

# Period of Adjustment

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Rating: T

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## ACT I: DEVOTION

## Chapter 1: Home Again

The sights and sounds of Metropolis slowly entered the car as Lois and Clark made their way through a bustling downtown. As their minds slowly accepted the fact that they were back home and their lives were about to truly begin, a little reflection was definitely in order. Thinking back over the past week, they could not have asked for a more perfect honeymoon location. The resort in Tahiti had been like a dream, the clear blue green waters, the warm weather, the delicious food, everything was perfect. Their week in paradise went entirely too quickly.

Lois glanced at her husband sitting beside her. They were in their way to Clark's apartment to pack up his 'superhero outfits, ' along with the rest of his belongings. She smiled and wondered again how she had been so blind for so long. She shook her head at herself. *You call yourself a reporter. He really is a good actor. He had everybody fooled.*

Her mind couldn't help returning to the island. She inwardly sighed. Clark was such an incredible lover, and she had to admit she wasn't in Metropolis right now, but back on that island in bed with her husband. She inwardly sighed again. The honking horns, the screeching tires, and the police sirens all brought her back to reality, back to their jobs, but also back to their son, Jason, and back to their future together.

Clark saw her smile. "What's that smile about, or do I need to ask?"

"Well, if you must know, I was thinking about the island and how much I'll miss it," Lois said waiting for his reaction.

Clark pouted. "The island? Is that all you'll miss?"

Lois laughed as she took his hand. "I'll miss the island yes, but I'll miss our quiet days and nights, just the two of us together without any worries or rescues, or anything, just us together in that huge bed doing all kinds of wicked things," she chuckled at his expression.

Clark's cheeks reddened. "Ok, Lois, I see your point. You don't have to go on."

Lois laughed again. "Clark, you really are too much. I love you, you know."

He squeezed her hand. "I love you, too, Lois, very much."

It was early evening when they arrived at Clark's apartment. "Come on up, Lois, this won't take but a few minutes. Once I get all my things, I'll turn in my key to the landlord, and I'm all yours ... forever," Clark said and smiled. He took her hand and headed for the elevator.

As they rode the elevator to his apartment, Lois realized she had never seen his apartment. Thinking back on it now, she realized that Clark did have a hard time finding a place after being away from so long, and she felt bad for not helping him. "Clark, I just realized I've never seen your apartment. When was the last time you were here?"

"It was just before our wedding. Jimmy and I dressed here."

"You won't have any problems getting out of your lease, will you? It hasn't been a year since you came back."

"No, this place had a month to month lease, so it worked out perfect for me."

As they entered his apartment, Lois looked around and it was just as she suspected his place would be like. "It's a very nice place, Clark. So, show me where they are," Lois said wanting to know where they were hidden.

"Show you what? Oh, you mean the suits? Follow me, they're right in here," he said and went inside his walk-in closet and there hidden behind a wall of clothing was a panel. He slid it open and there were three Superman suits and red boots.

"So, this is your lair, Clark, and you have only three suits? Don't they get dirty? How do

you clean them? Are they wash and wear? Who made them? What are they made of?" Lois couldn't explain her fascination with the suit. It was different from the earlier suits from years ago.

Clark laughed. "Why so many questions about the suit, Lois? I didn't know you were so fascinated by it. I'll tell you all about it later. It's getting late. We have to get to the house. Jason and Richard will be there soon."

"Oh, alright, do you need any help packing?" *That was a stupid question, Lois. He has super speed remember?*

"No, not really, you can wait in the bedroom. I'll be out in a second." He chuckled. *Did she say my lair?*

He was right. As soon as she sat down on the bed, blinked several times when she saw a blur before her eyes, then Clark walked into the bedroom with three suitcases packed and ready to go. Even the dressers were emptied.

"Wow, I guess I'll have to get use to seeing that, although, maybe you could not do that when we're at home. I don't want Jason to get any ideas. He's still so young and things could get broken. And that thing you do with your eyes, you probably shouldn't do that either."

"Of course, Lois, I promise, no superpowers in the house," Clark said wondering what else he'd have to do differently.

"Clark, you do understand, don't you?" Lois said wondering if she'd hurt his feelings.

"Sure, I do. Jason will be curious and I'll answer him truthfully. He is still very young, but when he's ready, I'll teach him control. The sooner he learns it the better. You know, when I was growing up, my parents didn't know what to do or how to help me control my powers. They did the best they could, but Jason will have me to help him from now on."

She went to him then and gave him a hug and a kiss. "Thank you, Clark. I knew you would understand."

"Of course I do, Lois." He kissed her then, but stopped after a moment. He lifted his head listening.

"What is it? Did you hear something?" Lois asked thinking he'd miss Jason's homecoming if he had to leave now. "No, nothing the League can't handle. We should hurry. I wanted to check in with them later tonight, but I wanted to see Jason and get us settled first. I really missed him."

"I've missed him too. I hope he was alright with Richard," Lois said.

"I'm sure Jason had a great time with Richard. Let's go."

It was after dinner time when they arrived at the house on Riverside Drive and they could see Richard's car out front.

"Clark, they're here," Lois exclaimed as they drove up to the front of the house. "Jason, Jason, we're home," she called entering the house.

"Welcome home, Lois," Richard said coming into the foyer.

"Oh, Richard, how are you?" Lois asked giving him a warm hug. *I'd forgotten he still had a key.* "Where's Jason," she asked looking for her son.

"He's upstairs. He couldn't wait to get back to his room and play with all of his toys."

"Hi, Lois," Lana said coming in from the kitchen. "Welcome home. I brought over a couple of casseroles for you guys to eat. I know it was a long flight, so you must be pretty tired and hungry."

"Thank you, Lana, that was really sweet of you, and yes, it's good to be home." *I can see*

*now why Clark fell for her. I thought it would be awkward with our ex's being together, but it's not bad, not bad at all.*

Clark came into the house then loaded down with luggage under both arms as well as carrying several pieces in his hands, and a carry-on bag hanging between his teeth. Embarrassed, he dropped the bag between his teeth and spoke to everyone. "Hi, Richard, Lana. It's good to see you both."

"Hi, Clark, welcome home," Lana said happy to see her old friend.

"Thanks, Lana. Richard, it's good to see you," Clark said repeating himself as he shook Richard's hand. "Where's Jason? Oh, I hear him ... umm, I'll take these bags upstairs ... umm ... I'll go get him," he mumbled and hurried up the stairs. *This is awkward and I don't know why,* he thought.

Lois shook her head at her husband's manners, but she couldn't help wondering what that was about. "Come on in guys. So, Lana, have you snagged this guy yet?" Lois couldn't help teasing her former fiancé.

Clark entered Jason's room as quietly as he could. He could see Jason playing with his Superman doll, holding it high above his head as if it were flying. He smiled. "Jason, we're home."

"Dad!" Jason jumped off the bed and into his father's arms. Clark still couldn't believe this beautiful little boy was his son and he could hold him, kiss him and see him everyday from now on. "I missed you son."

"I missed you too, Dad." Jason pulled back and touched his father's cheek. "Are you crying?"

Clark just pulled him back into his arms. "Only a little. Come on, your Mom is downstairs with Richard and Lana and she can't wait to see you."

Richard was used to Lois's jabs, so he took it in stride. "Lois, we only started dating a month ago," Richard said smiling at Lana.

"Can you stay and eat with us? I'm sure Clark would love to catch up." Lois asked.

"Oh, we can't stay. We've got a long drive back to Gotham, and Lana starts her new job tomorrow."

"Really, what kind of job, Lana?" Lois asked curious.

"Well, after studying the food industry in college, a subsidiary of Wayne Enterprises called Wayne Foods offered me a job developing organic produce. With my background in farming, there's a growing demand by retailers for organic foods. Wayne Foods is on the cutting edge with its research and development division. I'm very excited about it."

"That sounds fascinating, Lana. You'll have to tell me all about it one day." Lois leaned forward and whispered, "but tell me, have you met Bruce Wayne?"

"No, I haven't, why?"

"Surely, you've heard of him? He's a billionaire playboy and he owns, or his family owns this huge conglomerate based in Gotham City. They employ thousands of people around the world. I would love to interview him."

Lana shrugged. "I doubt I would ever come in contact with him, but I admit he does sound fascinating."

"Oh he is, very fascinating."

Richard listened to their conversation and shook his head. *Women!*

Clark tried not to listen, but when Bruce's name was mentioned his ears perked up.

"Who's fascinating?" Clark asked coming down the stairs with Jason in his arms.

"Mom!" Jason hollered, jumping down from his father's arms and running to his mother.

"Jason, munchkin, how are you honey? I think you've grown an inch in a week." She hugged him and kissed his cheek, smoothing his hair from his forehead. "Were you a good boy for Daddy Richard?"

"Yes, Mom, I was good. Did you bring me a souvenir like you promised?"

"Of course, I did, honey. It's in the luggage. I'll give it to you later, alright?"

Jason pouted. "Ok, Mom."

"Who's fascinating?" Clark asked again.

"Clark, the ladies were discussing Bruce Wayne and how Lois wants to meet him and interview him," Richard replied.

"Oh, I see. I've heard of him. He's a billionaire, right?"

"From what I hear, yes, he is," Richard replied having no interest in rich playboys. "Well, we'll be heading out now. It's been a long day and I know you both must be exhausted." He winked at Clark with that last statement.

Clark chuckled and shook Richard's hand. "Thanks again, Richard, for taking care of Jason. We appreciate it."

"Sure anytime. Come here, buddy. Give Daddy a hug goodbye."

"Bye, Daddy. I'll see you soon?" Jason asked, not wanting to say goodbye.

"Sure you will, remember, we have a date in a few weeks, and I'll call you tomorrow. Bye son."

"Ok, bye, Daddy. Goodbye, Ms. Lana."

"Bye, Jason," Lana said and gave him a hug and a kiss.

"Thanks again, Richard. We'll talk later, Lana, and thanks again for the food. Good night," Lois said and closed the front door.

After watching Jason and Richard's interaction, Clark couldn't help but feel envious. He stood in the foyer with his hands in his pockets thinking he had a lot of years to make up for. *I have to gain his trust. Jason has to believe that I would never leave him or his mother again, not ever.*

After a light dinner, giving Jason his souvenirs, and putting him to bed, Lois and Clark found themselves alone in their bedroom. Clark couldn't help it. He stared at the bed remembering that Lois and Richard also slept in this bed.

Lois caught his expression and knew what he was thinking. She went to him and took his hands in hers. "Clark, it's just a bed. We can get a new one if you want."

"Well, maybe, but only if you want to."

"I'll order it in the morning. Now, why don't we relax? Let's get these clothes off, shall we?" Lois asked as she couldn't wait to get Clark into bed.

"Lois?"

"Humm?" Lois said distracted by Clark's strong throat and wide chest. She could feel how tense he was. "Just relax, Clark, it's only a bed," she said as she gave him a shove and he landed on the bed with a bounce. Lois giggled as she jumped on the bed and proceeded to help her husband out of his clothes.

They both sobered suddenly. Clark stared at his wife amazed at how lucky he was to have

a woman like Lois in his bed every night. He pushed her hair out of her eyes and stared at her lips, then leaned down and slanted his mouth against hers. Lois melted as she pulled him closer kissing him back. Soon, they were climbing to that peak and they both reached it together kissing and caressing each other and landed safely in each other's arms.

Several minutes passed, as Clark stroked her hair and arms. "Are you alright? I got a little carried away."

She didn't respond. "Lois?"

Lois pulled her mind back from oblivion. "Humm, what did you say?"

"Never mind, go to sleep. I love you, Lois," Clark whispered kissing her temple and holding her tight.

"I love you too, Clark," Lois whispered snuggling against his heat.

## Chapter 2: Finding Time

On the drive back to Gotham City, the two individuals in the car were uncharacteristically quiet, each thinking of their friends on Riverside Drive and what lay ahead for each of them. Lana and Richard both wanted to talk but didn't know quite where to begin.

Lana sensed there may be something wrong. "Richard, what are you thinking? Is everything alright?"

"Everything is fine," Richard replied not believing the words.

"I can hear it in your voice. What is it? Is it Lois and Clark? They seemed very happy to me."

Richard sighed. "I have no doubt they're very happy. That's not it," he said squeezing her hand.

"Then, what is it? Is it Jason?" Lana asked. They hadn't dated very long, but she also knew how much Jason meant to him.

"Yes, Lana, I'm concerned about him. He's a very special little boy, and I just wish ..." He couldn't finish.

"What do you wish? Tell me," Lana said encouraging him to speak.

He glanced at her concerned face wondering if he should say anything. "It's nothing. I'm sure everything will be alright. They have a lot to work through and Jason will be fine." He squeezed her hand again and smiled.

Lana could sense he had more on his mind, but she decided not to push. *He'll tell me what I already know in due time.* "I'm sure he'll be fine too." Lana returned his smile.

Back at Riverside Drive, after making love and thinking about the best sex he has ever had in his entire life, Clark stood at the foot of their bed and watched Lois sleep. He was in the suit about to leave knowing that they both would need to get used to being apart. He knew it would be an adjustment for them, but he couldn't seem to make his feet move. *Just go, Clark, go now!*

"Clark?" Lois whispered.

Clark froze. He could see her eyes were closed but her lids were moving. He slowly moved to the side of the bed. *She's dreaming. Oh, God!* He tried to get control of his thoughts and emotions.

Lois moaned and hugged her pillow close.

Clark closed his eyes and imagined he was that pillow. *This is ridiculous. Just turn around and leave. The League is waiting for me.* He opened his eyes, stared at his beautiful wife, took a shuddering breath, turned and left her alone in their bed.

As he was flying away high into the sky, he closed his eyes and imagined he was back in bed with Lois and they ... he snapped out of it just before he nearly collided with an airplane. *Good one, Clark.* He shook his head, trying to clear it, put his arm out and headed to the League's headquarters.

Bruce Wayne, billionaire playboy, owner and CEO of Wayne Enterprises, and Batman as the League members knew him, did not like waiting for anyone.

Diana Prince, an Amazonian princess and Wonder Woman, was a little more patient than her friend.

Bruce had found this location for them to meet a few weeks ago. The Watchtower was located in Metropolis in one of the oldest buildings in the city. It had long since been deserted,

but the interiors of the top two floors were renovated and designed for the League to meet and plan their strategies. Bruce was thinking this place was supposed to be temporary and a more centralized location was in the planning stages.

"So where is he?" Bruce impatiently asked Diana. "He should have been here a half hour ago."

"Bruce, he's a newlywed. I think we can cut him some slack. I imagine it's going to be hard for him to leave his wife and family."

Bruce snorted and put a hand over his heart. "My heart bleeds for him. He never should have made this commitment to the League if he couldn't hold up his end of the agreement."

"I can hold up my end just fine, Bruce. Good evening, Diana," Clark said walking into the Watchtower headquarters. "It's good to see you both."

"Hi, Clark, it's good to see you too," Diana said not missing how good his mood was.

"Well, thank you Clark for gracing us with your presence," Bruce couldn't help saying.

"You're welcome," Clark said. "My pleasure," he smirked.

Diana just shook her head at them. "Can we move on from all this sugar-coated mutual admiration society, please? So, Clark, how's Lois?" Diana asked. She liked Lois. They had met before the wedding and she was truly a good person and Diana considered her a friend.

"She's fine," Clark said taking a deep breath trying not to get distracted.

Bruce saw that look and couldn't help rolling his eyes. "Look, Clark, I knew it was too soon for you to come back here. Maybe you should just ..." He let that hang in the air.

"Bruce, I'm fine. Lois is fine. Jason is fine. Everybody is fine," Clark said steeling himself against his emotions.

Bruce held up his hands surrendering. "Alright, alright, let's get to work. There are a few things you should know, Clark. While you were away, Diana and I were able to add four members of the League. Diana, please introduce Clark to our new 'founding' members."

"My pleasure, I'd be happy to. Clark, here take a look," she said, typing in a few words into the computer and pulling up the biographies of the new members of the League.

"This is great news, Diana. Who did you get?" Clark asked excited to have more help.

"Well, first, we have the Flash. Barry Allen is his name. He may just be faster than you, Clark."

"I've heard of him, good choice and I like his costume," Clark said impressed.

"Then, we got the Green Lantern. His name is Hal Jordan. He has an ancient ring that enables him to fly and he can transform and use force fields to protect himself and others."

"You found another impressive member, Diana."

"I'm glad you agree. Next, there's Aquaman. His name is Arthur Curry. Arthur communicates with sea creatures through telepathy, if you can believe it. It really is an amazing gift."

"Yes, it is. He is very impressive, Diana. I'm sure he'll come in handy."

"And lastly, we have the Martian Manhunter. His name is J'onn J'onzz. He can also transform and fly."

"Did you say Martian? He's a Martian?"

"Yes, Clark, he's a Martian," Diana said chuckling.

"How in the world did you find him?" Clark asked amazed.

Bruce came over to the monitor then. "It really wasn't that difficult. The members you see here all know of or have met each other. Once we got the word out that we were putting together a group of superheroes to serve the populace, they were ready and willing to help,

eager even. It didn't take long," Bruce said elaborating.

"You've been busy. I just wish I could have been here. When will I get to meet them?" Clark wanted to know.

"We should be able to get everyone here within a few days," Bruce replied.

"But how will we contact them?"

"Well, we've managed to put together a communications system that will enable us to be in touch with them at all times," Diana said. "The equipment you see here will not need to be monitored as long as it's fully powered. There is a backup system, so we shouldn't have any problems."

"And you should probably know Clark, once they knew that you were also a member, well, you can imagine how excited they all were," Diana said chuckling, watching Clark trying not to blush.

"Ok, now you're just saying that," Clark said trying to be humble.

Bruce snorted. "Diana, please. His head is big enough already. Please don't make it any bigger."

"You're one to talk, Bruce. My wife and my former high school sweetheart can't wait to meet you. You were all they could talk about today. So, I have nothing on you and your reputation," Clark said daring him to deny it.

Bruce couldn't help smiling at that information. "Really, what did they say?" He asked, curious in spite of himself.

Diana sighed. "Guys, can we please get back to work?" Diana asked tired of their posturing, but inwardly laughing at their banter.

"Sorry, Diana," Clark couldn't help inwardly snickering.

Bruce just shook his head. "Alright, now that we have all these members, how are we going to make this whole thing work?"

"Actually, I have a few ideas about that," Clark said eager to get started.

*Gotham City, earlier that same evening:*

Lana was contemplating her relationship with Richard White. Meeting him by accident had turned her life upside down. She had happened to stop by to see Martha and Ben after a particularly boring day working at a job she hated, and Clark was there with Lois, Jason and Richard. She hadn't wanted to admit it at the time, but there was no denying it now, there was an instant attraction between them. I'm sure Clark noticed it too. Richard had invited her to Lois and Clark's wedding after they had gone out on a few dates, and the rest, well, she wasn't sure what the rest was, but she was definitely interested.

She glanced at him as they walked up to her apartment. She had found a job in Gotham City, and everything fell into place rather quickly. A friend from college helped her immensely by letting her stay with her for a few weeks, and Richard had been a true friend by showing her around the city.

They stood at her apartment door each not wanting to say goodnight. "Thanks again, Richard for inviting me to welcome Lois and Clark home. I'm very happy for them. I hope they have a long and happy life together."

"I want that too very much. They've both been through a lot. They deserve it."

"That's very generous of you, Richard. I know it didn't end well between you and Lois," Lana said getting more and more impressed with this man.

"It was a tough road for all of us, but I believe everything turned out for the best," he said

smiling at her and giving her a look like he didn't want to talk anymore.

"I think you're right," Lana said and smiled as Richard closed the distance between them and kissed her. He pulled her closer and she immediately responded amazed at how quickly they had become intertwined in each other's lives and maybe in each other's hearts, too.

Lana pulled back and smiled. "Call me tomorrow? It's my first day and a friendly voice is just what I'll need. Promise me?"

He didn't answer her, but pulled her back into his arms for another kiss. After a moment or two, he rested his forehead against hers, looked into her eyes and said "count on it." He smiled. "Good night, Lana."

"Good night," Lana said and turned and went inside her apartment.

Richard closed his eyes, took a deep breath and tried to steady his breathing. "Have a little patience, man."

Later that night, a mere hour before the sun was about to rise, Clark quietly entered their bedroom through the window, stripped off the suit, climbed into bed and pulled Lois into his arms.

