch."

"Is it a keychain?"

"No."

"Money clip?" Clark rattles the box again.

"No."

"Cuff links?"

"Cuff links? With flannel?"

He
grabs a flat pink box with blue robed angels frisking across it. The pink tag is closed and tucked under a pale blue ribbon. "What about this one?" "Dad does have a few suits, you know." Clark replaces the box.

Lex glances around. "Kara."

Clark weighs the box across his palm. It's very light. Too thin to hold clothes. Could it be jewelry? His dad will hit the ceiling if Lex gives Kara an expensive necklace or bracelet. Clark winces as he remembers the fights about some stupid watch that Lionel had given his mom. "Tell me it's not jewelry."

"It's not jewelry."

"Good." He peers again at the flatness of Kara's gift before putting it back. "Not money, is it? You know Dad would get upset."

"It's not cash."

"That's good." Clark glances at the biggest gift. It's long and thin and square. Santas in deep red costumes smirk at him from the glossy royal blue wrap. There's a big red bow on the corner, holding down a folded tag. It's too big to pull across his seat from the back. He looks uneasily at the Santas and squints hard, hoping for a flicker of X-ray, but he gets nothing.

"Something wrong?"

"The big gift...it's got Santas on it."

A subtle smile flickers on Lex's mouth. "You know how fond I am of Santa, Clark."

Like that's not exactly what's bothering him. As if Lex doesn't know it perfectly well. Clark glowers at the other's man's profile. "The other gifts don't have Santas."

"Perhaps they aren't Santa-worthy."
Clark touches the royal blue edge closest to him. It's hard and feels suspiciously like a picture frame. "It feels like a frame."

"That's because it is a frame."

"Tell me that you are not giving me a Santa painting in my parent's house."

"Don't be greedy, Sugar Stick. You have several Santa paintings. This gift is for someone else."

Ohgod. Not his parents. Clark swallows. "Who?"

"Your parents."

"You're giving my parents a Santa painting? No way! It stays in the car."

"If it makes you feel better, it's not a painting."

"Then what is it?"

"A drawing."

Clark scowls at his lover. "Oh, yeah. I'm feeling better already."

"I thought you might."

"Tell me that it's not me...the Santa, I mean."

"It's not you."
"Thank god." He relaxes against his seat.

"But you are in it," Lex adds helpfully.

"What? Lex! God. Am I wearing clothes? Tell me that I'm wearing clothes. Real clothes. Fully dressed kind of clothes."

"Do pajamas count?" Lex pulls over onto the side of the road.

He watches a dark car drive past and then turns back to his lover.

"Why are we stopping?" "What's wrong?" Clark looks sharply around, expecting mutants, murder, and mayhem to strike, but the evening is silent and peaceful. He can see the guards' cars neatly lined up behind them. In front of them, the Elbow River flows lazily beneath the bridge.

"There's something that I want to give you." Lex pulls off his driving gloves and tosses them on the dash. He leans over and softly kisses Clark as he slips one hand into his coat pocket.

Clark cups the other man's bare head. He succumbs to temptation and presses another kiss on the scarred mouth that's so close. "You already gave at the penthouse, and I'd rather not get that particular sort of gift in front of two cars of staring security. Hold that thought until the party is over."

"Clark," Lex pulls back slightly and holds out his hand. Centered across his palm is a long gold box. "This is for you, if you want it."

Clark turns the watch over to see the month and year engraved on the back along with his and Lex's initials. "It's great." He pulls the top open and stares at a very thin watch. Despite the elegant leanness of the design, there's an aura of toughness that makes him think of Lex. Clark picks the watch up, tilting it to bridge's lighting to see the subtle etched outline of a Santa face. He's surprised into laughter. "Lex, I love it."

"I'm glad that you like it." Lex undoes the cheap watch circling his lover's wrist and drops it into the box. He snaps the box shut and tosses it carelessly onto the backseat. "But you should know, before you accept that this is a special watch."

"Yeah? Don't tell me...Alexander the Great owned one exactly like it?" Clark teases as he spreads the cool metal across his wrist. His grin falters as Lex stares back at him, the usual poise is gone. "Lex?"