Lois sighed and pulled him close. "Clark? Am I dreaming?"

Instead of answering her, he pulled her beneath him and proceeded to awaken his wife with soft kisses and tender caresses. Lois responded without hesitation. "I'm not dreaming. You're here, aren't you?" Lois asked panting.

He didn't answer her as he made slow sweet love to his wife. All too soon, they reached that peak and happily traveled to the heavens and beyond.

Lois and Clark slowly began to realize that Jason was downstairs and the television was blasting early morning cartoons.

"Good morning, my love," Clark smiled.

"Good morning, love," Lois said smiling. She reached up and pushed his hair back from his forehead.

"Mom! I'm hungry!" Jason hollered.

"You stay and relax, I'll go first, then I'll fix breakfast," Clark grinned and kissed her throat.

"Humm, I like the sound of that," Lois said and pulled his head down and kissed him thoroughly.

"Mom, Dad!" Jason hollered again.

"I gotta go!" Clark kissed her quick, hovered into the bathroom, took a quick shower and was dressed in pajama bottoms and a tee shirt in two minutes flat.

Lois blinked and shook her head at her super husband.

*Well, so much for relaxing,* Lois thought, as she slowly climbed out of bed and went to take a more relaxed shower.

### Chapter 3: Memories

After reluctantly leaving his wife's side, Clark came down to the living room and stood watching his young son for a few quiet moments. He took a shuddering breath, wondering again when this overwhelming feeling of joy and happiness would lessen and he wouldn't feel this need to cry at the mere sight of his son. *Today is not that day.*

He took another breath. "Good morning, Jason," Clark said and frowned as Jason didn't even turn to look at him.

"Morning, Dad. Where's Mom?" Jason asked concentrating on SpongeBob's watery antics.

"Oh, she'll be down in a few minutes. I heard you hollering for breakfast. What would like to eat?"

"Are you cooking?" Jason asked finally turning to look at his father.

"Sure, what would you like?"

"You can cook?" Jason found that hard to believe.

"Of course, my Mom taught me when I was little and I was about your age, too."

"Really? That's cool, Dad. I'd like to learn how to cook. Can I help?"

"Sure, but you haven't told me what you want to eat."

"Well, I like waffles, but Mom uses the toaster for them. I want a real one, you know, all fluffy inside and crunchy outside."

"I think we can manage that. Come on. Turn off the television for a while."

"Ok," Jason smiled at his father.

Clark smiled back and held out his hand for Jason to take it. He did without hesitation.

Ten minutes later, Lois came down the stairs. Her stomach growled in anticipation of the wonderful aromas coming from the kitchen. She glanced down at herself. She had decided to wear a red silk nightgown with matching robe, one of the outfits from their honeymoon. She knew how much Clark liked it. She had also brushed her hair and put on lip gloss and a little blush.

"Good morning, Clark, Jason. Something smells wonderful." Lois smiled and couldn't help but notice Clark wasn't looking at her.

"Morning, Mom," Jason said giving his mother a hug and a kiss, then went back to stirring waffle batter.

Lois grinned at her husband's shyness. It was hard for her to believe this was the same man who literally ravished her last night. "Clark?" She asked trying to get his attention. He had his back to them, stirring the eggs, frying bacon and buttering toast.

"Morning, Lois," Clark said busy making breakfast, not looking at her.

Lois sighed dramatically. "I was hoping for a kiss from my new husband this morning."

"Dad, don't you like kissing Mom?" Jason innocently asked.

Lois had to bite her lip to keep from laughing out loud.

"Of course I do, Jason." Clark knew he was acting silly. He took a deep breath, steeling himself as he turned and looked at his wife. He was stunned speechless. *She's so lovely.* His eyes traveled of their own accord from the top of her beautiful head down to her eyes that had that teasing glint he knew so well, down to those luscious ruby red lips, and he could swear he could smell ... the bacon?! "Oh, no, the bacon!"

He turned around and the bacon was burning and there was smoke coming from the pan. He grabbed the pan and waved his hand trying to clear the smoke, and then without thinking,

he blew out a breath. Everything went flying, including the buttered toast, the bacon in the pan, the eggs on the counter, not to mention the toaster and the waffle pan. They all smashed against the wall and clattered to the floor in a disgusting blob.

Clark slowly turned around and looked at Lois. He inwardly winced. Her mouth was hanging open and her hands were on her hips. She had that look on her face. "Lois, I ... I'm sorry," he tried to apologize.

Jason was laughing. Lois turned to her son and gave him the look and he stopped, but couldn't help snickering behind his hand.

Lois took her son by the hand. "Come on, Jason, let's go change and go get a real breakfast while your father cleans up this mess."

"Lois?"

She turned to face him. "Clark once we get dressed, get breakfast, I'm going to work and Jason has to go to school. I'll see you at work."

Clark stared at the mess he had made, ran his hands through his hair and sighed. "That went well."

*Gotham City, Wayne Towers:*

Bruce was all about business that morning. He had been neglecting Wayne Enterprises for a few weeks concentrating his efforts on getting the League started, but now Lucius Fox was filling him in on the recent staff changes in a number of subsidiaries that were doing well in spite of the economy. *People would always need food and starting up Wayne Foods five years ago definitely has paid off.* He glanced at the list of names of new executives and one name stood out.

"Lana Lang, now where have I heard that name before? It does sound familiar. Humm, she's from Smallville, Kansas? It has to be a coincidence."

"I told you about her a few weeks ago, Mr. Wayne. I interviewed and hired her on the spot."

"Ah, yes, I remember now. You also told me she's Clark's old high school sweetheart and she's dating Lois's former fiancé. It is a small world, isn't it?" Bruce was fascinated. "She's lovely," he said smiling at her photograph.

Lucius knew that look. He tried to get back to business. "As I was saying, she seems very capable, eager to get started, friendly, and her credentials all checked out."

"I know you wouldn't have hired her if you weren't impressed. So, tell me, when does she start?"

Lucius stood up then and went to the window thinking about how he should answer him. He's known Mr. Wayne forever and he knew deep inside he was a good man, but the way he lived his personal life well, it wasn't his place to say anything. But he had spent barely an hour with Ms. Lang, and now he felt compelled to tell his employer how he felt. "Mr. Wayne ... she's good people."

Bruce turned to look at Lucius' expression and he could see he was serious. "What are you trying to say?"

"You know exactly what I'm saying."

"Lucius, I'm going to let that one slide because I know you mean well, but I would never do anything to hurt Ms. Lang or any woman I may be interested in seeing. I'm a consenting adult and so are the women who *consent* to go out with me." *This conversation is getting way too serious.* "Besides, I just want to meet her, welcome her into the Wayne Enterprises' fold,

that's all. And let us not forget, she is a member of the Kent circle and we should keep an eye on her. Don't you agree?"

Lucius understood his reasoning. "Yes, I agree, we should keep an eye on her."

"Good, now when does she start?"

Lucius glanced at his watch. "She should be at the office in about an hour."

Bruce led the way to the door. "Shall we?"

Meanwhile back at Riverside Drive, Clark was still cleaning up the mess he had made when he heard Lois and Jason come downstairs, but then he heard the front door open. "Lois, aren't you going to say goodbye?" He asked coming into the foyer hoping to get a goodbye from his family.

Lois didn't answer him. She wasn't as mad as she was at first, but she had told him not to use superpowers in the house. Not only did he use them twice, but he had used them in front of Jason too.

Clark hung his head, feeling awful. She wasn't even speaking to him.

Jason felt bad for his father. "Mom, aren't you going to kiss Dad goodbye?" He could feel the tension between them. He didn't like it.

Lois and Clark stared at each other. Clark tried again. "Lois, I'm really sorry. It won't happen again, I promise. Please forgive me," he begged with a puppy dog face no woman could resist, and Lois was no different.

She really tried to steel her emotions against him, but it just wasn't possible. *How in the world am I supposed to resist that face?* "Come here, you big dolt," she said holding out her arms.

Clark was in them in a second holding her tight. They both didn't seem to want to let go of the other. Clark pulled back after a moment. "I love you."

"I love you too," Lois said as they kissed each other. She stroked his hair and pulled him closer.

Jason began to fidget. He pulled on his Mother's coat. "Mom?"

They both pulled back and smiled. "See you at the office?" Clark asked smiling.

"And where else would I be? I'll see you in an hour. Bye, Clark."

"Bye, Lois." Clark squatted down to eye level with his son. "Jason, before you go, I wanted to apologize to you too. I'm sorry son for using superpowers in the house. It's against the rules. It won't happen again. Forgive me?"

"Sure, Dad, you didn't mean to do it," Jason said and impulsively hugged his father.

Clark couldn't help glancing at Lois at that true remark. "Thanks, son and I'll see you later," he smiled and ruffled his son's hair.

"Dad, stop that, I'm not a baby anymore," Jason said smoothing his hair back in place.

"Sorry son, and no, I agree you're not a baby anymore," Clark said and smiled. He closed the door, took a deep breath, super sped into the kitchen, then he stopped dead in his tracks. *What am I doing?* He went to get a broom and a mop, and cleaned the kitchen like he promised Lois he would.

Lois arrived at the office in little over an hour. Clark wasn't at his desk. *Maybe he had an emergency or maybe he's still cleaning the kitchen.* She shook her head. Suddenly, there was a tap on her shoulder, and then a hot cup of her favorite cappuccino appeared over her shoulder.

"Thank you, Clark," Lois said turning and taking a sip. "Delicious."

"You're welcome." Clark smiled and couldn't help staring at her lips.

"Welcome back, CK, Ms. Lane," Jimmy Olsen said smiling and coming up to shake Clark's hand.

"Thanks, Jimmy, it's good to be back," Clark said.

"Thanks, Jimmy," Lois said chuckling. "That's Mrs. Lane-Kent, Jimmy. So, what's going on around here?"

"Well," Jimmy said as he leaned in and whispered, "there's a rumor that Superman has teamed up with a group of superheroes and that he won't be around here much anymore, but he'll be doing more rescues overseas. Have you guys heard anything? I mean, you were on the other side of the world recently."

Lois and Clark glanced at each other and then they both shrugged their shoulders, and answered at the same time. "Nope, haven't heard anything."

"Wow, that's surprising. I would have thought Superman would have contacted one of you to give you the story, especially you Ms. Lane, I mean Mrs. Kent, I mean Mrs. Lane-Kent."

"Jimmy, Lois is fine, please."

Jimmy's mouth fell open, but he recovered quickly. "Thanks, Ms. Lane, I mean Lois. Sorry."

"Jimmy!" It was Perry leaning out the door of his office. "Well, look who's back? Welcome back Lane, Kent! In my office, both of you, now!"

Lois and Clark glanced at each other wondering what that was about.

"Coming Chief," they both said simultaneously.

"Close the door and take a seat." Perry paced in front of his desk. "First of all, congratulations, I'm happy for both of you, although I had my suspicions about you two, even as far back as your trip to ... Niagara Falls."

They both dropped their mouths open, shocked to have that brought up now. "Perry?" Clark asked wondering where this was going.

"I know you're Jason's father, Kent. Don't look so shocked. You two have danced around each other for years, and then right after that trip, you leave and Lois turns up pregnant two months later. Come on, I'm not blind."

"Now Perry, you don't understand," Clark began.

"Oh, I think I do. You left Lois pregnant and disappeared for years while my nephew took care of her and her son while you went gallivanting all over the world."

"It wasn't like that Perry. Lois and I have worked all of that out. She forgave me. Besides, I didn't know she was pregnant when I left."

"Is that true, Lois?"

"Yes Chief, it's true. Why are you bringing all of this up now?" Lois was getting emotional, which wasn't like her.

Clark put his arm around her shoulder. "Perry, that was a very difficult time for both of us, but we've moved past all of it. Please, it's our first day back."

"Look, the reason I'm bringing this up now is that you hurt a lot of people with your little sabbatical, Kent. I don't want Lois or Jason hurt again, or you'll have to answer to me. Got it?"

"Perry, believe me, that's the last thing I want. I love Lois and Jason very much. They mean everything to me. I would never hurt them again. I swear it."

"Alright, Kent, I believe you. Remember, Lois and Jason are counting on you, don't let

them down."

"I won't Perry, I promise."

"Go on, then, staff meeting in an hour."

Lois and Clark left Perry's office both feeling as if they'd been punched in the stomach. Lois touched her forehead feeling a bit lightheaded. "Clark, can you take me some place quiet? My head is pounding."

He took Lois by the arm and used his x-ray vision searching for a place where she could rest for a few minutes. He found a quiet place several corridors away from the noises and prying eyes of the bullpen. He entered a vacant office and locked the door so she wouldn't be disturbed. He could see she was upset. "Are you alright, Lois? Do you want some aspirin?" Clark asked solicitous of his wife.

Lois lifted her head to look at him and there were tears in her eyes. "Oh, Clark, why did he bring all of that up now? I never want to think about that time ever again," she said trying to hold back her tears.

He brought her over to the sofa and pulled her into his arms stroking her back. "Try not to think about it. Everything is fine. It's all in the past. It can't hurt us, not anymore."

"My heart knows you would never leave us, but my head still remembers. Clark, I couldn't bear it if you left us again. I don't know what I would do," she whimpered.

He took her face between his palms trying to convince her. "I will never ever leave you again. You must believe that, honey. We're married now and nothing will ever part us again, not even in death. You know that, don't you?"

She threw her arms around his neck trying to believe it, hoping with all her heart that they would always be together like this. "Hold me close, don't let go, please don't let go," she cried.

"It's alright, honey. I've got you." Clark had no idea she felt like this. He pulled her closer holding her tight.

"Clark, I need you now, please?" She didn't wait for an answer, but started pulling at his tie, kissing his cheek, his ear, his strong throat, anywhere her lips could reach.

"Lois, we can't do that here," Clark said knowing he wanted to ease her pain, but this wasn't the right place.

She acted like she hadn't heard him. She pulled his head down and kissed him hard, desperate to get closer. She pulled back after moment and gave a breathless plea. "Please!"

Clark responded knowing it was wrong, but he wanted her too more than anything. He pulled her head from his shoulder, wiped her tears with the back of his hand and kissed her softly. "I love you, Lois. I promise I'll never leave you."

She kissed his chest, laid her head under his chin, and snuggled against him. He pulled his coat up and covered her back stroking her hair. Lois sighed. "I believe you and I love you, too."

## Chapter 4: Contact

*Gotham City, Wayne Towers:*

Lana was doing a little reflecting about her life up to that point. She stood outside looking up at the tall glass office building in downtown Gotham City where she would be starting her new job with Wayne Foods. Her job title as the Executive Director of Research and Development - Organic and Natural Foods was a mouthful, but she was up to the challenge. She had every confidence in her abilities, and after meeting with Mr. Lucius Fox, the head of all Wayne Enterprises' subsidiaries, she looked forward to a long and prosperous career with the company.

Looking back over the past several months, it was hard for her to believe she was really there in Gotham City, and after telling herself for as long as she could remember that the big city was not for her, she had made the decision to move there. She was at a dead end job in Smallville, but this job would start a new life for her.

As Lana rode up the elevator to her office, she kept telling herself staunchly that Richard was not the reason she had moved to the big city. It had nothing to do with the fact that he was sweet, charming, funny, and attractive. She sighed. *Who am I kidding? I know why I'm here. Just accept it. It'll be easier once I do.* She groaned at her inner voice.

"Ms. Lang?" Mr. Fox greeted her, as she got off the elevator to the top floor of the executive offices of Wayne Foods.

"Mr. Fox, good morning. It's good to see you again," Lana wasn't expecting to see him today. They shook hands in greeting. "What brings you here this morning?"

"Well, I always welcome our top executives on their first day. So, how's the apartment hunting going? Any luck?"

"No, not really, and I may be wearing out my welcome at my friend's apartment."

"I see, I may be able to help you with that," Mr. Fox smiled.

"Really? That would be most appreciated. Thank you," Lana replied truly grateful for the help. She didn't know the city very well and hopefully she could find something sooner rather than later. She couldn't entertain Richard at her friend's apartment and she didn't feel right going over to his place. It didn't feel like it was the right time for them. They had both agreed to go slow. *It would be asking for trouble if I went over to his place. I'm not made of stone. He is entirely too charming for his own good.*

"Well, here we are," Mr. Fox opened the double doors to her richly appointed executive office.

Lana entered her new office and was stunned. Being a small town girl, she was not used to this kind of opulence. Her desk was a dark cherry, and so were the cabinets and credenza which lined one wall. There was a side table with a conference telephone, a couple of nicely appointed desk chairs, desk accessories, a beautiful lamp, a computer, keyboard and everything she would need it appeared, not to mention a lovely view of the city. There were even a few art pieces on the walls. She also saw a dozen red roses and went to see who they were from, but she had a vague idea. She smiled as she read the card:

*Good luck today, Lana. You deserve it! xoxRichardxox*

"How sweet of him," she sighed.

Mr. Fox cleared his throat. "Ms. Lang?"

Lana turned from her desk and there standing in the doorway on her first day on the job was none other than Bruce Wayne, CEO and President of Wayne Enterprises.

"Ms. Lang, may I introduce ...?" Mr. Fox began.

"I know who you are. It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Wayne," Lana said coming forward to shake his hand in greeting. *The air of confidence and assurance rolled off this man in waves. I can see why anyone would want to meet him and work for him. I can't wait to tell Lois about this.*

Bruce returned her handshake inwardly grinning. *She's even lovelier in person.* "Welcome to Wayne Foods, Ms. Lang. I see you're getting settled. Do you like your office?" Bruce asked taking a stroll around her office and he couldn't help noticing the flowers.

"Oh, yes, very much, sir. Thank you," Lana replied, but she couldn't help wondering why he was really there. She studied him for a moment. *He is very attractive and his playboy mantle is not surprising, but he must be a very busy man, and I'm just one of the many executives in many subsidiaries he owns all over the world.*

"Oh, don't thank me. You seem to have made quite an impression on Mr. Fox, and you haven't even started work yet."

Lana was humbled. She didn't know what to say. "I just hope I can live up to your expectations."

"Do we look worried?" Bruce asked smiling. "We'll let you get to work. Good luck, Ms. Lang. We here at Wayne Foods are lucky to have you." He shook her hand goodbye.

"Thank you, sir, I'll do my best," she smiled.

"I'm sure you will," Bruce replied and turned to leave.

"Excuse me, Mr. Wayne, I know it's my first day, and please forgive me, but ..." Lana hesitated worried she may overstep.

"But ...?" Bruce asked encouraged.

"A friend of mine works for the Daily Planet. She's a reporter," Lana said and waited for him to blow up or something.

"Ah, yes, a reporter. I may have heard of her. What's her name?" He asked knowing the answer.

"Lois Lane-Kent."

Bruce smiled. "Yes, I have heard of her and her husband too."

"Really? You know Clark, I mean Mr. Kent?"

"Yes, we've met on several occasions."

"It is a small world. Clark and I go way back. We grew up together."

"Is that right?" Bruce smiled again.

"Yes, we did. You see, Lois wants an interview with you. Please feel free to decline. I would certainly understand and Lois would too, I hope," Lana said reluctantly.

Bruce chuckled. "Please tell Mrs. Lane-Kent I would be honored."

Lana was so pleased. She shook his hand again. "Thank you, Mr. Wayne. I'll tell her."

"You're welcome, and I'll look forward to that call from Mrs. Lane-Kent. Bye now."

Bruce left Lana's office inwardly grinning.

Lucius watched him leave and he couldn't help but feel relieved. Ms. Lang didn't seem the least bit interested in Bruce, except as her employer. "Ms. Lang, feel free to call me anytime, and I'll be in touch with those numbers for that apartment. Give me a few hours?" Mr. Fox asked.

"Thank you again, Mr. Fox. I really appreciate it."

"You're welcome, and I'll talk to you later. Have a good day," Mr. Fox said and left her office.

Lana walked over to her desk, sniffed a rose, and went and took a seat. She smiled and

twirled around and around, lifted her arms in the air and said .. "YES!!"

About three blocks away, at the Gotham City Daily Planet offices, Richard glanced at the clock on his desktop again. Only five minutes had elapsed since the last time he had looked. He sighed. *I'm not getting any work done today. Just call her and see how she's doing. But it's her first day. I know she's busy. Just pick up the phone.* He picked up the phone and dialed the main number.

"Wayne Foods, how may I direct your call?" The receptionist answered the call.

"Lana Lang, please," Richard was getting nervous.

"Lana Lang, here," Lana answered her intercom, distracted.

"Hi, Lana, it's Richard. How's it going? Can you talk for a few minutes? I hope I'm not disturbing you," Richard was rambling.

"Hi, Richard, it's good to hear your voice. I have a few minutes. Everything is great. It has been a little crazy around here though. I've been in meetings all morning, meeting staff, getting the lay of the land, you know, the usual," Lana replied as she waved to her assistant that it was a personal call.

"Sounds like a pretty hectic day. Are we still on for tonight? We have to celebrate."

"I'm not sure. I may be here a while, so I don't think I can confirm dinner until my desk is not so insane. Can I call you later, say around 6:00? I'll know for sure by then. Is that alright?"

"Sure, that's fine. Did you get my roses?"

She smiled. "Yes, I did. Thank you, Richard. They're beautiful. When I came into my office for the first time, there they were. I knew they were from you."

"Who else would send you a dozen red roses?" Richard asked knowing she was a beautiful and successful woman.

"No one, Richard, I'm not seeing anyone else, just you and only you. I told you that. Don't you believe me?" Lana was concerned that Richard's insecurities may be lingering after what happened with Lois.

"Yes, of course, I believe you, Lana. I'm sorry. I just ... I miss you," Richard said trying to rein in his feelings.

"I miss you too. Look, I'm going to try my best to get out of here on time. Let me get back to work. Call me later alright?"

"Sure, I'll call you later. Bye, Lana."

"Bye, Richard."

Richard hung up and stared at the phone hoping he wouldn't screw this up. She had become way too important to him.

Meanwhile back in Metropolis, Lois and Clark discretely left the bullpen area and went to another floor to clean up, promising each other they wouldn't do anything like that again. After realizing that they were going to be ten minutes late for the staff meeting, they steeled themselves for the looks they knew would come. Clark held the conference room door open for her silently saying with his eyes, *here goes.*

"Nice of you to join us, Kent, Lane," Perry announced their arrival.

They took their seats not looking at the other. "Sorry, Chief," they said at the same time.

Most of the staff grinned and shook their heads, but a few others snickered and whispered, or the jealous ones did anyway. "I can guess where they've been. It's written all over their faces."

Clark heard every word, but he could see Lois wasn't paying them any attention. She smiled shyly at him. He ducked his head after returning her smile, afraid his cheeks would heat up. When she turned back to Perry, his mind returned to that vacant office. *I tried to reassure her that I would never ever leave her again. It is painful to think she was still hurting from my disappearance.* He sighed, wondering again how to ease her pain and his own. He snapped back to the present as Perry was speaking to them.

Lois's thoughts were also back in that vacant office. *What happened back there? I have no idea what came over me. I thought those doubts and insecurities were gone forever.* She inwardly sighed. *Apparently not, when even the mere mention of those two words ... Niagara Falls ... could turn me into someone I don't even recognize.* She glanced at her husband and couldn't help but smile. *We need to talk about it. It can't hurt us. It's in the past, just as Clark said. I just need to believe it.*

"Attention people." Perry tapped his water glass with his pen to get everyone's attention. "Stop the chatter and listen up." Once he got everyone's attention, Perry began to pace back and forth at the head of the table, staring at the best reporters in the business that worked for him. "Ever since Superman returned to our world six months ago, we've seen a steady influx of superheroes among us. Some would call them vigilantes, or just ego hyped men and women out to make names for themselves, but I don't believe that, not for a minute."

Clark inwardly smiled at Perry's words. Having a paper like the Daily Planet on their side was exactly the kind of support they wanted and needed. He glanced at Lois and she had that smile in her eyes he knew so well.

Perry continued. "Now, my sources tell me that a few of them are meeting, putting together a League, as it were, a society of superheroes that would work together to help each other to help us, all of us to make our country and the world a safer place."

"But what gives them the right to rein over us?" A staffer asked worried about this new turn of events. He looked around the table and he could see this was not a popular stance. He tried to clarify his question. "I mean, even the police are skeptical about their motives. I'm not alone."

"From what I hear, Superman will be their leader. He will be the one in charge and I trust him. We all trust him. He has more than proven himself time and time again. Need I remind you what happened six months ago?" Perry asked his staffer.

"Of course, we remember, Perry, but that's not the issue. How can Superman keep track of these other 'members'? What if they go rogue or turn on us?" The staffer was getting worked up.

"I have no worries on that score," Perry responded. "Superman will keep them in line. Now, listen to what I'm saying. We, and I mean, everyone in this room, will make it clear that the Daily Planet will make a stand for truth and justice, because that's what Superman stands for, and that's what I believe this new league will stand for too. Are there any more questions?" Perry asked his staff, as he pointedly looked to the staffer who had spoken up earlier.

No one had any questions. "Now, I want all articles on my desk within the week. According to my sources, a major announcement is in the works. Get on it people. Move it. Meeting adjourned."

*Meanwhile, back in Gotham City:*

Richard had most of the afternoon to think about his earlier conversation with Lana. It

spoke volumes about the way he felt about her. After admitting that to himself, he resolved to take things slower. He didn't want to scare her off. As it was, she wouldn't even consider coming to his apartment for the evening, knowing that the attraction between them was potent. There was no denying it. He glanced at his watch. It was almost 6:00 pm. He was looking forward to seeing her again, and he wanted to hear about her day. He had made reservations at one of the more popular restaurants in the city.

He dialed her number. "Good evening, Wayne Foods," the receptionist answered the call. "Is Lana Lang available to speak to Richard White, please?"

"One moment, I'll connect you."

Several moments passed. Richard began to worry. *Had she left for the evening? No, I told her I would call. We agreed.*

"Hello, Mr. White, I'm not getting an answer in her office, and her assistant has left for the evening. Would you like to leave a message?"

"Oh, I see, has she left for the evening? Could you page her please? It's important that I reach her."

"One moment, please."

*Where is she? Maybe I should try her cell phone.* Richard looked up when he heard footsteps in his office, and there leaning on the door jamb with a smile on her face was the very person he was trying to reach.

"Well, hello there," Lana said smiling flirtatiously at him.

"Lana, where'd you come from?" He hung up and came to her and gave her a hug and a kiss.

"Hum, I should have come over here sooner if I that's the kind of greeting I'll get. Happy to see me?" She asked knowing the answer.

"You know I am, but I thought we were going to talk again before we confirmed our plans."

"I wanted to surprise you. I could tell from your call how excited you were about tonight and I confess I'm excited too. So, where are we going?"

"I see we both like surprises. Let me get my coat and we'll head out. I'm sure you'll like this place. I hear the food is outstanding," he said and smiled as he escorted her to the elevator.

The restaurant was located in one of the tallest buildings in Gotham, owned by Wayne Enterprises. It was one of those swanky restaurants that slowly turned giving customers a spectacular view of the city at all angles as they dined.

After being seated at their table, Lana took it all in and was very impressed with what she could see. "Wow, this is some place. I'd heard of it, but I never thought I would ever eat here. I hear the food is amazing. I do love Italian."

"I know you do. Are you hungry? I know you were pretty busy today. Did you get a chance to eat lunch?"

"I barely had time to have a sandwich at my desk, so I'm starved," Lana replied greedily looking over the menu and tried to decipher all the Italian words.

"May I make a recommendation? Good evening, Ms. Lang," Bruce Wayne cocked his head in greeting as his date scrutinized Lana.

Richard stood up to shake the gentleman's hand. "Good evening. Aren't you ...?"

Lana made the introductions. "Richard White, this is Bruce Wayne, umm, my employer."

"I'm very pleased to meet you. Lana and I are here to celebrate her first day on the job,"

Richard said feeling the need to explain.

"I'm sure Lana told you about our meeting today," Bruce wanted to feel out their relationship. He still didn't understand why he came over to their table. Ms. Lang fascinated him in a way he found hard to describe.

"Actually, no, we haven't had a chance to talk about her day," Richard replied.

"Well, you picked one of the finest restaurants in the city to celebrate. I have eaten here on numerous occasions and I highly recommend ..."

His date cleared her throat. "Bruce, aren't you going to introduce me?"

"I'm sorry, this is ... what was your name again?" Bruce asked not feeling the least bit awkward about asking his date her name.

She sighed. "You are too bad, Bruce. I'm Deborah Alderson of the Gotham City Aldersons. It's nice to meet you both." Deborah extended her hand in greeting to both Lana and Richard. "Bruce, the waiter is trying to get our attention. Our table is ready," Deborah said.

"I'm not done talking, Diane. As I was saying, you can't go wrong with any pasta or seafood on the menu."

"Thank you, Mr. Wayne," Lana said curious in spite of herself.

"Yes, thank you," Richard said trying to read the man.

"Enjoy your meal. It was nice seeing you both," Bruce said turning on his heel and escorting his pouting date to their table.

"That was odd," Richard said sitting down.

"I'll say," Lana said narrowing her eyes at his retreating back. "You know, I've read up on Mr. Bruce Wayne, and it's a fascinating story. He was orphaned at a young age, raised by close friends, and the only heir to an enormous fortune. I can see why Lois wants to meet him and interview him."

"Being rich does not make one fascinating. He looks like a playboy to me. He didn't even remember his date's name," Richard said trying not to sound jealous.

Lana shrugged. "Well, enough about him. Let's order," Lana said, as she could see that Richard was getting worked up a little.

Richard couldn't help having a twinge of jealousy. *Lana will probably see him again since the man is her boss.* He groaned to himself. *That's all I need.*

## Chapter 5: Secret Meetings

Lois and Clark would both like to forget Perry's words, but they were sitting there between them refusing to be ignored. After falling into bed exhausted after their first day back at work, Lois and Clark had not found the time to talk about what had happened at the office the day before. They knew it would be a painful conversation, but it had to be done.

The next day, Lois was at her desk making calls to her sources about the League. *Clark sure is being secretive about his meetings. I guess I can understand why.* As she checked her desk drawer for supplies, she saw the note. It was from Clark. *He wants me to meet him on the roof at noon.* She checked her watch and it was about that time. She grabbed her bag and headed to the elevator. *It looks like we'll have that talk sooner than I thought.*

Clark was there waiting for her when she arrived, but what she wasn't expecting was to see him standing on the ledge and in the suit. He didn't seem to hear her, so she watched him for a moment. Lois's mind went to their *rendezvous* yesterday and what she had said in the heat of the moment... that she would be lost without him. At the time, it had been a purely emotional outburst, which she still didn't understand, and thinking back on it now, she couldn't remember her emotions being so out of before.

He turned then and smiled, but didn't say anything. Lois stood very still as he hopped down from the ledge and slowly walked towards her, his cape moving with every step. She was frozen to the spot and her heart was pounding in her chest. He picked her up and she held on tight as he leapt into the sky before she had a chance to say anything. Once they were above the clouds, he leveled off and it seemed to her as if they were heading south.

*I'll never get over flying like this. It always feels as if we're in a dream and it's not really happening, but it is.* Lois finally found her voice. "Clark, where are we going? We don't have a lot of time," she said amazed at how breathless she sounded. She looked down and she could see they were over the ocean.

"This won't take long," he answered her and looked down to get his bearings.

Lois was relieved they were high enough that no one would see them. "Clark, you know, now that we're married, people could get the wrong idea if anyone saw us together like this," she said nodding at the suit.

"Don't worry, I was careful. Look, we're here," he said and landed on a beautiful sandy white beach. He set Lois down but held her close to him not wanting to let her go.

"Where exactly is here anyway? It's beautiful." Mesmerized by the scene before her, she took off her shoes, took his hand and started walking towards a dwelling she could see up ahead just beyond the trees.

"We're in the Caribbean, Lois. This island is completely private and secluded. The bungalow and this island belong to a friend of mine." He stopped walking after a moment. "I thought we should talk privately."

"Really, a friend? Remind me later to thank this friend of yours." She couldn't help but be impressed. "It is private, I'll admit that, but I can't believe you brought me hundreds of miles to a secluded and private beach just to talk," she smiled quirking an eyebrow at him.

He caught her look and then it dawned on him. "Oh, you thought ... Lois, there's not enough time to do that, is there?" He smiled at her expression.

Lois laughed and grabbed his hand. "Come on, is there any food inside? I'm starved."

The bungalow was lovely. There was a living room, a dining area, a kitchen and a bedroom, all appointed with dark woods with white, blue and aqua accents, all beautifully designed and arranged. The fridge was stocked with snacks, fruit, beverages and sandwiches.

"Someone has been here recently," Lois stated rummaging for food in the fridge.

Clark twirled and was in jeans and a tee shirt in seconds. "Well, it is lunchtime. Let's eat and then, we'll talk."

Lois heard the swooshing sound and knew what had happened. She took a deep breath, turned to face him and pasted on a smile. "Let 's eat." They took their food out on the veranda to have lunch to enjoy the weather and the lovely view. They talked about safe topics, Jason, work and the League. Clark promised he'd have a story for her in day or two.

After lunch, Clark sensed her reluctance to talk about the day before, so he asked her if she wanted to take a walk on the beach hoping it would help her relax. They walked hand in hand for a few minutes. He stopped walking, turned her to face him, and lifted her chin to look at him. "Lois, I can see you're reluctant to talk about this." He sighed. "If I could change the past, I would."

"I know that, Clark."

He held tight to her hands. "I wanted to talk about Perry and what he said, but there is something else I've wanted to say and please stop me, because I'll understand if you don't want to talk about it."

"Go on, I'm listening."

He took a deep breath. "When I first came back and I found out you were engaged to another man and had a child, I didn't think I could bare that much pain," he barely managed to say as he closed his eyes.

Lois squeezed his hands and sighed, knowing it was way past time for them to clear the air between them so they could move forward. "Clark? Clark, look at me."

He opened his eyes and stared into her beautiful eyes.

"All of that is in the past now. We've both done things we're not proud of but none of that matters now." She brought his right hand up to her chest and placed it over her heart. She raised her right hand and placed it over his heart. "The point I'm trying to make is ... we stopped, Clark. We stopped hurting each other. We healed our hearts, Clark. We did it, and now, we're together ... forever." She went into his arms then, holding him close.

Clark was so moved, all he could say was "forever." He pulled back, leaned down and kissed her finding a response that he wanted and needed. They made love on their beautiful island as all too soon, Clark's cry of rapture followed hers by mere seconds. Lois stroked his dark head as she tried to catch her breath. Several moments passed before either of them could speak.

"Are you alright?" Clark asked.

"I'm fine now," Lois said holding him close.

He stroked her hair and kissed her temple. "Do you want to tell me now why you were so upset when Perry brought up Niagara Falls? I thought we had moved beyond that Lois."

Lois sat up then, gathering her clothes together. Clark did the same. She shook her head trying to make sense of her feelings. "I honestly don't know, but when Perry said those words, Niagara Falls, and he went on and on about Jason and how much you had hurt us, the memories came flooding back, and along with the memories, came the pain. It felt like I was drowning. I just wanted it all to go away." She touched his cheek. "But you were my lifeline, Clark. You've saved me so many times in the past and I'm sure they'll be more times in the future."

"Don't say that Lois. I want you to be safe and happy always." He stood up then and

pulled her into his arms, kissing her temple, holding her tight and stroking her back.

Holding back tears, she whispered, "this is when I'm safe and happy, Clark, when you're holding me like this."

Clark dropped his head to her throat nuzzling softly. He kissed her cheek and stroked her hair. "I love you, Lois."

"I love you too, Clark," she said smiling. "Thank you for bringing me here, and Clark, I promise not to let the past hurt me or us anymore." She stroked his hair. "One day, I'll look back at the past and remember the good times, because we did have a lot of good times, Clark."

"We did, didn't we?" He smiled back. "Come on, we have to hurry now." They both laughed as they hurried back to the bungalow, and then headed back to Metropolis.

*The Watchtower, later that evening:*

Bruce and the other members had just arrived. While waiting for Clark, they were all fitted with their communication devices. All the members were ready to get started, excited about working together to stop crime and put the bad guys away. A large roundtable had been set up for easier discussions and everyone could see each other while they planned strategies.

Clark walked in a few moments later ready for their first meeting. There was chatter, but the room went silent when he entered it "Gentlemen and lady, please take a seat everyone, and welcome to Metropolis and the first meeting of *The Justice League of America*. It's good to finally meet all of you in person. We'll skip the formalities for now. We all know of or heard of each other. Now, as you all probably know, this is an historic occasion. Nothing like this has ever been done before, a league of superheroes banding together for the betterment of mankind. It's new and I don't expect everyone will welcome us with open arms."

"Oh, we're not that naïve, Clark, believe me. We've all been around the block and have endured our fair share of mistrust and envy," Bruce stated.

"Well, mistrust and envy are milder emotions that could lead to more intense reactions. We should all be on our toes for anything and anyone who might have something to say about how they really feel about us. Does anyone have any questions before we get started?"

"We understand congratulations are in order?" Bart grinned knowing the answer.

"Well, yes, I was married a little over a week ago, and I have a son, Jason, who's 6."

"Congratulations, Clark," everyone chorused happy for him.

"Thank you all very much," Clark replied as he slowly walked around the table. "You've all read the manifest and you all have your communication devices, and they've been tested and retested, so you shouldn't have any problems contacting each other no matter where you are. You should also take note that this League is a democracy. If we have any disagreements about how things are done, then there will be a vote. If you have any questions about why we're here and what our goal is, we have only one goal and that is to save lives. The bad guys will not win, not here, not anywhere."

"Exactly who are the bad guys and when can we start kicking some butt?" Green Lantern wanted to know.

"It's not a who, but a what. You've probably all heard the name 'Intergang,'" Bruce stated. They all looked at each other, nodding their heads in recognition.

"Just how big are they?" J'onn J'onz wanted to know.

"Aren't they nationwide? We've all heard the name before," Arthur asked.

"Bruce, I'll let you fill everyone in on what we're up against," Clark said.

Bruce stood up and went to the main monitor, punched in a few key words and a list of businesses, heads of those businesses and the one man who was the head of entire organization came up onto the screen. "To answer your question, Arthur, yes, they are nationwide, but they are headquartered here in Metropolis. The organization has been run at various times by Morgan Edge, Ugly Mannheim, Boss Moxie, and once taken control of by Luthor. Intergang was brought up to date by Morgan Edge, with considerable backing from Darkseid of Apokolips, shortly after Clark arrived in Metropolis." Bruce stopped at that point in his speech and glanced at Diana.

Diana looked straight ahead refusing to acknowledge Bruce's attempt to get her attention, inside the memories were still keen in her mind, but she refused to go there.

Clark nodded for Bruce to continue. "This timing was carefully planned to take full advantage of Lex Luthor's devotion of more and more of LexCorp's assets towards stopping Clark after he had entered 'his' city. Intergang found a niche from where they could make a grab for power. Now that Luthor is currently in a prison psych ward, a vast variety of crimes have plagued the streets from the time Clark left and they've intensified since his return. I think they're sending Clark a message, that they can't be stopped, but we have our own message to send them, and I can't wait for them to receive it."

"Thank you, Bruce," Clark said. "Are there any more questions?"

"Who's Darkseid? He sounds ominous," Arthur asked.

Clark stood at his chair, took a deep breath and stated. "Darkseid is a very formidable foe, even more so than Lex Luthor. Not only does he have superior intellect, but he is considered a New God on his own world," he said not feeling the need to elaborate at the moment.

"He's from another world, like you Clark? How powerful is he? He must know you're back in Metropolis," Bart inquired wanting to know more about Darkseid.

"I see no reason why he would come back here, and once Intergang realizes we are here to stay, then we'll send a message to the entire syndicate once and for all, that they can't run roughshod over this country, not anymore."

Bruce listened and realized that Clark hadn't answered Bart's question. He would talk to Clark about Darkseid in private. He's one foe Clark can't ignore. "I have one more thing to say about Intergang. Listen up, everyone," Bruce said, as he pulled the Intergang legitimate business list up onto the monitor again.

"I have a question about these businesses. So if they're legitimate, how do we stop them?" J'onn asked.

"There's only one way, from the inside. I have several people in place, but it's a slow process. One bad move and they could disappear," Bruce believed.

"What do we do in the meantime?" Diana wanted to know.