Lex takes a deep breath. "Think of it as an engagement watch. Clark, will you marry me?"
"Yes. God, yes." Clark wraps his arms around his lover and kisses the scarred mouth enthusiastically.
Oliver sighs as his phone buzzes 'J-U-S-T-I-C-E'; the Morse code buzz app had been amusing at first, but it's beginning to get old. He picks up his TV remote and clicks 'mute'. No reason to let the guys know that he's doing nothing more exciting than watching TV tonight. He taps his special Bar Sounds app to create a more interesting background for his conversation and then answers his phone. "Yeah?"

"Oliver?" Bart asks, "Where are you?"

"Out. Around." Oliver stares at his screen as a pretty brunette screams silently and runs through the forest, bouncing away from a hood-wearing stalker. "What do you need?"

"You."

"What?"

"I need back up. They've got me trapped, Oliver."

He sits up. "Who?"

"Oh, no! They're coming for me!"

"Calm down, Bart. Where are you?"

"Ace O' Clubs. The alley out back. Hurry. Noooooooo!"
Oliver hits redial and gets Bart's voicemail. Damn it. What's Bart gotten himself into now? Just in case one of the others is closer, he texts the rest of the team. He clicks off the TV and gets up. Oliver tosses the remote onto his chair and strides into his semi-secret Green Arrow closet. So much for his night off.

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Bart tucks his phone into his coat pocket and pauses. He looks thoughtfully at the club's neon sign. It'll take Oliver a few minutes to suit up, head out, and get here.

"Bart!" Victor calls over the earpiece. "Get into position."

"It's not like he's gonna get here in the next five minutes. Take a chill pill why don't you?"

"What did you say to me?" Victor demands.

"Dude," A.C. comes on. "He said to take a chill pill. Kinda redundant considering we're all freezing our balls off."

"I hear what he said," Victor snaps. "I can't believe that that pipsqueak dared say that to me."

"Don't be like that, Victor." Bart looks at the sign again. A club with Ace's rep wouldn't care about his age, and it is damned cold. "A.C.'s got it right, I was thinking about our collective balls...in a very non-gay way. Who's up for...I mean who wants Irish coffee?"

"Hell, yes," A.C. agrees. "You need cash?"

"You can't send him into that bar. Jesus, A.C." Victor moves out of position. "I'll buy the damned coffee. Bart! Bart! Get your raggedy ass back here now."

Bart smirks as he zips into the warmth of the bar. Victor's gonna have catch him before carrying out any of the threats being growled into his ear. He taps his earpiece off and walks across to the bar. Bart leans casually next to redhead in a low cut sweater, and nods to the guy behind the bar, "Four coffees to go. Irish."
"I don't think so, kid."

"Awww, come on," Bart whines, "it's cold out. I won't drink it in here. Put it in a plain coffee cup and who's to know?"

The bartender stares at him. "No."

"Puuuuhhhleassssse." Bart shivers elaborately. "I'm really cold, mister. I won't tell anyone that you sold it to me. Honest."

"Get out."

"Look, gimme the coffees and I won't make a scene," Bart threatens. "How about them apples, huh?"

"Bart?"

Shit! He's been made. Bart looks over his shoulder to see Jimmy standing behind him. "Uhh, hi."

"What are you doing here?" Jimmy frowns at him.

"I wanted some coffee since it's so cold. You know, like the Irish make."

Jimmy sighs. "Go wait by the door. I'll take of it."

"Thanks! I need four of them." Bart hurries toward the entrance and stands near the door. He pulls up onto his tiptoes, trying to see around the taller people. After a few seconds, he sees Jimmy moving toward him with a cardboard tray of plain white foam coffee cups. Alright! He snatches one and takes a sip. Huh. Weird the way that Irish Coffee tastes exactly like the regular stuff.

"Bart, did you see anything interesting going on out there?" Jimmy asks.
"Interesting?"

"Yeah. I need some photos to sell. Word is," Jimmy leans closer, "that Late Nite Lite is willing to pay well for a shot of the Arrow in his new costume."

Bart blinks. Oliver's got a new outfit and no one told him? That stinks. What if the G.A. sneaks past him 'cause he doesn't know that it's the G.A. in a new costume? His team shoulda told him. "Yogurt for brains. All of them."

"What?" Jimmy frowns. "I didn't catch that."

"What's the new look supposed to be?" Bart raises his voice.

Jimmy adjusts his camera strap. "That's why there's so much interest. Nobody knows. I guess he's keeping it a secret up he decides to pop out in it."