"We hit them in the small areas around the country, take care of the small time businesses, just enough for them to take notice of us. I know it's not what we had planned, but it will send a message that we're not going anywhere and that we mean business," Bruce said.

"Thank you, Bruce," Clark said. "Let me just say that my leaving earth was a personal and purely selfish decision, but I'm back now. I'm not going anywhere. Earth is my home. The sooner the thugs and criminals realize they're up against not only me, but the best superheroes this country has to offer, they'll have no choice but to sit up and take notice. Speaking of taking notice, the press has gotten wind of our meetings so it's time for a public appearance." Clark heard a few groans around the table.

"The press conference won't last long, and I'll do all the talking, so it will go faster that way. It's mostly for the mayor and a few public officials to get the word out about us. We want these officials on our side, as well as the press. It's important to what we're trying to accomplish. The conference starts at 10:00 am tomorrow morning at City Hall. Don't be late. So, if there's no further business, I'll see everyone in the morning. Meeting adjourned."

## Chapter 6: A Better World

The house on Riverside Drive was eerily quiet the next morning. The sun was slowly rising outside the lover's bedroom window casting a shadow on the walls, and on the two individuals so close together on the bed that one might think at first glance that they were one person.

Clark instinctively turned his head toward the window just as a bright light from the sun caressed his face. He inwardly sighed and pulled Lois closer. He knew he should get up, but this day was going to be a very special day for all of them. He wanted to spend some time alone with his family. He also knew that this day would change their lives forever.

Lois slowly awakened and was very pleased to feel her husband's arms around her. She snuggled closer amazed at how quickly she had become accustomed to his body heat. She sighed thinking about their honeymoon and how blissfully happy they had been, but the past few days had taught her that their love would only grow stronger as the days, weeks and months went by.

"Good morning," Clark smiled and kissed her forehead.

"Good morning," Lois whispered and then stated the obvious. "You're here."

He chuckled. "Yes, I am."

"Why, not that I'm complaining, mind you." Then she remembered the conference. "Oh, I think I know ... the press conference. Are you worried about it?"

"Well, only a little," he whispered.

Lois leaned up on her elbow to get a better look at his face. "I can't imagine why you would be worried. Everybody loves you, and once the public realizes this is the best thing that could happen to Metropolis and the world for that matter, they'll come around. You mark my words."

She may be a bit biased in that department, but Clark loved her for saying it. He shook his head, smiled and touched her cheek. "You know, I can't think of anything to say to that except one thing."

"And what's that?" Lois breathed and leaned down on his chest until they were face to face.

"I love you Lois Lane-Kent. Don't ever change," Clark whispered and then he kissed her and then all too soon they were welcoming the new day in their own special way.

A few doors down the hall, Jason awakened to a new day with a lot on his mind. He also instinctively turned his head toward the sun. Lately he had been feeling differently, like something was happening or about to happen. It was a strange feeling, but somehow he knew deep inside that it had something to do with his powers. He wanted to talk to his father about it, but he knew how busy he was right now and besides, he didn't even know what to say to him.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. His Dad was there poking his head inside and smiling at him. "Good morning, Jason. I thought you'd be up by now. Are you feeling alright?" Clark could see something was on his mind and hoped Jason would open up to him.

"Morning, Dad," Jason sighed and sat up in bed.

Clark sat down next to him and touched his forehead. "You don't have a temperature."

"I'm fine, Dad."

"Well, it is a big day today for all of us. Were you thinking about that?" Clark probed trying to get him to talk.

"A little." Jason paused. "Dad ...?" He hesitated.

"What is it son? Go ahead. You can talk to me about anything." Clark encouraged him to speak.

Jason stared at his father, not knowing what to say or how to begin.

"It's alright, Jason, I know what's bothering you," Clark said.

"You do? Can you read minds?" Jason thought that would be a cool power.

"No, son, but I went through the same thing growing up. It is about your powers, isn't it?"

"Yes," Jason breathed then he tried to explain his feelings. "I want to be like you, I do, but ..."

"But what, son?"

"I'm ... afraid," he whispered and sighed. "I'm sorry." He hung his head ashamed.

Clark understood. He touched his son's cheek and raised his head to look at him. "There's nothing wrong with being afraid, son. Do you think I never feel fear?"

"You're not afraid of anything, Dad." Jason didn't believe that for a minute. "You're just saying that."

"Jason, I want you to listen to what I'm about to say and listen carefully. Do you understand?" He took his son's hands in his, stared at them for a moment. *Jason's hands are so small in mine.*

Jason could sense this was important. "Alright, Dad, I'm listening."

"Now, I know we haven't talked about that day on the island, but ..."

"Do we have to?" Jason began to squirm, not wanting to talk about it.

Clark touched his shoulder trying to soothe him. "I'm sorry, Jason. You know I wouldn't bring it up if it weren't important."

Jason sighed. "Alright."

Clark realized that he didn't want to talk about it either, but he had to make a point. He took a deep breath. "I was afraid that day that you and your mother were going to die because of me. I was terrified that I was going to die too."

Jason couldn't imagine it, but his father was afraid of something.

"Yes, Jason. I don't want to die. I don't want to leave your mother or you, not ever. I love you both so very much. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?" Clark was barely holding it together.

Jason understood. His little heart burst with love for his father and his family. "Yes, Dad, I do." He held up his little arms and Clark pulled him close trying hard not to cry, but a few tears had a mind of their own.

"I love you, son," Clark whispered and kissed his son's head holding him close.

"I love you too, Dad," Jason said and hugged his father tighter.

Clark pulled back after a moment or two and smiled. They both wiped at their eyes.

"Now, from what I hear, the schools are going to let the students watch the conference today. Is that true?"

"Yes, Dad, it's all anyone can talk about. I can't wait," Jason said getting excited.

"Neither can I," Clark said smiling. "Let's go wake your mother. Are you hungry? I could whip us up something to eat."

Jason was his mother's son. "Remember, Dad, no superpowers in the house," he giggled.

Clark picked his son up and tickled him. "Haha, come on," he laughed along with his son.

*The Daily Planet, 9:00 am:*

Lois Lane-Kent could not remember ever seeing so much chaos in the bullpen. *Well, maybe after Superman's big night, but not since then, that's for sure.* She was packing up her things to head down to City Hall, when she heard her name being called from behind her.

"Lois!?" It was Martha and right behind her was her husband Ben, along with Richard and Lana too.

"Martha, Ben? What a wonderful surprise!" Lois gave her mother and father-in-law hugs and kisses. "Does Clark know you're here?"

"No, honey, we wanted to surprise him," Martha said.

"This day will go down in history, Lois," Ben said also feeling the excitement in the air.

"Oh, it definitely will, Ben. Hey, Richard, Lana, it's good to see you both. I knew you wouldn't miss this. It's a madhouse around here as you can see."

Everyone was running around or on the phone. The monitors were all channeling the live feed from City Hall.

"Hi, Lois, and yes, it is all very exciting," Lana said and looked around. "Where's Clark?"

Everyone glanced at Lana. "Well, umm, Clark is out of town getting a public reaction story. He left last night."

Martha smiled at her daughter-in-law.

"What's that smile about, Martha?" Lois asked.

"Lois, I know about our 'friend'," Lana said and smiled.

Richard and Lois both stared at her with mouth agape.

Lana chuckled at their expressions, but felt the need to explain. "Guys, we grew up together."

"Oh!" Lois was surprised and just a little envious of Lana's childhood memories. She shook her head and smiled at the images in her mind. *I'm finding it hard to picture Clark as a kid, let alone a teenager. I must get pictures of him when he was younger, not only for me, but I know Jason would love to see them too.*

"Shouldn't we be heading down to City Hall? It's getting late," Martha asked her daughter-in-law. She was excited to see her son on this historic day.

"Sure, Martha," Lois replied as she looked around and spotted Jimmy. "Jimmy, let's go!"

"Coming, Lois!" Jimmy hollered back.

Richard stared between the two of them amazed. "Lois?"

"I'll explain later," Lois chuckled at Richard's expression.

Lana pulled Lois aside stopping her from leaving. "Lois, before we leave, could you join me in the ladies room?" She turned to Richard. "We'll meet you downstairs."

"Sure, but we have to hurry," Lois told Lana wondering what was going on.

Lana told her about the surprise visitor she had on her first day at work.

"He just showed up unannounced?"

"I admit it threw me for a moment," Lana said still wondering about Bruce's visit.

"Didn't you think that was odd?"

"Yes, but what could I say? I did ask him for an interview for you."

"And what did he say?"

"Well, his exact words were 'I'd be honored!'"

"Really? That's great, Lana. Thank you," Lois said, truly grateful, and she hugged Lana impulsively.

"He said you should give him a call."

"Oh, I will, before he changes his mind. I can't remember the last time he gave an

interview. He's very leery of the press."

"Speaking of that, there's something else he said I found curious. He said he knew who you and Clark were, and that he had met Clark on several occasions, although, now that I think about it, you two are famous in the newspaper world, so it's not that surprising."

"Humm, that's true enough." Lois thought about that for a moment. "Well, we should head out. We have to hurry."

*Downtown Metropolis, City Hall, 9:55 am*

Mayor Walter Bennett; Chief of Police, Alan Jones; and District Attorney, Samuel Washington, were all seated and ready to get the press conference started. The Mayor turned to his assistant, who was standing at the entrance of City Hall, and nodded to her that it was time to start. He approached the podium, touched the microphone and tried to get everyone's attention. He looked out at the crowd and if he were a guessing man, he would say that there must be at least a thousand people there either seated, lined up in the streets, on rooftops, or in office building windows. There were also television cameras from local, national, and international stations that he could see. There wasn't an empty space to be had.

"May I have your attention, please?" He tapped the microphone harder. "Attention. We're about to start. Thank you. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and welcome distinguished guests. Let me introduce to you the District Attorney for Metropolis County, Samuel Washington, and the Chief of Police of the Metropolis Police Department, Officer Alan Jones. Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us here today."

"This is an historic day for our city and for our country. Like many of you, I remember the day or should I say the night Superman arrived here in Metropolis. He saved countless lives that night, including the President of the United States. I know we were all saddened that he left us on his personal journey to find himself, but we were overjoyed and thrilled that he came back to us. Now, today, Superman and a handful of his ... super 'friends' have formed *The Justice League of America*. They are here to protect us, to help us fight crime and bring peace and justice to America and to the world. A better world is what we all want; a safer world for our children to play, where we can live our lives and not have to worry about criminals who roam our streets day and night wanting to hurt us and our families. So, ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, I give you ... *The Justice League of America!*" The Mayor applauded and turned toward the City Hall double doors.

The doors to City Hall opened and as the League members made their way down to the grandstand, the Mayor introduced them one by one. "The Flash, Green Lantern, Aquaman, Martian Manhunter, Wonder Woman, Batman and ... Superman!" The crowd went wild. Flashbulbs went off, cell phone cameras were clicking left and right, and everyone screamed and waved for the League to speak to them.

Lois, Martha, Ben, Lana and Richard each had their own cameras. Lois smiled at her husband, applauded, and yelled along with everyone else.

Jason's classroom was whooping and hollering too. Jason's smile was from ear to ear. He felt so proud, thinking, *that's my Dad*.

The Mayor held up his arms and tried to quiet the crowd. "Thank you everyone. We're ready to begin the questions from the press. Each agency was given a number when you arrived. Who has the first question?"

"I do," Lois answered holding up her hand. "Lois Lane-Kent, Daily Planet. My question is for Superman." A few people laughed and whispered "of course." Lois ignored them.

"Superman, whose idea was it to start the League?"

"The idea was formed between Batman, Wonder Woman and I. After my return six months ago, we all realized that crime had taken a chokehold on this country. We all wanted to make a difference, but we also knew that we needed help. We had been in contact with each other since my return, and one conversation led to another and soon everything just fell into place."

"Thank you, Superman," Lois said trying not to smile at him. Then Lois's mind wandered back six months ago and then back even further. *Superman and Batman have been friends for years, or they tolerate each other, from what I hear. Batman's home is in Gotham City. Everybody knows that. Clark has a rich friend who owns a private island in the Caribbean. Bruce Wayne is very rich. Bruce Wayne's home is also in Gotham City. Bruce Wayne is Batman? No Way.* Lois stared at Batman with mouth agape.

"You're welcome," Clark said wondering where Lois's mind went just then. *Why is she staring at Batman like that? Oh boy!*

"Next question," the Mayor asked.

"I have the number two. Adam Jones, *Washington Post*. Please show us if you can, and this is to anyone who wishes to answer, can all of you fly like Superman?"

Superman nodded, as the ones who could fly did. Wonder Woman, J'onn J'onzz, Green Lantern and, of course, Superman, lifted a few feet off the ground and came back down.

Everyone ohhed and ahhed, as flashbulbs went off again.

"Wow, that was awesome!" Reporter Jones exclaimed. "Thank you."

"Only two more questions left. Who has the number three?" The Mayor asked.

"I do. Lucy Peterson, *New York Times*. I believe you said Superman that the reason you all got together was to make a difference. Don't you think that's a slap in the face to all our uniformed men and women who go out everyday to fight crime in our cities and a lot of them won't return to their families?" There were some grumblings from people who didn't like her question.

"Superman, if you wouldn't mind, I'll answer that," Police Chief Jones spoke up then as he approached the podium.

"Of course," Superman said.

"Thank you. Like many of you, I was here that night in Metropolis working the evening shift when Superman arrived in our city. He not only saved many lives that night, but the criminals he brought to justice also realized that there was someone in their mists they couldn't ignore. In a matter of weeks, the crime rate dropped to the lowest levels ever recorded. I know I speak for our entire police force." He turned to Superman. "Welcome home, Superman and welcome Justice League of America." Chief Jones shook each superhero's hand in turn as the crowd applauded and cameras flashed.

"Thank you, Chief Jones," Superman said.

"Thank you, Chief. Next question," the Mayor said.

"I have question number four. Beth Hancock, *Los Angeles Times*. I'm sure this question is on everyone's mind here today. Just how far would any of you go to stop a criminal?" There was more grumblings from the crowd.

Superman went up to the podium then and tried to set the record straight. "Ladies and gentlemen, I want to make it perfectly clear to all of you today that we are not judge, jury, or executioner, but we will defend ourselves against any foe and with force if necessary. We are not here to replace the criminal justice system. We will work within that system to bring

criminals to justice. That is what we are all here for and that is what the League has pledged to do. Does that answer your question?"

"Yes, it does. Thank you, Superman," Reporter Hancock replied.

"You're welcome. Mr. Mayor, if there are no more questions, we have work to do."

"If I may, Mayor, I would like to add to what Superman said about the criminal justice system," District Attorney Washington said as he approached the podium.

"Yes, of course, ladies and gentlemen, the DA, Mr. Samuel Washington," the Mayor announced.

There was very little applause and only a few photos were taken.

Clark inwardly groaned and glanced at Lois. *She knows exactly what I'm thinking.* There were rumors that the DA was corrupt. He'd heard the rumors soon after he had returned, but apparently no investigation was done at the time. If the crowd's reaction was any indication, he was not a popular DA.

"Ladies and gentleman, when I was asked to come here today and show my support for the Justice League of America, I admit I was skeptical at first, but I wanted to show that Metropolis is an united city on all levels of the criminal justice system. The DA's office is behind the League 100%." He then spoke to Superman directly. "I just wanted to tell you and your ... friends that you are all welcome here in Metropolis." He proceeded to shake all the League members' hands just as Chief Jones had done.

"Thank you, Mr. Washington," the Mayor said. "Thank you everyone for coming today. Please give a round of applause for the Justice League of America as we look forward to a crime free city and a safer world!"

The League members turned, but instead of leaving the way they had came, the Green Lantern lifted towards the sky, extended his ring hand and lifted the non-flying members into his green sphere and the flying members followed him up into the sky!

The audience was stunned at first, but then everyone applauded, yelled and started chanting 'Justice League, Justice League, ' as they applauded even louder, as flashbulbs went off and television cameras turned towards the sky.

## Chapter 7: Intrigues

*Somewhere in Suicide Slum:*

Morgan Edge used to be a very powerful and legitimate businessman, heavily into media and print corporations until he was exposed and convicted of conspiracy by Clark Kent. After being released from prison several years ago and finding out Luthor was currently in a prison psych ward, he concentrated his efforts on putting the syndicate back together, and it turned out to be perfect timing to take over Intergang.

As he sat in his office watching the Justice League news conference, he couldn't remember ever being so furious. He narrowed his eyes, flipped off the television and threw the remote across the room. *It's bad enough that I have to keep my eye on that flying alien, now he's breathing down my neck with his league of fools! It was pretty obvious to me who was in charge up there.* He got up from his desk, went to the window and couldn't help looking up at the sky. Annoyed with himself, he started to pace trying to come up with a plan to get rid of that alien once and for all.

"Frank, get in here!" Edge hollered still annoyed.

His number one lackey, Frank, came scurrying into the room. "Yeah, boss, what's up?" Frank knew exactly what was up, Superman and the Justice League of America. *I know Edge will be in a foul mood for days if not weeks.* He braced himself for whatever might happen.

Edge stared at him as if he didn't have a brain in his head. *Why do I surround myself with total idiots?* "I'll give you one guess," Edge said hoping Frank had one functioning brain cell.

"Hum, Superman?" Frank tentatively replied.

"Good guess, Frank," Edge replied pleased. "I have a very important job for you, Frank."

"Yeah, boss?" Frank felt relieved.

"I want to set up a meeting with all the bosses in two days time."

"Did you say all the bosses in two days?"

"I don't like repeating myself, Frank. Now get a move on and another thing, I want everything you can get on the League, and I want it yesterday," Edge instructed him and then he turned and went back to his desk.

"I'll get right on it boss," Frank said and turned to leave.

"And Frank, one more thing; hand me that disposable cell phone. I have an important call to make."

"Sure, boss," Frank said as he handed him the cell.

Edge continued to contemplate the news conference and what his next move should be. He then dialed a familiar number.

The DA, Sam Washington, was in his office wondering if he should hop on a plane and head to one of those places that didn't have extradition laws. His cell phone rang. He didn't recognize the number, and he was definitely not in the mood for wrong numbers. "Who is this?" He snapped to the unsuspecting caller.

"Well, we are in a mood. I wonder why that is."

"Edge, why the hell are you calling me?" Sam demanded annoyed.

"Why do you think?" Edge said just as annoyed.

"I can't help you. I have my own problems."

"That's not what I wanted to hear. What kind of problems?"

"Well, besides the Justice League, Lane and Kent are breathing down my neck again."

"So what else is new?" Edge said bored with the conversation.

"You don't know what a few hints in the paper can do to my reputation. There's an

election in six months."

"So, silence them," Edge said still bored.

"Are you crazy? I'm going to ignore that remark. Look, Edge, it was good while it lasted ... but I think we should shut down operations, at least for a while. Let the League think we're running scared. Yeah, it might work," Sam said getting encouraged by the idea.

"Forget it. I couldn't stop operations even I wanted to. There are too many balls in the air, too many people involved. We'll have to ride it out for now."

"Then what do we do?" Sam asked hating the desperation in his voice.

"I have a plan that just may solve all our problems."

"I don't want to know," Sam said as chills went up his spine.

"Oh, you will in time, count on it," Edge said and hung up.

Sam stared at the phone more terrified than ever.

Bobby, the informant, meanwhile, was headed back to Edge's office in the Slums, but he had a call to make first. He pulled up in front of a restaurant and bar, one of the few places that still had land line phones, and called his contact.

"Hello, it's me," Bobby said. "Yeah, I was there. I hear you, but what do you think Edge might do?" He listened for several minutes. "Ok, I'll keep my ears open, as always." He hung up and headed back to Suicide Slums.

*Watchtower headquarters:*

Bruce hung up his disposable cell phone knowing that Edge would get a more detailed but distorted description of the conference.

"Bruce, was that who I think it was on the phone?" Clark could see whoever it was had Bruce distracted.

"Yeah, it was my informant," Bruce replied still distracted.

"And, what did he say? What's happening?"

"Nothing at the moment, but soon now, Edge will be all over us in one way or another, and we have to be ready for him." Bruce looked around. "Where is everybody?"

"They all had their assignments, but as soon as we hear back from your informant about what Edge is planning, we may need to bring them all back here to rethink those plans."

"Yeah, you may be right about that. I was just thinking about our next move. It should be something big, something that will cause Edge to lose it, make a bad move, or show his true colors."

"You don't think the conference was enough?"

"It was a good start, but we have to hit him where it hurts," Bruce replied.

"Oh, we will. The members are all over the country right now, putting the screws to his 'legitimate businesses,' and we should hear something soon."

Bruce decided now was as good a time as any. "Clark, we need to talk about something that's been on my mind for a while now."

"Make it quick. Lois called a little while ago. My mother and father-in-law are in town for a few days. She wants me home for dinner," Clark replied distractedly as he worked at the computer.

Bruce couldn't help chuckling at that statement. He shook his head amused. "This won't take long." He knew Clark wouldn't like it. "It's about Darkseid."

That got Clark's attention as he slowly turned from the computer. "Darkseid? Why are

you thinking about him?"

"Well, he's out there, Clark. He could come back here at any time. He could control you, make you do things you don't want to do," Bruce tried to stress his point.

Clark sighed and turned back to his work. "I know that Bruce."

"Aren't you worried? Edge and Darkseid have a history. They could rekindle their friendship and that could spell disaster for all of us. Edge is probably feeling threatened and there's no telling what he'll do."

Clark sighed again. He stood up and walked over to the League meeting table thinking about what Bruce had said.

"Well, Clark, what are you going to do about it?"

There really was only one answer. "Look Bruce, I can't do what I have to do if I sit around worrying about someone who is out to hurt me. I can't live my life like that. Look, I'll be careful. I'm always careful. If it will put your mind at ease, I'll head to the Fortress in a few days and see if there's been any outer space communications from earth."

"Good, Clark. That will definitely put my mind at ease, and it should ease your mind too. I know you're worried. I know you, remember."

Clark shook his head. "I know. I'm headed for patrol now, then I'll be at home. Good night, Bruce."

"Good night, Clark," Bruce replied hoping he got through to his friend.

Clark went to the door, just missing Diana who had just finished her rounds.

"Hey, Clark, are you headed home?" Diana asked.

"In a little while; I'll see you both later. Good night."

"Good night, Clark." Diana came to sit beside Bruce. "He seemed to be in a hurry."

"He had to get home to his 'family,'" Bruce said and couldn't help snickering.

"Bruce, what is it with you? Clark is happy. We can't fault him for that. Are you jealous of his happiness?" He didn't answer her. "You know, you've had your chances. Why you let them get away from you is beyond me."

Bruce sighed. "I'm not jealous, Diana. He has his life away from this place, and ..." He hesitated.

"And, what?" Diana pressed.

Bruce stood up and turned to face his friend. "Whenever I see his family or think about his family, I can't help thinking ... it won't last; it never does. It's going to end badly, I know it."

She knew her friend and how cynical he could be about life, but it didn't have to be that way. "Bruce, you can't give up on love, on life. You'll slowly die inside if you do. Yes, life is short and no one can predict the future, but Bruce, love is worth any risk, you must know that. Please tell me you believe that."

"How can I, Diana? You know about me, about how I live. It's just not in me to believe it. Look, I have to go."

"Bruce, wait."

"Good night, Diana."

Later that evening at the Kent house, Lois was trying to convince Martha and Ben to stay with them instead of at a hotel. Yes, they were newlyweds, but they wouldn't mind having them there at the house. Jason was doing his part too.

"Please stay, Grandma, Grandpa. Please, we miss you," Jason said beginning to whine a little.

"Come here, honey," Martha beckoned to her grandson. Jason sat on his grandma's lap. Martha noticed how big he was getting. She kissed his cheek and smoothed his hair. *It won't be long now, but I won't be able to do this much longer.* She made up her mind after glancing at her husband. "We miss you too, sweetie. Alright, we'll stay, but we have to go to the hotel and get our bags."

"That's great, Grandma, Grandpa," Jason enveloped them both in a hug.

"Clark will be so thrilled, Martha. Ben, maybe you should head over to the hotel before it gets too late. We still have about a half hour or so before dinner."

"Ok, I'll be back in a few minutes," Ben said and kissed his wife's cheek.

"Perfect!" Lois exclaimed.

"What's perfect?" Clark asked coming into the house dressed in jeans, shirt and a jacket. "Hey, Ben, where are you going?"

"Martha and I will be staying here with you guys. I'm headed to the hotel to get our bags. I'll be back before dinner is ready," Ben replied. "Lois and Jason were very persuasive, but I'm sure you knew that," he smiled and left.

"I do know that. Bye, Ben," Clark said knowing he couldn't deny his family anything. He stood inside the door watching them for a moment. *I can't let myself think about all the people out there who want to hurt me, but if anyone tries to hurt my family, then they will get my attention, more attention than they could possibly want.*

Lois couldn't help noticing Clark's mood. They would have time to talk after dinner.

"Dad, you're home!" Jason ran to his father.

"Hey, Jason, how was school today?" Clark picked up his son giving him a hug, and couldn't help teasing him.

"You know we saw you on television today, Dad," Jason smiled.

"You did? How was I?" Clark said and smiled.

"You were fantastic," Jason said liking his father's mood.

"I was? Wow, I wish I could have seen it," he chuckled.

Martha and Lois were chuckling and shaking their heads at father and son.

"You're silly, Dad, you were there," Jason laughed.

"I was, wasn't I?" Clark laughed and tickled his son.

"Good evening, Mom," Clark set Jason down and kissed his mother's cheek.

"That's some mood you're in. What brought this on?" Lois smiled as he came toward her, but she sensed something was up.

"It's nothing," Clark said trying to keep his mood upbeat. "Come here," he whispered, as he kissed her cheek then pulled her into his arms holding her tight, just a little too tight.

"Clark?" Lois held him close worried now.

"We'll talk later," he whispered in her ear. "Go with me on this, honey." He spoke louder for Jason and Martha's benefit. "Do you see what I put up with around here?" He asked his Mom.

"Oh I see alright," Martha laughed. "Are you hungry, Clark? We're almost ready to eat dinner."

"I'm starved." And he didn't mean food. He nibbled on Lois's neck.

"Clark, stop," Lois said unconvincingly as she watched his face for a moment. "Go and set the table. It'll keep your hands busy," she said trying to keep the mood going.

"Oh, alright," he said pouting. "Jason, could you help me please?"

"Sure, Dad, but could we talk about the League? I really liked the Flash's costume. It's so

... red," Jason said.

"It is, isn't it? You know, Jason, between you and me," he whispered, "the Flash is faster than I am."

Jason gasped, not believing it for a moment. "Really, Dad?"

"Yes, really, it's true," he smiled.

Martha watched her son and grandson. "I don't think I've ever seen my son so happy." She glanced at Lois and she had a serious expression on her face. "Are you alright, honey?" Martha asked as she put her arm around Lois's waist. "His wedding is right up there too, you know," she said hoping to make her feel better.

Lois smiled accepting Martha's support. "He's not the only one," she whispered watching her family.

Later that night, the house was quiet and Lois was sitting up in bed waiting for Clark to join her. After he came out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist, he stood at the foot of the bed and watched her for a moment.

"Clark, it's late. Aren't you going to talk to me?"

"I don't know where to start," he sighed.

"Just say it. It can't be any worse than what I'm imagining."

He took off the towel, climbed into bed and pulled her back against his chest. "Honey, please don't get upset, alright? We don't know for sure at this point, but anything could happen. Now that Morgan Edge knows about the League, we don't know what he might do."

She turned to face him. "I haven't heard that name in months. What are you trying to tell me Clark, and please don't hold anything back. I can take it."

He touched her cheek, closed his eyes for a moment, then he said, "Darkseid."

"Oh, no," she whispered. They both sat up then. "Why would he come back now? It's the League, isn't it?"

"Yes, Lois, the League being out in the open now will stir up a lot of criminals who don't want the attention or their money train derailed." He took her by the shoulders then. "Lois, we knew when we went public that we were stirring the pot, but we're not worried, not really. We all have each other's back. Everything will be alright," he tried to convince her.

"If that's true, why even bring it up? You are worried, aren't you Clark?"

"Of course, I am. Darkseid did a lot of terrible things to me and the world, but he didn't succeed the first time and he's not going to again. Please try not to worry too much. I'll be careful, everyone will be careful," he stressed and pulled her into his arms.

Lois hugged him back trying to be strong for him. She pulled back after a moment. "I'll try not to worry too much, but you have to promise to tell me everything, and I do mean anything that might put you or our family at risk. Promise me, Clark?"

"I promise," he smiled and kissed her cheek and then his wet mouth closed over hers and then wandered down her throat. He needed her so much tonight.

"Hum, Clark we can't." Lois said needing to talk to him some more. "We have guests, remember?"

Clark continued to nuzzle her neck making slurping sounds.

Lois giggled. "Clark, wait a minute, I've been thinking and I wanted to ask you something."

"What is it?" He dared to ask, still nuzzling her neck.

"Is Bruce Wayne Batman?" Lois asked and watched his face closely for his answer.

"What? Where in the world did that come from?" Clark asked truly shocked by the question.

"I know you heard us talking about him the other day and Lana works for him now. She told me he knows about you and me and that you've spoken to him on numerous occasions, and you have a friend who owns a private island in the Caribbean. It all adds up."

Clark chuckled and shook his head and decided to play dumb. "Lois, I don't see your reasoning. I don't know who he is."

"Really, Clark? So tell me who owns that island so we can thank whoever it is properly." *That should make him squirm.*

"Sorry, honey, that person wanted to remain anonymous."

"Um hum, alright, Clark, I understand you can't betray a confidence, but I should tell you I have an interview with him next week."

Clark inwardly groaned, but he knew Bruce could handle himself. "Good luck with that, honey. Now, where were we?" He said getting back to kissing her ear and her throat as he tried to move on to more enjoyable pursuits.

Lois chuckled at her husband's antics. *Mr. Wayne will definitely be in for a surprise next week.*

Meanwhile, the League was busy with their assignments. In Miami, Florida, Wonder Woman, Aquaman and the Flash were busy locating and disrupting drug movements on the coastline. According to their informant, there were shipments coming into port very soon now. They had notified all the authorities in the area and it was only a matter of time before they made a bust big enough to send a message to Edge that they were not going anywhere and he would have to take notice of the League.

On the west coast, J'onn J'onzz and Green Lantern were busy infiltrating the Mexican border. The nature of narcotics trafficking changed as shipments neared the border. While Mexican cartels did have representatives in cities across the United States to oversee networks there, local gangs got involved in the actual distribution of the narcotics. Both J'onn and Hal were familiar with this type of distribution and were easily able to go about doing their business without too much trouble. Soon now, with the help of the informant, the Cartels and the local gangs would see that the League was on the trail and soon the authorities would be too.

Batman, meanwhile was busy in his own city, working with Commissioner Gordon on numerous crimes, including murder, also directly linked to Edge and his work in Metropolis. The Commissioner was ready and waiting for him when he arrived late one evening. "Hello, Commissioner, it's good to see you," Bruce said landing on the rooftop after receiving the Batman signal.

"Batman, it's good to see you too. I saw the conference the other day. Congratulations are in order. I am very, very pleased to see you'll be getting more help out there."

"So am I, Commissioner, which is why I answered your call so soon. We need your help. According to a few of our sources, Edge has upped his narcotics distribution here in Gotham, in Florida and on the west coast. Our League members are busy at those locations, but we want to send Edge a message here in Gotham as well."

"It sounds like you have a plan," Gordon said curious to see what he had come up with.

"It is the oldest plan in the book. Hit them where it hurts, in the pocketbook. No drugs, no money, it's as simple as that."

"You do realize that Edge won't sit still for it," Gordon said.

"That's exactly what we're counting on," Bruce said liking their plan more and more.

## Chapter 8: Evolution

*Gotham City, the next morning:*

Lana needed a break and soon. *What a week, between starting my new job, finding an apartment, moving in and now, working on a Saturday, I need to get out of here.* The past several months had been like a whirlwind, not that she was really complaining. She loved her new job and her new apartment, and Richard was there every step of the way ready to help no matter what her request happened to be. *He is a true friend. Still calling him that, are we?* She smiled at her inner voice. Richard wanted more and she finally admitted it to herself that she was definitely warming to the idea.

Her phone rang just then. "Lana Lang, here."

"Hi, Lana, it's me. Are you almost done?" Richard asked anxious to put his plans into action for the afternoon.

She was more than ready to leave. "Hi, Richard, perfect timing, I'm all done."

"Great, I'll be there in ten minutes."

"I'll be ready. Bye, Richard," Lana said and smiled.

"Bye, Lana. I ... ummm ... I'm on my way," Richard mumbled and hung up. *I did not almost say those words over the phone and for the first time no less. That is not how I want to tell her how I feel.* He grabbed his jacket and headed over to her office.

"So, where are we going?" Lana asked looking out the window of Richard's car and not recognizing this part of town.

"You'll see; we're almost there."

"Oh, you and your surprises," she said smiling. Shaking her head at him, she loved surprises, but then she saw the passing signs. *Air strip, hangars for hire.*

"Richard, are we going flying?"

"Yes, would you like a little ride?" He hoped she would say yes.

Lana took a deep breath as her nerves started screaming at her. She had never been on a private plane before. She put on her brave face, at least she hoped it was a brave face and said, "of course, I would. Thank you, Richard."

Richard chuckled. "You're nervous, aren't you?"

"How could you tell?" She gave him another brave smile.

"Well, that smile, I've not quite seen it before." He patted her hand. "We don't have to, you know."

"No, no, I want to. I trust you, Richard." She squeezed his hand. "I know you're an accomplished pilot. Let's do this."

"Are you sure, because I want you to have a good time and I know you've been going non-stop for weeks. This is my way of getting you away from it all, just for a little while."

If Lana had any doubts about him or her feelings, they were wiped away with those words. *He really does care about me. He's proven that in so many ways, I've actually lost count.* She was finding it hard to speak past the lump in her throat. "I'm very sure."

"Great," Richard said more excited than he could ever remember. After parking the car, he pulled out a picnic basket from the trunk, took Lana by the hand and headed to his plane. Soon, they were all buckled in and ready to take off. He turned to Lana who was clutching the arms of her seat. "Ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," Lana said amazed she could talk considering she was shaking inside.

After getting clearance from the tower, he taxied down the runway and they were off, up

into the sky. Richard glanced at Lana and her eyes were closed. He chuckled. "We're leveling off now. You can open your eyes, Lana."

Lana dared to open her eyes, looking out the window to the right and saw blue skies and flowing clouds and she looked directly out the front of the plane, and finally she turned to Richard. His smile warmed her heart and she could feel it slowing to a more manageable rhythm. She smiled back and relaxed. She thought her terror would be with her the entire time, but it was gone. "Oh, Richard, it's beautiful. I can see why you love it so. Thank you."

Richard saw and heard her reaction, and it pleased him enormously. He took her hand and kissed it. *Now might be a good time.* "You're welcome. Lana, I ..." He hesitated.

Lana saw his expression and her heart literally skipped a beat. "I know," she smiled as her eyes filled with tears.

"You need to get over here," Richard said as he pulled her hand.

Lana unbuckled her seat and went into his arms kissing him senseless. Richard barely managed to put the plane on autopilot as their kisses intensified. "Should we be doing this?" Lana asked as she kissed his cheek and his ear.

"We're good, no one's around," Richard breathed and kissed her again. He'd never done this before, but he couldn't stop kissing her. *She feels wonderful in my arms.*

"Maybe we should land," Lana breathed between kisses.

"Humm, actually, there's a strip ahead not far from the beach. We could stop there and have lunch. How does that sound?"

"Perfect. I'm hungry," Lana said and kissed his throat. "And not for food," she pulled back and smiled at his shocked expression.

An hour later, Richard landed the plane in Tampa, Florida. He couldn't remember ever flying so fast, as he patted his coat pocket, remembering that he had made a hotel reservation hoping they would stay the night. He knew it was wishful thinking on his part and Lana may not be ready for this, but he couldn't resist the temptation, knowing he was ready for the next step.

They grabbed a cab from the airport and headed to the hotel which was close to the beach. It was a beautiful day, sunny and warm. Richard glanced at Lana, she seemed so excited and he couldn't help feeling it too. They held hands in the cab and smiled at each other. He couldn't resist her, as he pulled her to him and kissed her. She immediately responded kissing him back. *I haven't told her yet how I feel, but I will remedy that very soon now.*

The cabbie just smiled and shook his head. *They must be newlyweds or something.*

Richard pulled back after a moment and decided to let it all hang out. "Lana, I booked a room not far from the beach," he said hoping he hadn't made the biggest mistake of his life. She opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. He sighed. "You can smack my face now."

Instead of smacking him, she pulled his head down and kissed him like never before. Richard was ecstatic. He kissed her back moaning and tasting her tongue.

The cabbie cleared his throat. "We're here guys, guys?"

Richard's brain vaguely heard the cabbie speaking, as he smiled at Lana's flushed face. He paid for the cab and he wouldn't remember later exactly how much he had paid the man. They entered the hotel hand in hand, got the room key, entered their room, and immediately fell into each other's arms.

They fell back onto the bed and began slowly removing each other's clothes like a dance

they knew, but didn't want the music to end. Lana studied his handsome face trying to decide which of his features appealed to her the most. Was it his eyes, his full, perfectly shaped mouth, which now drew her gaze? Her look turned him on beyond measure. He had to have her. "You're so lovely," Richard said so enthralled, he didn't think he could go slowly. He had to say it or he would burst. "I love you, Lana."

Lana smiled and touched his cheek. "I love you too, Richard." She kissed him thrusting her tongue inside his mouth and moaning her approval when he kissed her back. He smiled against her temple and stroked her hair.

Content, Lana closed her eyes and snuggled closer. *Oh yeah, this is just what I needed.*

*Somewhere in the far north:*

Clark was fast approaching the Fortress of Solitude. He hadn't spoken to his father since before the wedding. It was way past time to clear the air between them. He had avoided coming here, but he couldn't put it off anymore. He had to know if any unusual outer space communications had occurred since his return six months ago.

After speaking with Bruce and the informant, and finding out about a big Intergang meeting, he knew he couldn't wait any longer. The League was doing their part hitting Edge where it hurt the most ... narcotics trafficking. It was time to update his father about his life. Even with all that had happened in the past, as he came closer to the Fortress, he couldn't help the feeling of coming home and the sense of peace and assurance that came over him.

A few weeks before the wedding, he had installed security precautions in light of what had happened with Luthor, so no more unwanted visitors could gain access to his home. As he punched in the security codes and scanned his fingerprint, he was granted access. The Fortress came alive as soon as he approached the main console.

"Father?" Kal-El called to his father.

"Kal-El," Jor-El responded. There seemed to be a pause. "How are you, my son?"

Clark was startled by that question. *He has never asked about me before. That is strange. Could it be possible that Jor-El is evolving somehow? It wouldn't be unusual, but it certainly is surprising.* "I'm doing well." Confused, Clark looked around. "Father, I still can't see you."

"There have been a few minor problems since Luthor stole the crystals, but everything should be back to normal soon. Kal-El, I haven't spoken to you since the security upgrades."

"Yes, I know. I wanted to come and talk to you about the many changes in my life."

"What changes, Kal-El?"

*He is not going to like this.* "Lois and I ..." He hesitated.

"Tell me, Kal-El," Jor-El encouraged his son to speak.

Clark took a deep breath and forged ahead. "Lois and I were married several weeks ago. We are mated for life, Father. I love her and she loves me. Nothing and no one will ever change that."

Silence followed that statement. Clark sighed, not knowing what to say.

"Kal-El ... why ...?" Jor-El began.

Clark interrupted him. "I know what you're going to say, but Father, Lois and I can make this work. It's what we both want more than anything. I can be a father and a husband and still be Earth's savior."

"What I was going to say was why didn't you tell me about this before?" Jor-El asked and then he said ... "a father, Kal-El?"

"Yes, I'm a father. Lois and I have a son. His name is Jason. He was conceived six years

ago after I gave up my powers to be with her."

"You have a son?"

"Yes, I do." *If I didn't know any better, I could swear he is smiling.* "I want you to meet him. You'll ... like him Father. He's smart, beautiful, friendly, funny, sweet ..."

Jor-El interrupted him. "Kal-El, you can bring him here to meet me."

Now Clark was the one smiling. He was so relieved. "I will, Father and soon, but what about Lois? Can I bring her too?"