"Huh." Bart takes a drink. Jimmy had bought him coffee, but there's that thing with Chloe. On the other hand, she didn't look all that upset when he spotted her with Lana on the Internet so maybe she's over being mad at her ex. "Listen, Jimmy, you know the alley behind this joint?"

Jimmy nods. "Uh-huh. Why?"

"Find yourself a good spot and be ready. Word on the street is that the G.A. is gonna hit that alley in the next thirty."

Jimmy's eyes light up. "Thanks, Bart."

"I can't promise what he's gonna show up in, you understand."

"I can still sell it even if it's the same costume."
"Okay." Bart nods. "Just remember...you didn't hear that from me."

Oliver stomps into his boots. He grabs his quiver and bow, and stalks toward his personal elevator. He frowns at the reflection of his back in the shiny metal. He still can't believe that someone had suggested that he have 'Green Arrow' stamped across his ass. He frowns. Is that a speck of pink on the center of his back? Where had that come from?

He twists his neck, trying to get a better look. Is it lint? Had he saved anyone in a pink sweater lately? He saves so many people that he can't remember. Could it be the tip of a fake nail? Or even a smudge of lipstick from some girl clinging to his back on the motorcycle? He tries to reach back and rub it away, but he can't quite reach it. No time to change. Oh, what does it matter? Who is going to notice a tiny pink spot in the dark? Oliver slings his quiver over his shoulder. There. It's covered up for now and as soon as he gets back from rescuing Bart, he can clean whatever it is off.
Chapter Summary

The Kents prepare for their party. Lex and Clark tell the big news.

Jonathan leans against the counter, watching as his wife pulls another hot apple pie from the oven. Her black velvet skirt swirls around her shapely backside as she swivels to set the pie on a cooling rack. The whole kitchen counter is weighted down with dessert trays, cake stands, fancy pie pans, cupcake holders, nut scoops, and Christmas china.

She leans back down to grab a second and third pie. "If you've got time to lounge around and watch me work, you've got time to start taking some of the food out and put it on the buffet."

"I had lots of help getting the furniture arranged." Jonathan grins. "All those boys out there, just burning for a chance to flex their muscles in front of Kara and those girls. All I had to do was stand and give orders."

Martha sets the pies on the iron-wrought rack. She pulls off her oven mitts and straightens the snug red holiday vest that she's wearing over her black sweater. She smiles at him, her face flushed rose from the oven's warmth. "Have a sugar cookie. All that hard work deserves a sweet."

"I'm definitely in the mood for something sweet." He gives her a significant look. "And only the sweetest thing in the house will do."

"Is that right?" She laughs at him as she unties her apron and tosses it over the back of a chair.

Jonathan walks toward her. "Oooh, yeah."

"What about the kids?" Martha glances over his shoulder at the closed door. "It's suspiciously quiet out there."

"Out in the barn, getting the tree and tree stand. With that many boys grandstanding over the right way to get the job done and that many girls tossing out suggestions, we should have a good twenty minutes before they make it back inside."

"A whole twenty minutes, hmmm?" Martha teasingly fiddles with the snowman button on her vest. "I bet it's more like ten. It's cold out there."

"What fella cares about a little cold when he's got a girl to impress?" Jonathan slides his hands over her hips and leans down for a kiss. He lifts his head at there's a sharp rap at the back door. He scowls. "Who the hell could that be? All the kids are out front."

"Maybe Kara forgot something," Martha murmurs as she refastens her buttons. She leans up to kiss her husband quickly. "Maybe a few other guests decided to show up early. Hold that thought, handsome."

"At the back door? Thoughts aren't what I want to be holding," Jonathan grumbles as he stalks toward the door. He flings it open and stares. There's a Luthor loon on his doorstep with an armful of gifts, and his son standing behind him. "Clark." Jonathan smiles warmly at his son and then scowls at the bald man. "Lex. Come to kill off a few more of my dairy herd?"
Bastard had nerve enough to give him a reproachful look. "You're blaming the wrong Luthor for that one, Mr. Kent. I replaced every cow and cleaned up your contaminated pasture. What more do you want?"

"Dad." Clark frowns at him over the loon's shoulder. He mouths, 'be nice.'

Jonathan sighs and steps aside. "Come in. Why are you at this door instead of the front door?"

"We need to talk, Dad," Clark mumbles as he follows Lex inside.

"I'm being polite." Jonathan scowls with the strain of it. "Like I promised. Nice is too much to ask, so don't push your luck."