"Yes, Kal-El, I wish to speak with her."

Clark didn't like the sound of that. "And what are going to say to her? She's been through enough Father. Lois and I have been through hell and back to be together, and there's nothing you can say that will change it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Kal-El, I do. I wanted to tell her and you that I will no longer stand in your way."

"Do you mean that, Father?"

"Yes, Kal-El, I do mean it."

"Thank you, Father," Clark said relieved beyond measure. *Maybe he has evolved.* "I will bring them both here very soon. But there's another reason why I came today. Has there been any suspicious outer space communications in the past several months or since my return six months ago?"

"Yes, Kal-El, there has."

Clark's heart sank. *Edge truly was desperate to unleash that monster. Millions could be harmed or worse.* He thought he was prepared for this, but hearing it made it all the more real. "When was it?"

"About three days ago."

*It must have been right after the conference.* "I see. Father, it's possible one of my greatest foes will be here on Earth very soon now. I've brought everything I know about him and I'll upload the data in a few minutes. I've also brought all the names and biographies of all the Justice League members. I want them to be able to access everything here just in case anything happens. They're superheroes like me. They can help us. What I want from you is a way to stop him."

"I'll help you any way I can, Kal-El."

"Thank you, Father. Now, let's get to work."

*Meanwhile back in Metropolis:*

Lois was at the house that morning sitting on the bed in their bedroom staring into space. She was still in shock, as she lifted her hand and stared at the blue positive test strip indicating that she was pregnant. She blinked, shook it again, but it still read positive. *I'm pregnant.* She put her hand over her mouth, shook her head, still not quite believing it.

Looking back over the past week, she couldn't ignore the signs anymore, her missed period the other day, the headaches, the mood swings, the exhaustion, it all added up. *It looks like Clark and Dr. Hamilton were both wrong. We can make babies with Clark's powers and we did.* She knew when it had happened too. She pulled out the bedside table drawer and looked at her calendar organizer, and sure enough, it happened on their honeymoon or anytime really over the past two weeks. Of course, she wasn't surprised. *It's a wonder we survived our honeymoon at all. We couldn't keep our hands off each other let alone take time to eat anything.* She chuckled. *I guess some things haven't changed.* She put her hand over her stomach. "Oh, Clark." Tears welled up in her eyes and slid down her cheeks. *This time will be*

*different from before. Yes, so different.*

Clark meanwhile, had arrived at the Planet offices expecting to see his wife and to talk to her about Darkseid. He had to tell her everything. He dreaded it, but he had promised her he wouldn't keep anything from her. He looked around the bullpen and she wasn't there. He checked Perry's office, the copy room, and she wasn't around. He asked Jimmy, but he said he hadn't seen her all morning. *Where is she?* He pulled out his cell phone and called the house. Lois answered and told him she was fine and that she needed to see him as soon as he could get away. He told Perry there was an emergency at the house, so he had to leave.

When he entered the house, he called to his wife, "Lois, I'm home, where are you?"

"I'm upstairs," Lois cried, trying to pull herself together. She threw the test strip in a drawer, went into the bathroom and threw cold water on her face. She looked at herself in the mirror and groaned, and then she grabbed a brush and tried to look presentable. *He's going to think something's wrong. Just look at yourself.*

"Lois, honey," Clark called as he entered the bedroom. He saw her in the bathroom wiping at her eyes. *Was she sick and hadn't wanted to tell me over the phone?* He saw her face then and his heart fell to his knees. *Something is terribly wrong.*

Lois looked up at his concerned face and it tore at her heart. The tears came again. *Damn hormones are going to make me crazy.* "I'm fine, Clark," she managed to get out between sniffles and wiping at her eyes.

"What's wrong, why are you crying?" Clark was so worried about her. He brought her into the bedroom. He sat down and pulled Lois into his arms. "Has something happened?" *Could she have heard about Darkseid somehow? No, that's impossible.*

"Give me a minute," Lois said and sighed. She closed her eyes, put her arms around his waist and rested her head on his chest trying to get control of her emotions. She breathed in his unique scent ... fresh air, sunshine, and ... Clark. She took another breath and smiled then.

Clark could feel her relaxing and he pulled her close waiting for her to speak. *She'll tell me when she's ready.*

"I'm alright now," she said and pulled back and looked into his face. "I have to tell you something," but she hesitated not knowing where to begin.

Clark didn't know what to think, but then he had a thought. "You want me to quit the League, is that it? I know I've been pretty busy since we got back from our honeymoon, but ..."

She touched his lips to stop him from speaking. "No, no, Clark, that's not it at all. I know the League is important to you, and I wouldn't ask you to choose. Besides, you need them and they need you." She touched his cheek. "I'm very, very proud of you, what you've done with them now and will do in the future."

Clark was so relieved. He didn't want to make a choice, but if he had to, Lois and their son would always come first. "Then, what is it? Is Jason's asthma back? Are you ill?"

"No, no, that's not it." She paused again then took his hands in hers. "A miracle has happened. Clark, I'm pregnant," she said and suddenly realized he had the same expression as when she had told him she would marry him ... shocked and deliriously happy at the same time.

"What did you just say? I'm hearing things. Did you just say ...?"

She laughed. "You heard right. I'm pregnant, Clark." She threw her arms around his neck. "It's really true."

"Really? You're pregnant? Oh, honey, that's wonderful news." He stood up then pulling

her to him as he kissed her cheek, her temple, her hair. "Are you sure? I never dreamed this would happen again."

"Neither did I, but I took a home pregnancy test twice. It's a miracle, Clark. We're going to have another baby," she smiled as the tears welled up again.

"You're the miracle, Lois. I love you so much," Clark sighed holding her face between his palms as he leaned down and kissed her tasting her tears, as a few seeped through his lids as well.

"I love you too," Lois said between kisses and thinking about the past and how much they had missed, but not this time. This time they would have it all.

## **A C T   I I :   L O S T**

## Chapter 9: Stronger Together

It was a beautiful night, calm and clear, the kind of night Clark would have taken Lois for a late night flight, but they didn't have time for that now. They had Jason to take care of, not that he minded. *I know Lois misses our flights together. We'll make the time somehow and hopefully before the baby comes. The baby; I'm still in shock. It truly is a miracle.*

Clark's thoughts and feelings suddenly overwhelmed him. He had to finish what he had started. As he made his way to south Florida and later that evening to the west coast to help his friends in the final stages of the narcotics sting on Edge's shipments, he was more determined than ever to stop Edge, shut down the syndicate, and intercept Darkseid before he arrived here to wreck havoc on all of their lives.

His thoughts suddenly went back to a few hours ago, when he had told Lois about Darkseid. Her reaction had been no less than what he had expected.

*Earlier that evening at Riverside Drive:*

Lois and Clark had arrived home from the office, both exhausted but excited and determined about the progress they had made in their investigation into Edge's actions since the news conference. There was a connection between him and the District Attorney. And Lane and Kent would find it. There was no doubt in their minds about that.

As Lois waited for her husband to join her, Clark came into the bedroom dressed in the suit and she could she he had something on his mind.

"You're leaving? Where are you going?" Clark looked at his boots and didn't answer her. She knew her husband well enough to know whenever he got all quiet and couldn't look her in the eye it had to be bad news. "I can see you want to talk about something."

"Come and sit down, honey," Clark said holding out his hand for her to sit with him. Lois took his hand, sat down and waited for him to speak. "I went to the Fortress this morning."

"Oh and how is my father-in-law, the AI?" Lois asked sarcastically.

Clark couldn't help but grin at that. He thought about how to answer her. "He's different from before. I can't explain it."

"What do you mean different?"

Clark thought about it for a moment trying to understand Jor-El's questions, and then he remembered what he said to him. "Something just occurred to me, honey. This change in his demeanor and his acceptance of us and our life together may be connected to the loss of the crystals."

"Wait a minute, back-up. Jor-El has accepted our life together?" Lois couldn't believe it, especially not after all these years, and not after all they'd been through to be together.

"Yes, Lois, it's true," Clark smiled and squeezed her hand. "He said he wouldn't stand in our way. Those were his exact words. He wanted to tell you himself in person, but I couldn't keep it from you." He shook his head. "It's just all so strange."

"Are you sure it was Jor-El and not some temporary AI. Maybe he's recharging or something? Don't look at me like that. Jor-El hates me. Why would he accept me now? It makes no sense."

"Jor-El doesn't hate you. I know it's hard to believe and understand. I'm just as surprised as you are. I just know that he was different, in the way he spoke to me and the way he talked about meeting Jason."

"You told him about Jason? What did he say?"

"It was not so much what he said but the way he said it. He sounded proud that I was a

father and that Jason would get to know me. It's really hard to explain. I want you and Jason to come with me to the Fortress soon and we can tell him about the baby. We could test him with that information and see how he reacts. What do you think?"

Lois could see how excited he was about this 'new' Jor-El and a part of her was happy for him, but she was concerned about Jason and about herself. *Stress is the last thing I need right now.* "I don't know Clark. I'll have to think about it."

Clark was crestfallen but he hid it well. "Alright, that's fine, honey. Take your time. There's no rush, but have you given any thought about when we should tell Jason about the baby?"

"I think we should wait until after my appointment with Dr. Hamilton. We can tell him when the baby is due, which reminds me, I need to call him tomorrow for an appointment. I know you're busy Clark, but I'd like you to be there for this first appointment."

"You know I'll try and make arrangements for the League to cover for me, I promise." He squeezed her hand again and touched her cheek, dreading his next words. "There's another reason why I went to the Fortress and ... Jor-El confirmed what we suspected."

"So, it's true? Darkseid is coming?" Lois asked as she could feel her heart rate climbing, but she tried to stay calm for Clark.

"Yes, Lois, very soon now, in a few days maybe, I'm not sure." Clark could see she wanted to be strong for him. He knew his wife. He pulled her into his arms holding her tight. "We'll get through this, honey, just like we always have ... together."

She pulled back to look at him, taking a deep breath, she said, "I know we will, and I've been thinking, we should run with the article on Edge and the DA as soon as possible."

"I definitely agree. I may be a little late getting back to the office tomorrow. I have to go to Florida and California, but when you get into the office in the morning, convince Perry to run with everything we found today. Once Perry realizes the seriousness of the situation, and you can tell him about Darkseid too, I know he'll want to help, and he'll know what to print."

"Do you think we have enough to implicate the DA? I would love to bring him down."

"I think Perry should make that decision. He doesn't want a lawsuit on his hands."

"What about my father? Should we alert him about Darkseid? He'll want to know."

"That may not be a bad idea. Let me think about that tonight and I'll let you know once I speak with the League. Darkseid may be coming alone or with an army. As soon as we know for sure, we can get the military involved."

"Alright, I know Daddy would love another crack at that monster. As soon as I get the word from you, I'll contact him."

"Thank you, Lois," Clark said as he stood up to leave.

Lois stood up and put her arms around his waist. "What are you thanking me for? You know I want to help you anyway I can."

He grinned. "Jor-El said the same thing. He's never said that to me before."

Lois looked at him, surprised even shocked by that news. "Really, he said that?"

He nodded. "Yes, he did."

Lois didn't need to think about it anymore. "Clark, I'll go with you to the Fortress and I know Jason would love it too."

Clark pulled her tight against him kissing her hair. "I love you so very, very much," he said so touched he could barely speak.

"I know you do. Go on now, I'll see you later."

"Good night, honey." He kissed her softly, holding her close, and stroking her back.

"Humm, good night," Lois said smiling.

Clark returned her smile, then turned and went to the window, lifting slowly off the floor, he smiled again, and then he was gone. She rang to the window, but she couldn't see him. She heard a sonic boom a few moments later.

*Gotham City, earlier that evening:*

Lana and Richard were still in a romantic daze after their quick trip to Florida. As they rode the elevator heading to her office at Wayne Towers, they couldn't keep their hands off each other. As they entered her office laughing and smiling, Lana could smell the roses as soon as she opened the door. There were three dozen roses of various colors in different locations around her office.

Richard froze, not believing his eyes. He knew immediately who they were from. He stared at Lana, and she was just as shocked as he was. "Read the card," he got out barely able to speak, he was so furious. *Wayne is making a move on my girlfriend.* He couldn't believe it.

Lana finally found the card. She read it out loud. "I'm sorry you had to come into work today. Enjoy the roses. Let me make it up to you, say lunch on Monday? Bruce."

"Richard, I swear, I never encouraged him, not for a moment. You do believe me, don't you?"

"Get your things and we'll leave," he said staring at the flowers. He couldn't look at her.

"Richard, please look at me," Lana pleaded with him afraid he wouldn't believe her.

Richard finally looked at her and he could see tears in her eyes. *I put that hurt in her eyes, not Bruce Wayne.* He went to her then and pulled her into his arms, holding her tight. This wasn't her fault and he didn't want to spoil their beautiful weekend. "Everything's fine. I believe you." He pulled back after a moment and took her face between his palms. "Did you hear me? I believe you."

Lana threw her arms around his neck. "I love you, Richard."

"I love you too," he replied and kissed her showing her how much he cared. She kissed him back holding him close. They came up for air after a few moments. "Are you ready to go?" He asked smiling.

"Yes, I'm ready. Let me make a quick call to maintenance. They can deliver them to the children's ward at the hospital," Lana said pointing to the flowers. She made a quick call, got her papers together, and then they left heading for her apartment.

On the drive over to Lana's apartment, Richard was thinking about what he should say to Bruce Wayne to stop him from hitting on his girlfriend. "Lana, I know he's your boss, and I'd hate for you to lose your job or anything, but I can't sit by and let him do this. I need to confront him."

"I know you do, but I think we should confront him together. I'll call him and set up a meeting at his office tomorrow and we'll set him straight. How does that sound?"

Richard wanted to do this man-to-man, but she was hurt just as much as he was from Bruce's thoughtless actions. "Alright, that sounds fine. Let me know what time to be there tomorrow, alright? The sooner we get this over with the better."

"I agree. Do you want to come up for a little while, have a drink, it'll help you relax," she smiled at the look he gave her.

"I like the sound of that," he smiled and squeezed her hand.

*Somewhere off the southern coast of Florida:*

Superman arrived just as the ship full of contraband they were monitoring was nearing port. Aquaman resurfaced and immediately contacted Superman.

"Superman, can you hear me?" Arthur asked touching his earpiece as he looked to the sky. They had all decided to address each other by their superhero monikers just in case.

"I hear you Aquaman. What's our status?" Clark asked hovering high above the ship.

"My friends and I have been following this ship for a few miles now, and just when I thought they were pulling into port, they would go in a different direction. They may be on to me."

"You and your friends should stay put. I'm going to scan the inside of the ship and see if I can locate the contraband." Superman did just that. "I see about ten armed men. They're deep inside the vessel protecting their cargo, and there are maybe ten more throughout the ship, all loaded down with weapons. We have to be smart about this. Are you in touch with Wonder Woman and the Flash?"

"Yes, I spoke to them a little while ago. The police are ready, but we need to give them an exact location. I haven't been able to do that since they keep changing direction."

"They have to pull into port soon," Superman said. He scanned the vessel again for fuel amounts. "They'll be out of fuel very soon now. They'll have no choice but to dock."

"How much longer do you think it will be?"

"Soon now, I'd say in about an hour."

An hour went by and sure enough, the vessel pulled into a secluded area with a small pier. Superman followed the ship, contacting Wonder Woman and the Flash with the ship's location. Everyone was in place. *We should be able to do this and no one will have to get hurt.* Superman went to meet up with Wonder Woman and the Flash, speaking to them briefly. They knew what they had to do.

As soon as the men on the vessel began unloading their contraband, Superman could see they had no idea what lay ahead for them. The police were out of sight waiting for the right moment to make their move. Superman hovered over to the ship. "The party's over, gentlemen. Put down your weapons. You're surrounded."

The men immediately started shooting. Superman used his laser vision to neutralize their weapons. It was over in a matter of moments. Wonder Woman came forward just as another man came off the boat shooting in her direction. She raised her wrists blocking the bullets with no trouble. The Flash ran forward then and knocked the rest of the men into the ocean neutralizing them and their weapons.

Aquaman made his move by gathering up the men who had fallen into the sea. One of them couldn't swim, so he rescued him first. Superman scanned the vessel and there were no more men on board. "They're all yours," he told the police.

"Thank you, Superman," the policeman said truly grateful. The other superheroes came forward with all the men from the ship. "Thank you all for helping us tonight. If your sources are accurate, this will be one of the largest, if not the largest drug haul we have ever done in this state. It will definitely send a message to the drug lords and the syndicate that the Justice League of America is here to stay. Thank you, again," the policeman said shaking all of their hands.

"It was our pleasure," Superman said. He nodded to the other League members as they dispersed. "That felt good. Do you agree gang?"

"I agree, Superman. We can and will make a difference," Wonder Woman said.

"You said it, Wonder Woman. Where to now, Superman?" Bart asked.

"I'm headed to California to help Martian Manhunter and the Green Lantern. Why don't you all head back to the Watchtower and wait for us? I have a few things to update you on. It's pretty important. We won't be long."

They stared at each other wondering what that was about. "Alright, we'll see you back at Watchtower," Wonder Woman said unable to ignore the bad feeling in the pit of her stomach at Superman's words.

*Somewhere near the southern border of New Mexico:*

J'onn Jonz and Hal Jordan considered this type of work well suited for them, as being undercover and working with law enforcement officials and border guards would lead to a far better outcome than busting down doors and catching people with guns drawn. According to another invaluable tip, they were able to locate a shipment coming into the United States, a shipment so huge, that it would make history, they were convinced of it. It was just the kind of message the League was trying to send to the cartels in Mexico and Venezuela.

Superman scanned the area trying to locate his friends. He spotted them, but decided to wait for a while to consider what they had told him earlier in the day. Authorities in the area believed and their tipster had confirmed that metric-tons of marijuana and cocaine were about to enter the United States. Clark realized there was an ongoing war against drugs in this country and the Justice League was there to help in anyway that they could. Drugs spawned all manner of crime in this country, not the least of which was homicides, prostitution, death from overdoses, the list went on. The Justice League in this one way could ease some of that.

Clark scanned the truck more closely. Apparently, this flatbed truck was loaded down with drugs and was headed for the border, but the drugs were hidden inside a false floor of the truck. He could see them clearly now. A routine stop would find the drugs with the help of dogs but the right timing was crucial.

Superman then contacted Hal and J'onn. "Gentlemen, I have a visual," Superman said getting right to the point. "The drugs are there. What's your position?"

"Well, it's nice of you to join us, Superman. You know it's no fun without you," Hal said trying to make light of a serious situation.

"We're waiting at the mark, Superman," J'onn said shaking his head at his friend.

Clark chuckled. "It's good to be here. Is everyone ready? I can see the truck now. It will be at the checkpoint in about five minutes."

"We're ready, Superman," Hal said as he pointed to the ring and lifted up to the sky. He spotted Superman hovering just beyond some trees.

"I see the police are out of sight. That's good, Green Lantern. We don't want the driver to panic. I do see several weapons, but they're out of sight right now," Clark said.

"Yeah, it's best they not show themselves. We want the driver to think this is all just a routine stop for him."

"J'onn, he just pulled in. Get ready on my mark," Superman said, nodding to Hal.

Superman flew over to the truck and dropped down directly in front of the driver. "Good evening, would you mind stepping out of the vehicle, please?"

The driver's mouth dropped open. He immediately threw his hands up into the air, opened the door and fell to the ground. He was terrified. "Don't hurt me, please. I have a wife and child at home, please," the man begged.

Clark frowned at that reaction. He had never received that kind of reaction before. He didn't know what to make of it. The police immediately fell on the man, putting him in

handcuffs and taking him away.

J'onn and Hal were both dumbfounded by the man's reaction to Superman. "Well, that was easy, I must say," Hal said dropping down beside Superman.

Superman hadn't heard him. "What did you say, Green Lantern?" Clark was still confused.

"Superman, are you thinking about what he said to you? Don't let it get to you. He's just terrified of going to jail. That's all. Come on, we need to get back to Watchtower. Wonder Woman called us and told us about the big meeting."

"Yes, let's check in with the police and then we'll head back."

"So, J'onn, how did we do? Was it a big haul, big enough to make Edge sit up and take notice of us?" Superman wanted to know.

"We have a record take here, guys. There must be enough drugs here to net millions on the streets. We did good, real good."

"Excellent." Superman turned to the police. "Gentlemen, thank you for your invaluable assistance tonight. Remember, we're here to help you in any way we can. You can contact us anytime. Good night to you all."

"Good night, Superman. And thanks again to the League. We just heard of the bust in Florida. Way to go, guys," the policeman said giving them two thumbs up.

"It was our pleasure," Superman said as they all lifted up into the sky and flew back east toward the Watchtower headquarters.

## Chapter 10: The Brave And The Bold

*The Watchtower, later that evening:*

Wonder Woman, Batman and the other members of the League were waiting impatiently for the other members to return from New Mexico.

"Bruce, do you have any idea why Superman called this meeting?" Diana asked her friend.

"He'll be along soon. Just be patient," Bruce said not wanting to upset her.

"You'd tell me if you knew, wouldn't you Bruce?"

He sighed. "It's best we wait and see what Clark has to say," he said asking her with his eyes not to push the issue.

Clark and the others entered the Watchtower at that moment. "Is everyone here?" Clark asked dispensing with formalities.

"Everyone is here, Clark," Bruce replied.

"Please everyone, take a seat. I know you're wondering why I called this meeting. This won't take long. But before we get started, I wanted to thank everyone on the great job with the shipments tonight. It's all over the news and Edge will be telling his gang just what they're up against. I received word that they're probably meeting at this very moment trying to come up with ways to stop us."

"I'd like to see them try," Bart said.

"Oh, they will give it their best shot," Clark said. "And that is why I called this meeting. I went to the Fortress earlier today hoping against hope that Edge wouldn't contact Darkseid. It's not in the cards, guys. My father confirmed that Edge has tried to contact him."

Diana looked at Bruce, but he wouldn't meet her eyes. She stood up then and began to pace. "Clark, what can we do to keep him from coming here? There must be something we can do."

"There is only one thing we can do, Diana," Clark said and went to her then, knowing how much this information would upset her.

"Well, what is it?" Diana pressed.

"I have to confront him. He's too powerful for the League. I am the only one powerful enough to defeat him."

"But that's crazy, Clark. We're here to help. Why won't you let us help you? Bruce, tell him we can help."

"Diana, you know as well as I that once Clark sets his mind to something, we can't change it," Bruce said knowing Clark was the most stubborn man he had ever met.

"But surely, with our combined powers, we can defeat him?" Diana asked convinced they could defeat him together if they had a plan.

"I have to agree with Diana, Clark. This is what we've waited for, isn't it? A villain we can put our combined efforts to defeat? We can do this," Arthur said.

"I agree, too," Bart said.

"Count me in," J'onn said.

"Guys, please, this is pointless. Look, let me tell you what Darkseid is capable of and then you can decide if we can defeat him together." Everyone waited for him to continue.

"Darkseid possess powers similar to mine, including strength, speed, invulnerability, heat vision and flight. He also has the ability to manipulate energy, ranging from being able to absorb, convert and release various forms of energy as powerful blasts from his eyes and hands."

"These energy blasts can have an effect on your mind. He can make you do things you don't want to do. Believe me when I say, you don't want to be anywhere near him when he uses this power. Darkseid seeks to eliminate all free will from the universe and reshape it into his own image. He has tried this in the past and I was able to defeat him and send him away. Now he's coming back and I'll have to defeat him again."

Everyone listened and understood, but they would not be deterred. "Clark, you can go on and on if you want, but we will be there beside you no matter what happens," Bruce said, nodding toward the League.

"I seem to remember something about a democracy?" Diana asked and smiled at Clark.

"Now, wait a minute," Clark began.

"Everyone in favor of helping Clark, raise your hand," Diana said.

Everyone raised their hands. Clark just shook his head beaten by his own words.

*Somewhere in Gotham City:*

Morgan Edge liked Gotham City. Here in this crime-ridden city, there was more of the kind of element he was used to and best of all, there were no flying aliens, only a pesky caped crusader always messing in his business. As he stood at the head of the table facing the heads of his crime organization from all over the country, he was about to start the meeting when Frank came into the conference room and slipped him a note. As he read it, his face morphed into a furious scowl. He crumpled the note in his hand, went to the television monitor and turned it on.

One of the bosses looked around the table and wondered what was happening. He decided to speak even though Edge was not the type of man who liked interruptions. "Edge, we don't have all night. What's going on?"

"Just watch and listen. You may learn something," Edge said not feeling the need to elaborate. He turned the volume up on the national cable news channel.

The announcer spoke. *"Superman and the Justice League have been very busy tonight. We have just received word from local law enforcement officials that on two separate incidents, the League was responsible for stopping two record breaking narcotics shipments from entering the United States.*

*"DEA officials have confirmed that Superman along with several members of the Justice League stopped two massive shipments of narcotics from entering the country. In a secluded and unknown area south of Miami, Florida, the DEA has confirmed that this shipment had a street value of over \$45 million dollars.*

*"Also tonight, not an hour later on the border of New Mexico, Superman used his x-ray vision and was able to locate a shipment concealed inside a flatbed truck. Also there were several of his flying friends who also helped locate the truck. That shipment I'm told had a street value of over \$30 million dollars.*

Edge flipped off the monitor, turned and faced the highly placed members of his organization. "Well, I'm waiting. Can someone tell me what the hell happened?" Edge couldn't remember ever being so furious.

A few of the men finally found their voices. "We have no idea what happened. There must be a snitch somewhere inside the organization. There's no other explanation. I can't believe this. What are we going to do? That's \$75 million dollars, Edge. We can't replace that kind of money."

Then, someone stood up, went to stand by the monitor and said the one thing Edge

wanted to hear. "There's only one thing to do. We have to get rid of the Justice League."

"And how do you suppose we do that?" Edge asked wondering what plan he could possibly have to stop them.

"Well, we could ambush them. We could arrange another shipment, but it won't be narcotics they find, but a few ... explosives and one tiny piece of kryptonite for our alien friend."

"It won't work. Superman can see through anything."

"He can't see through lead."

"But if he sees the lead, he'll become suspicious. I have another plan, one that will get rid of Superman once and for all. All we have to do is sit back and watch him take care of our little alien problem."

"Who?"

"Darkseid of Apokolips."

Everyone stared at Edge shocked and terrified. "Edge, I don't think that's such a good idea. He destroyed half the city the last time. There won't be anything left. We'd have to start all over again."

"There's no other solution. It has to be done."

"Edge, wait a minute. I know you have a grudge against Superman, but we can come up with another solution."

"There's isn't time. There are three more shipments next week, and it's too late to stop them. If Superman gets his hands on those, we're done, and starting over won't be an option." Edge pulled out his communication device, one he acquired from Lex Luthor. Lex wasn't completely insane. Edge had visited the man about a week ago, right after the conference and with Luthor's instructions, was able to find the device. He had made several attempts to make it work, but now as he pushed several buttons, and watched the device come to life, he knew there would be no turning back.

*Meanwhile, back at the Watchtower:*

The meeting room was quiet as Bruce and Diana worked at the computers, as they finished up assignments for the next narcotics shipment. Everyone else had left for the night.

"Why didn't you tell your story Diana? It may have swung the vote to let Clark go it alone?" Bruce asked.

"It wouldn't have made any difference. Everyone was determined to help him. You know I'm right."

"I know, but maybe talking about it may help. I couldn't help but notice your reaction when Clark said Darkseid was coming here again."

"Bruce, please, let's just finish this and call it a night," Diana said not wanting to talk about it.

Bruce stood up from the computer, went to her and touched her shoulder.

Diana looked up at him trying to remember the last time they had actually touched each other as friends. It had been a long time. Diana sighed and began her story of that terrible time. Bruce listened to his friend tell him how Darkseid had kidnapped her, brainwashed her and made her turn against her friends.

"Diana, it wasn't your fault. I can hear it in your voice. You can't blame yourself for something you had no control over."

"I know that Bruce, but it doesn't make it any easier to remember all the things I did and

said all because of Darkseid's sick obsession with me."

Bruce tried to lighten the mood. "Can you blame him? You are a stunning woman," he said smiling at her.

"Bruce, stop it," she said and swatted his arm. "It was a terrible time for me. Please don't make light of it."

"I'm sorry, Diana." He took her hand. "I never want to hurt you, Diana, never." He stared into her eyes.

Diana hadn't seen that look in years. She really didn't know what to make of it. "It's getting late, Bruce. We really should call it a night," she said removing her hand from his. She stood up to leave. Bruce also stood up, but he took her hand again.

"Bruce?" Diana asked now totally confused.

"It's alright. Here just, let me hold you for a moment, as a friend, nothing more," Bruce said taking her other hand.

Thinking a little comfort was a good thing, Diana went into his arms, but then she closed her eyes holding him a little tighter, and rested her head on his shoulder. She sighed realizing how much she needed the comfort.

Bruce closed his eyes after hearing her sigh and stroked her hair. *She feels so good. Why did everything have to be so complicated?*

They both pulled back after a moment. Diana touched his face feeling the heat inside the mask. Bruce wanted to kiss her, but he thought she might slap his face if he did, then she closed her eyes and moved toward him. His heart soared like never before. He kissed her softly. *So sweet.* She kissed him back for a moment.

Diana was the first to pull back. "Bruce, what are we doing?" She touched her lips more than a little shocked by what had just happened. "This isn't pity is it?" She backed up feeling ashamed.

"No, no, of course not Diana, you know I've always cared for you, but you know our lives, the danger, and the excitement. It's difficult for us to stop and really appreciate what's important in life."

She shook her head amazed at him. "Didn't I just say almost the exact same thing to you a few days ago? What really brought this on? Did someone turn you down? Is that what this is about?"

"Diana, no, that's not it and you know it."

"How do I know it, Bruce? I know you, remember? You said it yourself. I know how you live your life." She couldn't look at him, as she turned to leave, trying to hide her face. She didn't want him to see how much he had hurt her. "Look, let's just forget this happened. I'll see you in the morning. Good night, Bruce."

He let her go. "Good night, Diana." Bruce watched her go, but he couldn't help thinking. *We're not done Diana. We never will be.*

*Gotham City, the next morning:*

Bruce was in his office trying to work, but he couldn't help thinking about Diana and what their kiss last night could mean for them.

His intercom rang just then. "Yes, what is it Jane?"

"You have several visitors, Mr. Wayne. Mr. White and Ms. Lang are here for their 10:00 am meeting with you sir."

Bruce groaned to himself. "Send them in."

"Mr. Wayne, this won't take long," Lana said not bothering with formalities.

"I know what you're going to say," Bruce said standing up.

"Look, Mr. Wayne, Lana and I are involved, seriously involved. Please don't send her flowers anymore," Richard said.

Bruce held up his hands. "I'm truly sorry if I overstepped."

"If, what do you mean if? You overstepped, Mr. Wayne. I never for a moment encouraged you," Lana said getting upset.

"I know that, Ms. Lang. I'm trying to apologize. I'm sorry. No more flowers, I promise."

Lana and Richard glanced at each other feeling satisfied with his apology.

"Good, then have a nice day, Mr. Wayne," Lana said.

"Yeah, have a good day," Richard said as he escorted Lana to the door.

Then Lana suddenly grabbed Richard's arm to stop him from leaving and turned back to her employer. "Mr. Wayne, I have something else to say. It may cost me my job but I think you need to hear this."

Bruce sighed and sat down at his desk. "Please enlighten me, Ms. Lang."

Richard had a feeling he knew what she was going to say. He knew how much Lana loved her job, but he didn't think he could love her more than at this moment.

Lana walked up to Bruce's desk and let him have it. "I know why you do the things you do, Mr. Wayne, especially to women."

"Oh, this should be good. Please continue," Bruce said leaning back in his chair and smiled.

"Well, I think you're hiding ... hiding from the world, hiding from your feelings, and hiding from who you really are."

"And who might that be?"

"The person who wants love, needs love, but doesn't know how to go about it."

Bruce stood up then, not really appreciating Ms. Lang's interference even though her words rang true in his mind. "Thank you, Ms. Lang, I'll definitely think about what you said." He tried to sound sincere. "I mean it, Ms. Lang, I do. Thank you both for coming today."

Richard and Lana left feeling assured they had gotten through to him in this one small way.

After they left, Bruce went to window thinking about Lana's words. He dialed his assistant. "Could you get Diana Prince on the line, please? Thank you, Jane." *I could use a friendly voice right now. At least I hope we're still friends.* That thought gave him pause. *I can't loose that.*

### *Diana Prince's office in D.C.*

Diana was in her office catching up on her assignments with the agency and trying without success not to think about Bruce and what happened between them. She sighed giving up as she realized it was lost cause. She didn't want to loose their friendship. They've been friends for so long, and just the thought of loosing that friendship sent a lancing pain in her chest, but in spite of that, the promise in his eyes spoke to her heart. She couldn't deny how her heart raced just thinking about it.

Her phone ran just then. "Hello, Diana Prince here."

"Diana, it's me," Bruce said hoping she wouldn't hang up on him. "Can you talk for a moment?" Silence followed his question. "Diana, are you there? Please answer me."

Diana knew she was being silly. "Yes, Bruce, what is it?"

"I wanted to call to see how you were."

"I'm fine, why?"

"Well, after last night?" He paused. "We should talk."

"There's nothing to talk about. I thought I made that clear last night."

"I know, but I can't forget what happened. Can you?"

Silence again. Then, "no, I can't."

"Can you meet me at the new station?"

"The station? Is it ready? I thought it wouldn't be ready for another month?"

"I decided to speed up production. Ever since the League went public, we do need the security and distance from those who would do us harm."

"I agree, Bruce. Your plans were brilliant."

"Well, will you meet me there in an hour?"

"I'll be there, Bruce, and I agree, we should talk. I'll see you in an hour," Diana said wondering why she was putting herself in this position, but she couldn't help the way her heart rate sped up at the thought of seeing him again.

"Bye, Diana, see you soon," Bruce said and hung up. He stared at the phone wondering if this wasn't a bad idea, but his heart didn't agree.

### *The Watchtower Space Station:*

Bruce arrived at the station first. He had given all the members of the League instructions on how to use the teleportation device installed at the Watchtower headquarters in Metropolis. As he magically materialized in "The Hall of Justice" or the conference hall where the League would meet and plot their strategies, his mind wandered again to Diana and what he was going to say to her once she arrived.

As he walked over to the round table, he knew the League would be pleased with this new and more expansive table. Seven of the seats were reserved for the 'core' members, while the JLA symbol was prominently displayed in the center. This table was much larger and would hold more members as the League grew its ranks in the future. He turned then when he heard a noise behind him. Diana was standing there just inside the main hall watching him. He decided the station was a safe topic for now. "Well, what do you think?" Bruce asked as he made a sweeping motion with his hand.

"First of all, let me sit down for a minute. That was some trip up here. How long was I in there? It's hard to tell with my head spinning in circles."

Bruce went to her and helped her to sit down. "Sorry about that. The ride is about five minutes. The dizziness should stop in a few moments. It's the one small kink my scientists are still working on. There, is it better now?"

Diana tried not to be affected by his nearness, but her mind and heart refused to obey her.

Bruce could sense her tenseness, so he went to sit beside her to give her some space. "We can take a tour when you're ready."

Diana shook her head as the dizziness went away after a moment. "I think I'm ready now."

"Great." He stood up and walked around the table. "Now, this room is called 'The Hall of Justice.' As you can see, this table is much larger than the one in Metropolis. It's large enough just in case if we decide to add more members in the future."

"That's smart thinking, Bruce. I like it," she smiled as she saw all the different insignias of the core members on their chairs and on the table.

"There's a lot more to see," Bruce said as he held out his hand to help her to stand.

Diana glanced at his hand and for a second, she wanted to accept his offer of chivalry. She looked at his face and he immediately dropped his hand, feeling embarrassed. "Bruce?"

"Come on, Diana, I want you to see all of it, then ... we can talk."

"Sure, what's next?" Diana asked, not wanting to talk right now, but knowing they had to clear the air at some point. She didn't like this distance between them.

"I don't know if you noticed, but we're at the very top of the station. The lower levels contain a monitoring center, which houses the communications network. I had no trouble getting volunteers to come up here to work different shifts to keep this station running twenty-four seven, communicating with all the League members as well as with NASA."

As Bruce spoke, they toured the monitoring center and a promenade area, large enough for special ceremonies and for large assemblies for visitors and other meetings that would require more space. He also showed her their living quarters, a training room, an armory/hanger, which housed smaller craft for space travel, laboratories, and the med-lab. He indicated that there was a physician, several scientists and several retired NASA astronauts ready and willing to live on the station for several months at a time. The last area he showed her were the emergency teleportation tubes strictly for emergencies if they had to leave the station in minutes if needed.

Diana was amazed and so thrilled, she didn't know quite what to say. "Bruce, everything is just amazing. It appears you've thought of everything. You should be congratulated. We must have a welcoming party or something to make it official. I don't know. What do you think we should do?"

Diana had her back to him. He looked her up and down. His mind suddenly conjured up all kinds of things they could do to officially launch the station, but he kept them to himself. "Well, a party sounds good. Maybe we could have some food, champagne, nothing too elaborate. We do have a problem hanging over our heads right now, but once that's taken care of we can do it up right. What do you say?"

She turned to face him. "Sounds perfect to me," Diana said and smiled.

"It will be perfect," Bruce said meaning something else entirely. Then he became bold and walked towards her. Diana watched him come closer, and she couldn't move if her life depended on it. He took her hand. "Diana, I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable when we kissed, but I'm not sorry I kissed you. It was wonderful. You know I care a great deal for you." He held up his hand when she tried to speak. "Let me finish, please? When you told me the other day how I let my chances slip through my fingers, you meant us, didn't you?" She nodded not knowing what to say. He looked at her hand and then he squeezed it. "Diana, would you be willing to give us another chance?"

Diana stared at his face, trying to believe this was the same man who told her the other day how all relationships would end badly, no matter how hard you may want it to work. They just didn't work out. "Bruce, what changed? I don't understand."

He sighed and tried to explain how he felt about himself and his life. "It wasn't until ... a friend told me that I was the one afraid, afraid to look inside myself, afraid to face the fact that I had no idea how to find love, and if I did find it, I wouldn't know what to do with it, that in all likelihood, I would throw it away." He touched her cheek. "I have no right to ask this, but would you give this old stubborn, pig-headed, and blind as a bat (pardon the pun), friend to the death one more chance to get it right?"

Diana laughed. "Oh Bruce, you know what I think?"

"No, what do you think?" Bruce asked hope shining in his eyes.

She came into his arms then. "I think this place needs to be christened properly," she said and then she kissed him. After a few moments, she pulled back and looked into his eyes.

"Come with me," she smiled and took his hand and led him to the window. He came up behind her, pulled her close to his chest from behind and kissed her cheek. "Wow, what a view," Diana said.

Bruce wasn't looking at the Earth, the Moon or the Sun. He felt as if he had captured all of those things and more and they were all right here in his arms.

## Chapter 11: The Power Of The Sun

*The Daily Planet offices the next morning:*

Lois was in Perry's office awaiting feedback on the article she and Clark wrote about their investigation into the D.A. and his connection to Morgan Edge and Intergang. *Where is he?* He should be arriving soon from his late night meetings with the League.

After reading the article, Perry was thoughtful for a few moments, and then he had a few things to say. "When you first brought this story to me Lois, I was definitely intrigued. I've had my eye on them for months, but nothing has panned out. Washington is good at covering his tracks. This article is excellent with just a hint of scandal, nothing that actually connects him, but enough to worry his PR firm, that's for sure. Are you going to tell me your sources?"

"Superman, of course, and the League have been very forthcoming with information."

"Oh, I see. Please tell me more," Perry said, wanted to hear everything.

"Well, the League planted a mole inside the organization and all the recent record breaking drug busts were due to his tips to the League. Once they received his last tip, however, he was pulled and put under police protection."

"And why was that?"

"Apparently, there was a big meeting of all the heads of Intergang in Gotham, and according to Superman, Edge contacted Darkseid."

Perry had hoped never to hear that name again. He stood up and went to the window thinking about this revelation. "Edge has become desperate, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he has. Apparently, there are only a few drug shipments left and Edge and the D.A. want to stop the League at any cost, even at the expense of the entire city."

"That includes Superman, of course." Perry turned from the window and faced his star reporter. "You seem to be taking this very well." He paused. "So, you've forgiven him?"