"Lex. Clark." Martha smiles them as Lex places his gifts on the table. "Let me get your coats."

Jonathan sighs as he watches Lex casually shed a coat that probably cost more than his old tractor had when it was shiny and new and worked regularly without massive amounts of coaxing, tinkering, and cussing.

Lex folds his coat over the back of a chair and hands Martha a gold and red box. "I thought that you might enjoy this later while you're recovering from hosting a party."

Martha slides a bottle of red wine out of the box, Her eyebrows go up as she reads the label. "Oh, yes. We'll enjoy it very much. Thank you, Lex. Let me put this in the fridge to chill. Would you and Clark like the first slice of pie?"

She's offering pie to that loon? Jonathan frowns as Martha carefully tucks the bottle in next to his beer. Why his wife has such a soft spot for Luthors is beyond him. He's got no use for the beasts at all. If pushed, he'd concede that the amount of produce he sold to the castle netted him a nice sum. Luthors apparently ate like locusts even if you'd never believe it to look at one. All of them skinny enough to hide behind a fence post.

"I would love a slice. Thank you, Mrs. Kent. It smells wonderful in here." Lex sniffs at the rich aromas of baked apples.

Clark sits down at the kitchen table, still wrapped in his coat. "Me, too. Ice cream on mine, please."

"All those cooks at the castle," Jonathan frowns at Lex. "Don't tell me that you can't have hot apple pie with your caviar every day if you want it."

"I'll be certain to suggest that combination to my chef. I should be able to add some interesting new words to my French vocabulary." Lex turns a melting look on Martha. "No one makes apple pie like Mrs. Kent does. How many county fair prizes have you won for it?"

"Eight." Martha slides a slice onto a plate and adds a fork. "Would you like some whipped cream or vanilla ice cream with this, Lex?"

"Ice cream, please."

Jonathan snorts. "I suppose you'll want coffee next."

"I'd love to have coffee." Lex smiles.

"Don't just stand there, Jonathan. Pour the boys some coffee," Martha orders as she sets Lex's plate on the table. She slides a plate with a large wedge of pie in front of Clark. "There you go, honey."

"Thanks, mom." Clark picks up his fork. "No coffee for me, Dad."
Jonathan places the cup that he's poured in front of Lex instead. "Are you still feeling sick, son?"

"I'm fine." Clark takes a big bite of pie, his eyes closing in bliss. "Good. Where's Kara?"

"Out in the barn with her friends." Martha fondly rumples her son's hair as she walks past him. She sets a coffee in front of her spot and sits down. "She asked them to come over a little early to help get the tree up."

"Oh. Is Chloe here yet?" Clark asks.

"Not yet." Jonathan frowns at the gift that Lex places next to Martha. What's that?

Lex ignores him, smiling at Martha. "Merry Christmas, Mrs. Kent."

"You shouldn't have." Martha reaches for the gift with a smile.

"That's right." Jonathan growls. "You shouldn't have."

"Dad." Clark frowns at him. His gaze slides to the bows and ribbon being peeled neatly away by his mother and set aside for reuse.

Jonathan uneasily looks at Lex. The Luthor looks as smugly satisfied as a fox in a chicken coop. He can practically see bloody feathers drifting in the air. Still, this particular specimen of Luthor is an invited guest tonight...an invited guest who has seduced his son. Jonathan shoves a red platter piled high with cake slices toward the bald man. "Fruitcake, Lex?"

"No, thank you." Lex gives the thick slices a dubious glance. "I'll stick with Mrs. Kent's excellent pie."

Jonathan frowns as he watches his wife's hands move over the Santa wrapping paper, pulling away the tape. It looks like a standard Christmas gift, but with Luthors, one could never be sure. It could be anything from a stuffed rattlesnake to a million dollar diamond necklace. "And what is that? It's not jewelry, is it?"

Lex grins at Martha over a forkful of warm pie. "Is that where Clark gets it from? He spent most of the drive trying to guess what was in each gift."

"You would not believe the lengths that I have to go to every Christmas to keep their gifts a surprise." Martha folds away the wrap and stares at the sketch, edged in muted gold and silver mats, and framed with silver frame. "Oh, Lex. It's beautiful! I love it. Look, Jonathan."

Jonathan raises his eyebrows as he looks at the sketch that his wife is holding up. He'd seen Lex running around with a sketchpad before, but he had no idea that Luthor could create something like this. He only needs one glance to be able to identify the house as his; Lex had captured everything from the exact shade of yellow paint to the slightly crooked first step of the porch. Despite himself, a smile touches his mouth as he studies the dark-haired toddler staring out of Clark's bedroom window with wide-eyed awe at Santa and the sleigh. He reluctantly admits, "It's well done. Thanks."

"You did this?" Martha touches the silvery gray signature that almost blends into the snow.

Lex nods. "I've always enjoyed art. My dad tried to discourage me from pursuing it, but I usually managed to find time to sketch or paint."

"It's great, Lex." Clark leans over and kisses the other man's cheek.
Martha sets the sketch carefully to one side. "I have to put this up over the fireplace where everyone can see and enjoy it."

"Mr. Kent?"

He looks away from his beautiful wife to the far less pleasing sight of a Luthor scarfing down pie at his kitchen table. A Luthor who is getting naked with his son on a regular basis. He's got to stop thinking about that or he's going to smash that smirk off Lex's face. Jonathan looks down at the fruitcake platter. Not much heft to it, but surely it would do some damage.

Lex holds out a small rectangular box. "This is for you."

Wonderful. Jonathan stares at the small box. "You shouldn't have. Really."

"I wanted to."

There's just enough enthusiasm in the low voice to make him inspect the proffered box intently. What could it be? Bugged cell phone? Tie tack with a free tracking device included? Only his son had already told Lex everything. So what did that leave? Mutant seeds? Rabid honeybees?

"Jonathan."

"Dad."

His son's and wife's voices hold the same note of 'be polite' warning. Jonathan looks at the remorselessly waiting Luthor. Stubborn bastard will probably proffer that stupid box until the end of time. Jonathan reluctantly takes it. He shakes it gingerly and hears a hard metallic sort of rattle. "What's this?"

"Not jewelry." Lex smirks at him.

"Don't just stand there, Jonathan. Open it."

"Fine. I'll open it." Jonathan tears off the ribbon and opens the box. A lean yellow flashlight is tucked into the padding. It's too small to fit comfortably into his hand, but Martha would probably like it. At least it's something useful. "Thank you."

"The case glows in the dark so that it's always easy to find, and it provides an amazingly powerful light for something so small. Exactly the thing for those nights when you hear odd noises." Lex finishes his pie.

Jonathan snorts. Personally when he's checking out strange noises, he prefers his old and sturdy flashlight so if he needs to whack something over the head, he's got the right tool for the job. At least until someone makes a shotgun with a built-in flashlight.

"May I?" Martha hold her hand out.

Jonathan pulls the flashlight out and hands it to her. His eyes widen and then narrow as he spots another object in the padding. He pulls out a gold chain threaded through a glossy metallic white key. He growls at Lex. "There had better not be a truck sitting in my driveway. If you think you can buy your way into this family..."

"Dad!" Clark pushes his plate away. His hand curls over Luthor's. He glances sidelong at the bald man. "Umm, Lex, you didn't..."

"Of course not. Mr. Kent made his opinions on Luthors with pick-up trucks quite clear several years
ago." Lex smirks. "I wouldn't dream of giving him a truck."

Clark frowns at Lex. "Then what does the key go to?"

"I wouldn't want to ruin the surprise." Lex turns his hand over and clasps Clark's.

"It's not to a car, is it?" Clark asks.

Lex shakes his head. "Not a car."

"A box of some kind?" Martha guesses.

Clark suggests, "A door?"

"No." Lex's smirk deepens. "Don't worry. You will know it when you see it."

Jonathan puts the key back in the box. He has no desire to find out what the thing opens, unlocks, or turns on. Whatever it is, it's going to be bad news. "Nice key, Lex. Thanks. Sure you don't want any fruitcake?"

"Dad."

"Jonathan."

"What?" Jonathan stares back at them innocently like he hadn't been calling Lex a fruitcake that morning.

Martha narrows her eyes at him. "Keep it up and that's the last fruitcake, I'll bake this Christmas."

"No. Thank you." Lex stares coolly at him for a moment and then tightens his hand around Clark's. He suddenly smiles. "Clark has something that he wants to tell you."

"Son?" Jonathan frowns at his son. What now? First Clark tells them that he's gone for the fruitcake special, and then that he's told Lex everything, and then that Lex had temporary ownership of his powers. What the hell is going on now?

Martha props her elbows on the table and leans closer. "Clark? What is it?"

A big goofy grin spreads across Clark's face. "I've got two things to tell you. First, Lex asked me to marry him and I accepted."

"What?" Jonathan stiffens. He never thought that he'd see the day that he'd urge his son to do this, but desperate times required desperate measures. "That's moving awfully fast. Have you thought about living together for awhile first? For a few years maybe. See how it goes."

"That's wonderful!" Martha darts around the table and hugs her son and then Lex. "Welcome to the family, Lex. What date have you picked? What kind of wedding do you want? Where do you want to have it? The castle would be a lovely setting or we could..."

"Mom. Mom." Clark grins happily at her. "We haven't really discussed all that yet. As for when...soon."

"What about January first?" Lex suggests. "We can sign all the legal documents as soon as my lawyers draw them up, but if we wait until January for the ceremony, our four special guests could attend as well."
"New Year's day...a perfect time for fresh starts. I like that." Clark leans over for a fast kiss. He glows at the other man. "And I like the idea of making them part of the ceremony even better. It's perfect."

"January...that's not much time," Jonathan tries again. "Have you thought about June? Or what about next December? Have a nice winter wedding with lots and lots of time to plan everything."

"Winter weddings are beautiful," Martha murmurs dreamily. "And New Year's day...that's such a romantic choice."

"The ultimate New Year's party," Lex smiles slowly as he looks into Clark's eyes. "How do you feel about an evening wedding?"

"I like it." Clark blushes at the intensity of his lover's look. "Let's do it. Luthor Manor. New Year's Day."

Jonathan helps himself to star shaped sugar cookie. "You said there were two things. What's the second?"

"More like four." Lex grins.

"Mom. Dad." Clark stands up and unbuttons his coat. He shrugs it off, revealing his thicker waistline. "You've got grandkids on the way. Four of them."

"What?" Jonathan stares at the distinctive profile of his son's torso. "You're...but...but...how?"

"Oh, Clark." Martha touches his stomach. Her face shines with joy. "Oh, Clark. That's wonderful! Four...I can't believe it."

Clark slides his hands over his mother's. He grins at her and his dad. "Do you want to see them?"
Chapter Summary

All the Luthors show up for the Kent party.

He pivots as he hears a clatter like beer cans rolling across the pavement. Oliver snaps his wraparound nightvision goggles down. The only thing he sees is stray cat scuttling across, and then hiding behind the boxes. Is he too late? Had they...whoever they might be this time...managed to grab Bart?

"Ah!" Oliver stares down in disbelief at the dart protruding from his bare bicep. Oh, shit. He fumbles at his belt for his emergency Arrow signal and thumbs down the button that will alert his team that he's in trouble. There's motion near the dumpster and he automatically brings up his box, notching an arrow into place as he blinks woozily at a shape rising from behind the dumpster. Are they coming for him? Or is that a wino in the wrong place and wrong time?

"Hi, Mr. Arrow! Nice costume." The nonthreatening boyish voice matches the skinny short form emerging from behind the bulky metal. Maybe it's an Arrow fan instead. He parts his lips to ask for help and suddenly a brilliant light explodes across his vision as the boyish voice calls. "Say 'cheese'!"

Jonathan can't stop smiling as he looks around the crowded room, and thinks of his four new grandkids. To think that in a mere two weeks, there will be four little Kents to admire. He sighs as his gaze crosses Lex's. There is that down side, but as long as he thinks about having grandkids, not about how they came to be...he couldn't be happier. With him, Martha, and Clark on the job, they should be able to keep any unfortunate Luthory inclinations directed onto an appropriate path.

He looks across the room where his Martha is glowing with happiness as she refills the cupcake stands. On the other side of the room, Clark is cheering on Kara as she competes with her friends to see who can make the longest popcorn garland for the tree. He wanders over to the buffet table and ladles more punch into his glass. He trades a secret grin with his wife before making way for the youngsters lining up behind him to get at the cookies, cupcakes, and pies.

Jonathan sips his punch and moves around the room, trading chitchat with his guests, and imagining four grandkids trailing him around the farm or perched in the kitchen, waiting for Martha's pies to bake. The image fills him with fresh hope for the future of his family's farm. Surely at least one of the bunch will love the farm like he does. Maybe even inherits a bit of the Luthor business genius. If he's gotta have Luthor in the family tree, it might as well make itself useful.

He pauses beside Lex; he can tell from the looks that his wife and son are sending his way that he's supposed to say something nice now. Something to make Lex feel welcome to the Kent farm and family. Like it or not, Luthor is his new grandbabies other...other...his throat locks up around the word. Jonathan clears his throat and tries another drink of his punch. He stares down at the frozen cranberry juice ice cubes melting into his drink, but still no words come to him. He looks at the loon's smooth face and sighs. "So...Lex..."

"Yes, Mr. Kent?"

He grits his teeth over the words that Luthor's smug smirk make him want to say, but Martha and
Clark are still watching. He glowers at Lex over his punch cup. "Jonathan."

"Excuse me?"

"You can call me 'Jonathan'."

Lex grins. "That must have hurt...Jonathan."

He opens his mouth to respond with all the biting words that he's been holding back since that slice of fruitcake showed up with his son, but Kara dances up to them with a wide grin. Jonathan firmly shuts his mouth. He manages a grim smile instead. "Kara. How did you do?"

"Look." Kara hold up her popcorn garland. "I won second place."

"That's great." Jonathan smiles at her.

"Congratulations. What did you win?" Lex asks.

"I get to turn the tree lights on after all the decorating is done. Chloe and Lana tied for first place, so they both get to put the star on top of the tree. I like your sketch." Kara leans forward and kisses Lex's cheek. "It's so pretty. Can you teach me to do that?"

"If you like." Lex hands her a flat angel print box. "Here. This is for you. And, no, Jonathan, it's not jewelry."

"Oooh." Kara yanks open the ribbon and pulls the top off the box. She shreds the gold tissue paper and finds a sheaf of papers at the center. Kara unfolds them and gasps as she reads the print.

"Paper?" Jonathan looks at Lex. "You're giving her paper?"

"A Christmas trees farm!" Kara flings her arms around Lex and hugs him. She turns to Jonathan, waving her papers. "Look, I've got a job at Jameson's Christmas Tree Farm in Grandville. I've got to tell Clark and my friends."

Jonathan turns a narrowed stare on Lex as Kara bounces gleefully away. "She's asked Jameson three times if he had any openings and he turned her down flat each time. Since when does Jameson hire anyone but his cousins?"

"Last week." Lex watches Kara with a smile. "I had a word with Mr. Jameson when I placed orders for the trees for LexCorp, LuthorCorp, Luthor Manor and my penthouse. I may have mentioned my intention to sponsor trees for several local nonprofit organizations every year."

"Does my son know about that?" Jonathan asks.

Luthor murmurs, "Clark is all in favor of LexCorp providing Christmas trees for charity."

Jonathan turns sharply as the sound of a fist pounding on the front door rises over the music and chatter. Who could that be when all the invited guests are there? The bad-tempered banging sounds like trouble to him. He takes a step toward the door, just as Kara calls, "I'll get it."

"Kara. Wait." Jonathan moves after her. In the mirror, he can see his son striding after him, only be cut off as Lex moves in front of Clark with a over the shoulder warning look and a murmured, "I got this. You stay here."

Jonathan walks toward the front door. It feels profoundly peculiar to have a Luthor at his back instead of his son, but he throughly approves that Lex's instinct had been to protect Clark. He pulls
open the door and scowls at the stocky man standing on the porch. "Great. Another Luthor. Like there aren't enough of them here already."

"Lucas?" Lex looks over Jonathan's shoulder. "What are you doing here? What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" Lucas steps into the short hallway. He grabs his brother's lapels. "Did you know? Did you?"

"Hey!" Clark grabs Lucas' arm.

"It's okay, Clark." Lex deftly shifts out of his brother's grip.

Lucas snaps at Clark, "Family business, hayseed. Stay out of it."

"Lucas," Lex warns as he shoulders between the two. "Clark is part of my family. What are you talking about?"

"That!" Lucas points at a white limo pulling up the drive. "That is what I'm talking about. Did you know?"

"What's going on?" Kara asks.

Martha walks up behind Kara. "Jonathan? What is it?"

Jonathan stares into the dark, watching a chauffeur get out and open the door. "What is he doing here?"

"Who?" Martha peeks out over his shoulder. "Oh."

"Did you invite him?" He asks. This is too much. He will not be responsible for his actions with no less than three Luthors invading his farm. One Luthor is bad enough, but three Luthors are two too many for any sane farmer to deal with.

Martha shakes her head. "No, Jonathan. I sent him a Christmas card, but I didn't send a party invitation. Why is he with Coach Teague? Who is that with them? Oh, dear. I better warn Lana that Coach Teague is here."

"Don't worry," Jonathan mutters grimly. "They won't be here long."

"Lex," Clark murmurs, "What's going on?"

"Lex." Lucas snarls. "Do you know what our fucking father did? I can't believe that I wasted my time looking for that sonofabitch."

"Jonathan." Lionel stands on the porch, his arm wrapped around a beautiful woman with cool brown eyes. "Sorry to intrude, but I need a moment with my sons. Lex. Lucas. Say hello to your new mother."

Lex sucks in a breath. "You married her?"

Lucas loosens his fists. "So you didn't know."

"I knew that he was with her, but I didn't know that he married her." Lex stares at Genevieve who smirks back at him.

"More sons, just what I wanted for Christmas." Genevieve strokes her mink coat and the large
diamond on her finger glitters in the light. "We're going to have such fun. I can't wait to begin planning a family Christmas party and invite all our friends. It will be so exciting."
Oliver snorts, twitches and wakes up. He freezes as his memory seeps slowly back. He had been in an alley... the one behind the Ace O'Clubs. Oh, shit. Has he been captured too? This doesn't feel like pavement. His hand moves over the firmly padded plastic. It feels like the kind of padded mats that he uses in his home gym.

He's still wearing his leather costume. He can feel the edges of his hood, pulled low over his face. He cracks his eyes open. His nightvision shades are gone and he can't feel the familiar weight of his bow and quiver across his shoulders. Gray fills his vision and then he realizes that he's staring at the mat. He carefully turns his head, trying to keep the move casual. Across the room, he can see a woman's feet tucked into black pumps that appear somber until he notices the very high spike heels.

That's promising. His gaze moves upwards over trim ankles, muscular calves and lean thighs covered by silk stockings. His head lifts involuntarily as he realizes that he can see between her thighs. See the orange silk of her panties. There's something printed on the front. He squints, trying to make out the colorful purple, green, red, black, yellow and white design. He manages to see that it's a man's profile... a man wearing some sort of weird hat. She crosses her legs, cutting off the view before he can make out the details.

"We can begin whenever you are ready, Mr. Arrow."

"What?" Oliver sits up. He stares openly at the woman watching him. The long blonde hair pulled back from her face into an elegant yet practical twist. The deep blue eyes twinkling behind serious black framed glasses. The prim white lab coat pulled over a bright yellow sweater dress. The big orange flower pinned to her coat's lapel. "Who are you?"

"Dr. Harleen Quinzel." She smiles at him. "And I'm here to help."

"Help? I don't need any help."

"Admitting that you have a problem is the first step, Mr. Arrow." She touches the flower's petals. "Don't worry. I can help you with that too."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Jonathan sits up in bed, listening to the strange noise.

"Jonathan?" Martha stirs beside him. She pushes her long red hair away from her face. "What's that?"

"I don't know, but I think it's getting closer." He shoves the blankets back up as he hears the gabble of disturbed chickens and the lowing of his cows. He rummages in the drawer where he keeps his sturdy black flashlight.

"Don't get upset. It's probably just a lost pilot, sweetheart." Martha wraps herself in her robe and pulls on her boots. She hurries after her husband as he thumps down the hall and stairs.
Jonathan pulls his shotgun from the gun cabinet just in case. He clicks on his flashlight as his wife opens the door. They step out on the porch and stop, frozen in their tracks as they stare at the object glittering in the copter's spotlights like ice under the sun as the rhinestones coating the metallic white paint sparkle. A huge white tulle bow billows from it as the chopper hovers overhead. Martha shades her eyes from the glare with her hand. "Jonathan? Tell me that we're still asleep and dreaming."

"Only if it's a nightmare." He stares stunned at the sparkly shiny glowy glory of the tractor sitting on his driveway. It looks like a mad hybrid cross between a crazed bride and a sequin happy showgirl. He takes a disbelieving step off the porch as the lights catch the deep blue sparkle of the words 'Kent Farm' along the top. He thinks of the key that Lex had given him and growls. "I'm going kill that damned Luthor. First thing tomorrow morning."

"Mr. Kent!" A guy with a bullhorn leans out of the chopper. "Merry Christmas and good night from Lex Luthor. Enjoy your new tractor."

THE END

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