Lois was confused. "Taking what very well, forgiven who?" *Does he mean Clark or Superman?*

"Lois, I can read between the lines. After you wrote that article, everyone knew how you felt about him. I published it because I thought it would purge him from your system. You needed that and I agreed with you."

"Perry, please let's not do this again. All of that is in the past," Lois said determined not to get into it. "Have you decided when you'll run the article?"

"It will run in tomorrow's edition. And one more thing, Lois, I wanted to apologize for the other day to you and to Clark."

"There's no need. We both understood where you were coming from. You care about us, Perry, and it means a lot, but Clark and I are fine. We couldn't be happier."

Clark arrived at his desk and he could see that Lois and Perry were very intent on their conversation. He did hear that last part, however, and smiling, he decided to stop listening.

"I am happy for you both. I mean that, Lois."

"I know you do, Chief."

"I have a few minor edits to this and I'll send it down to copy in a few minutes."

"Thanks, Chief," Lois said and left Perry's office.

Clark watched his wife leave Perry's office and wondered what type of mood she was in today. With the baby, Lois was even more moody than normal. He decided to tread lightly. "Hi, Lois, umm, did you give Perry the article? What did he say?"

"Yes, I gave him the article, but I really don't know what's gotten into him. He keeps

harping on the past. I had to nip it in the bud before he got carried away again."

"Oh, dear, what did he say this time?"

"He brought up my article, you know the one."

"How in the world did that come up in the conversation?"

"We were talking about Superman and Darkseid and how I felt about Superman back then and how I feel about him now in the present. It's all irrelevant. He knows I love you Clark. All of that is in the past."

"Please, honey, don't let it bother you. I'll talk to him," Clark said wondering if Perry was putting two and two together after all this time.

"He said he wants to apologize to you. He feels bad about what he said to us the other day."

"Really? I'll go speak with him. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Alright, Clark, but be careful. I'm getting a bad feeling about all of his questions about us. Oh, and before I forget, we have our first OB-GYN appointment at two-thirty today," Lois said and smiled at her husband's look.

"Wouldn't miss it," Clark said and smiled back. He then left to talk to Perry.

Clark tentatively knocked on the Chief's door. "Umm, Perry, do you have a minute to talk?"

"Sure, Kent, come in, take a seat," Perry said waving him in, a little distracted by his edits to the Edge/Intergang article.

Clark sat down and waited for Perry to finish his edits. "Good work on this article Kent."

"Thanks, Chief, umm, is there something you wanted to say to me?"

"Oh, Lois told you I wanted to apologize?" He stood up and went to sit on the side of his desk. "You know, Kent, I only said those things because I care."

"I know that, Chief. Lois and I understand. There's really no need to explain."

"I think I should explain," Perry said. He stood up then, walked around his desk appearing to be deep in thought, as he stared out the window. "You see, when you left for your trip, I could see how much Lois missed you. Oh, she tried to hide it, but I know her. I've known her for a very long time, Kent, and she couldn't hide it, not from me. Then, Superman disappeared from her life. She was pretty torn up about it, both you and Superman gone, and then she wrote that article." Perry turned to face him.

Clark decided to stop him before it got too close for comfort. "I know Lois was confused about a lot back then, but she's forgiven me for leaving. We're happier than we have ever been Chief." He stood up to leave. "Thanks, Chief. I'll be getting back to work now."

Perry watched him for a moment, thinking Kent couldn't wait to get out of his office. "Sure, Kent, I'll see you later."

Clark left Perry's office and breathed a sigh of relief. *There's no doubt in my mind now. Perry is definitely fishing for something.*

*STAR Labs, 2:45 pm:*

Lois and Dr. Hamilton were in his office going over her and Jason's records from her pregnancy over six years ago.

"Thank you, Mrs. Kent, for bringing these records to me," Dr. Hamilton said. He noticed she kept looking at her watch. "Are you in a hurry, Mrs. Kent?"

"No, no, I was hoping Clark would be here by now."

"Humm, I see. We've only just started. He may still show up. Let's get started on those tests. They will take a little while, and hopefully, he'll arrive by the time we're finished."

"Alright doctor," Lois said sighing, as she followed the doctor to the lab for tests.

Thirty minutes later, Clark showed up smoothing his hair into place and straightening his tie. Lois and the doctor were in the examination room going over a few of her test results as they both turned at the tentative knock on the door. Clark poked his head in hoping Lois wouldn't be too mad at him for being late. "I'm so sorry I'm late honey," Clark said as he kissed Lois's cheek. "Is everything alright doctor?"

Lois smiled at her husband and took his hand. "I'm just glad you made it Clark. We were just getting started."

"Hello, Mr. Kent. Mrs. Kent is in excellent health, but I wanted to talk to you about Jason and the problems he had early in life. Mrs. Kent explained to me about his asthma and other immune deficiencies that plagued his childhood."

"Yes, doctor, Jason was very sick as an infant. We almost lost him; he was so small," Lois said as she squeezed Clark's hand.

"And you were pregnant for ...," he glanced at Lois's records from years ago, "38 weeks, which is full term normally?" Dr. Hamilton inquired.

"Yes, I thought Jason would be fine. I never had any problems during my pregnancy, so when he was born, and he only weighed five pounds, the doctors couldn't understand what had happened. I ate right, took my vitamins, quit smoking, but Jason wasn't getting any bigger, then I went into labor. The doctors fully believed that since he was full term, that he would be fine, but that wasn't the case."

The doctor took a few notes, but then his beeper went off. "Excuse me, I have to take this. I'll be right back."

Clark watched the doctor leave and wondered what Lois could possibly do differently to ensure their next child would be healthy.

"Clark, I'm worried now. Jason was just so sick. The doctors took good care of him, but he was in the hospital for over a month," Lois said remembering that terrible time.

"I'm so sorry honey," Clark said squeezing her hand, as the guilt tore him up inside.

"I know it's hard to hear all of this Clark, but we can't change the past, just try to do things differently this time. I want this child to be healthy and happy."

"So do I, Lois, and he or she will be," Clark said hoping and praying for it to be true.

The doctor came back then. "I'm sorry about that. I've checked some things out concerning Krypton and how a pregnancy might have happened on your planet, Mr. Kent. I think your son needed an additional month to grow. If he'd had that additional time, his body would have matured more, specifically his lungs, and I believe he wouldn't have had those problems. We have to make sure you have a full ten month pregnancy, Mrs. Kent. If you go into labor sooner than that, we have ways to stop the labor. I also think once you reach your ninth month, we could put you on bed rest. It certainly couldn't hurt, and of course, we'll monitor the baby's weight and how he's doing."

"Lois, what do you think? I know it will be hard to be in bed for a month, but ..." Clark said letting that hang in the air. Their child's health had to be a priority.

Lois didn't need to think about it. "Of course, I'll do what the doctor says."

"Good, now, I'll set up a schedule today for your future appointments, and a sonogram in a few months to see the sex of the baby, if you'd like to know."

Lois smiled at her husband. "Clark, do you want to know the sex of the baby?"

"I would like it to be a surprise, if that's what you want, honey," Clark said leaving it up her.

"It's settled, doctor. We don't want to know."

"That's fine, then. I think we're done. I'll see you back here in a month, Mrs. Kent," the doctor said as he prepared to leave.

"Thank you, doctor," Lois said.

"Yes, thank you, doctor," Clark said as the doctor left.

As Clark helped her down from the table, he could see she was deep in thought. "What are you thinking, honey?"

"I was just wondering how Jason is going to react to the news," Lois said hoping he will love the idea.

"Well, Jason and I haven't known each other very long, but my son will be absolutely and totally thrilled to have a sibling."

"Oh, you think so?" Lois said smiling as she couldn't help but be encouraged by Clark's opinion.

"Yep, I know he will," Clark said, as he silently sent up prayers that it be true.

Later that evening after dinner, Clark and Lois sat Jason down admitting to themselves that they had no idea how he was going to react to the news.

Jason was facing his parents and he could see it was going to be one of 'those' talks. He was starting to pick up things about his parents and how they acted when there was something important they wanted to tell him. "Mom, Dad, what's going on? I have homework."

"This won't take long, honey. Your father and I have some wonderful news to tell you."

Lois took his hands in hers. "We're going to have a baby, Jason. You'll have a baby brother or sister in about nine and half months."

"A baby, really?" Jason could not believe it. He was beginning to think he would be an only child. "Is it a boy or a girl?"

"Well, we won't know until the baby is born. Does it really matter which it is, Jason? He or she will look up to you to teach him or her things about life and you can be there for each other all your lives."

"I know that, Mom, but a baby brother would be so awesome," Jason said getting more and more excited about the idea. He stood up then and went to stand before his father. "Will he have powers like you and me? Wow, Dad, that would be so cool," Jason asked and as he said that, he started to float up towards the ceiling. "Dad, Mom, look, look, I'm flying," he said looking down at his parents' shocked expressions.

Clark got over his initial shock and tried to coax Jason down from the ceiling. "Jason, Jason, look at me. Concentrate son, take a deep breath and come down ... that's it, slowly, slowly."

Jason did as his father said as he drifted down to the floor with his arms out trying to balance his weight. "Wow, Dad, I didn't think I would ever do that again."

Lois was still in shock. *I've never seen Jason so excited. Clark was right; he is thrilled about the baby.* She shook her head smiling at her family. "Jason, are you alright honey? How did it feel?" She asked as she held out her arms to her son.

"It felt great, Mom. Can I do it again?" Jason asked looking between his Mom and Dad.

"Well, honey, I don't know," Lois said looking to her husband for help.

"Jason, you need to practice control. You know you're too young to even think about

using your powers. You have a long way to go before that happens. What we need to concentrate on now is not letting your powers control you. Do you understand?"

Jason hung his head but he knew what his father said made sense. "I understand, Dad, but you promise to help me, right?"

"Of course I will son. Why don't you go on up and do your homework? We'll be up in a little while before you go to bed. Go on now," Clark told his son.

"Alright, good night, Dad, Mom," Jason said as he kissed his Mom's cheek.

"Good night, son," Clark said.

"Good night, honey," Lois said watching him go up the stairs. Clark went to his wife and enveloped her in a warm hug. "He's growing up so fast. Tell me everything will be alright, Clark," Lois said.

"He'll be fine; we'll be fine," Clark said trying not to think about the threat that could tear his family apart.

*Later that night:*

Clark watched his wife getting ready for bed. He had to leave to meet up with the League to plan their strategy against Darkseid, but a part of him felt as if these days may be their last days together. He didn't want to think this way, but he couldn't help it.

"Lois?" He spoke her name like a prayer.

Lois stopped brushing her hair and watched her husband in the mirror for a moment. "Aren't you leaving soon?"

"In a little while, here let me," Clark took the brush from her hand and brushed her hair running his fingers through the silky strands.

Lois sighed and leaned her head back. "HUMM, that feels so good. You missed your calling, honey."

Clark stopped after a moment, got down on one knee, pushed her hair aside and kissed her throat moving up to her ear. Lois moved her head to the side to give him better access. He then turned her around and pulled her into his arms and kissed her, holding her tight. She kissed him back moaning his name. He stood up then, lifting his wife into his arms and brought her to the bed. Lois could feel how tense he was and she had a feeling she knew what was bothering him.

She took his face between her palms. "We'll get through this, Clark. I know we will. We just have to have faith."

"I know," Clark said, as he proceeded to make love to his wife, slowly and reverently. Once they were both undressed, Clark's gaze moved over her body. His eyes stopped at her stomach as he slowly reached out to touch it, feeling a bit afraid to touch her. Lois took his hand and placed it on her stomach. She smiled at him. "Is it too soon to hear the baby's heartbeat?" He asked hoping he could hear it.

"Yes, Clark, it's only been a few weeks."

He leaned down anyway and placed his ear against her stomach. Clark listened, but he couldn't hear the heartbeat yet. He didn't know why he felt disappointed, but he did.

Lois stroked his hair understanding. "It will be a few more weeks yet, Clark."

"I don't want to leave you tonight, Lois," Clark managed to say as he sighed into her hair.

"But they're waiting for you, Clark. You have to go," Lois said leaning up on her elbow to see his face. She touched his cheek. "I'll see you in a few hours."

Clark sighed, knowing she was right. He looked into her eyes trying to grab hold of that

faith she always seemed to have in him. He kissed her softly stroking her hair. "Get some rest honey." He touched her stomach. "You too, little one," he said and smiled.

He left their bed, went to take a quick shower, and twirled into the suit all in a matter of a few minutes. "Am I forgiven just this once?" He asked smiling.

Lois grinned and shook her head. "Yeah, I suppose, just this once." She paused. "I love you."

Clark leaned down and kissed her again. "I love you too. Good night," he said and smiled. He couldn't bring himself to say goodbye.

"Good night," Lois smiled in return.

Then he was gone.

## Chapter 12: The Return

*The Daily Planet bullpen, the next morning:*

Lois was at her desk reading her and Clark's published article on Intergang, Morgan Edge, the D.A., and how they were all connected to the recent record-breaking drug busts around the country. *If this doesn't open the eyes of people in this city, I don't know what will.*

But Lois was worried; she couldn't help it. Clark hadn't made it home last night. He always made it home by morning, and in her worry, her mind went back to last night and how gentle and sweet he had been, not wanting to leave her. She knew how worried he was as he tried to hide it from her, but she knew her husband too well.

Lois suddenly realized that the noise in the bullpen had gotten louder and everyone was talking at once. The cable news channels were scrambling for information to find out what was happening. Then the monitors went dark and a full minute passed. A civil defense announcement came up on the screen saying ... "This is not a test. All citizens should remain indoors, not go outside and take cover inside their homes."

She knew exactly what was happening. Darkseid had arrived. Lois ran to the window hoping to see something, but all she could see was a clear blue sky. Then she saw and heard jets flying high in the sky, going where, she didn't know. What she did know was that she had to see what was happening to Clark, no matter what it was, she had to be there. "Jimmy, come with me!" Lois hollered as she gathered her bag and headed to the elevator. Jimmy had to run to keep up with her but he was used to it.

*The Watchtower earlier that morning:*

After seeing the looks he received from his colleagues while revealing his plans for Darkseid, it was evident why Clark was called the *Man of Steel*.

"You can't be serious," Bruce was the first to find his voice.

"It's only as a last resort, Bruce," Clark said as he paced around the table accepting the fact that the League would not agree with his plan.

"So you expect us to just stand by and watch you just leave with him without a fight?" Bruce said not believing he would do such a thing.

While everyone around table was shocked by Clark's plan, Diana understood.

Bruce caught Diana's look and he couldn't believe she would agree with Clark's plan. "Diana, you don't agree with this insanity, do you?" He said not believing her.

"No, Bruce, I don't agree with Clark's plan, but I do understand it. Look, let's just make sure it doesn't come to that."

"Guys, we have a problem," Bart announced as he watched the monitor. "There's a disturbance south of town, and we need to go now."

As Darkseid of Apokolips made his way toward Earth, beginning his rampage by destroying as much of Metropolis as he could, he had only one objective in mind, the reason why he came back: to get his revenge for his humiliation at Superman's hands over ten years before and to feed upon Earth's despair and anguish once Superman is gone. As he guided his ship through the portal into Metropolis, his ten warships begin blowing up trees and buildings in their wake. People screamed running from office buildings into the street.

The Justice League arrived shortly after Darkseid, as well as a full battalion from the Army commanded by Colonel Lane. Colonel Lane had no choice but to return fire. "Fire now, with all you've got," Colonel Lane ordered his troops on the ground and in the air. Nothing was

held back, as the troops fired their rocket launchers, tanks, and heavy weapons.

Darkseid didn't have a lot of time to stand and fight. The Army was gaining on his warships. He decided to lead the League to an area where he knew he would have a chance to get Superman and his League alone. The League was right behind him.

"Stand and fight Darkseid," Superman ordered.

"Superman, you can stop this carnage," Darkseid said.

"I know what you want," Superman said knowing it would eventually come down to the two of them. He looked around at his fellow League members and he could see it on their faces. Clark knew he couldn't let them die. He could hear the Army standing strong against the warships but he knew they couldn't hold out forever.

Lois and Jimmy made it to the Daily Planet rooftop. They could hear the battle, the bombs and the screams. "Hurry, Jimmy," Lois ordered, as they climbed aboard the helicopter. She could still see the jet stream, but it was fading quickly.

"Lois, where are we going?" Jimmy was worried as he could still hear the civil defense siren. It kept announcing that people should stay in their homes.

Lois started up the chopper and lifted up into the sky. "I have to see this, Jimmy. Now, buckle up and hang on."

Lois managed to patch into her father's signal. "Daddy, daddy, can you hear me?"

"Lois, what you doing on this frequency?" Colonel Lane asked his daughter.

"Daddy, what's happening? Do you see the League, where's Superman?"

"Lois, the League followed Darkseid about a mile or so away from the warships. It's apparent to me he wants to get all of them alone. I have my hands full with these warships. I can't help them."

"Daddy, I can see you now. Tell me where to find them."

"The coordinates are due south L34 by L77. Please be careful, Lois," her father demanded, knowing it would be useless to ask her to stay out of trouble.

"I'll be careful, Daddy. I just want to see what's happening," Lois said hoping to see her husband. She managed to avoid the warships, the rocket blasts and all manner of explosions, as she maneuvered the helicopter away from the main battle. She then realized that they were all standing in the crater where Superman had fallen to earth six months ago. "Jimmy, are you getting this?"

"Yes, Lois, I got it. I don't think we should get any closer. There's no telling what Darkseid may do now that he has the entire League alone down there."

Lois had no idea what he might do either. It was pretty obvious to her that Darkseid had brought the warships as a diversion to keep the Army busy. As soon as Lois landed, the fighting began.

The League's plan was for them to distract Darkseid giving Superman the advantage and gain the upper hand in hand-to-hand combat. The superhero charged Darkseid hoping to catch him off balance, then the Kryptonian pummeled his face knocking him through some trees, not too far from where Lois's chopper had landed. Clark saw the DP logo on the side of the chopper and knew it was her. He knew his wife, but he couldn't help being furious with her for putting herself and the baby in harms way.

Darkseid was getting weaker from Superman's pummeling, so he began using the Omega Effect. Everyone seemed fast enough to avoid them, as Green Lantern was able to protect everyone from the blasts so they didn't penetrate his green sphere. Darkseid became enraged

as he unleashed the Omega Effect on Superman who avoided them just in the nick of time.

Superman charged him again as they both fly across the park careening through buildings. Darkseid unleashes the Omega Effect again towards Batman but he dodges it. Superman continues to beat Darkseid then slams him down on the ground gaining the upper hand, momentarily stunning him. "Give it up, Darkseid, you're beaten," Superman demanded of the exhausted monster.

"Not until I get what I came for," Darkseid replied regaining his strength. He then begins blasting anything in sight from his eyes and his hands. Superman tries to stop him again by continuing to hit him in the face again and again, but a few blasts hit their mark. *I have to stop this before anyone else gets hurt.*

"You can't save all of them Superman," Darkseid taunted him. Then suddenly, Darkseid used all of his power and blasted the chopper with his eyes. The beams hit the chopper's tail. Superman screamed, "nooooooo," and he punched Darkseid in the face as the blast hit the tail of the chopper.

The chopper swirled around and around. Lois had no control over the steering. Green Lantern and the others knew who was in the chopper and tried to help, but it was too late. Superman watched in horror, as the chopper crashed nose first. Batman and the others immediately went to Lois and Jimmy's aid helping them escape the chopper moments before it exploded.

Darkseid knew how much Superman coveted these humans. He could see it on his face. Their spirit would be crushed once he's gone. Then Darkseid blasted a distracted Superman in the chest and in the face, knocking him down, as he opened the interdimensional wormhole, carried an unconscious Superman inside and then the portal closed.

Batman and the others were stunned at what had just happened. Once Darkseid had disappeared, the remaining warships also revealed portals and they too vanished from sight.

Lois and Jimmy had regain their senses in time to see Superman disappear before their eyes. Lois screamed, "noooooo, Superman, Superman," as she looked around at the League. "Do something. You have to go after him, please, please," Lois screamed at them.

"Lois, we will go after him. We have to get you both to a hospital first," Batman stated to the distraught woman.

"I'm fine," as she grabbed his arm. "Please go after him," she pleaded. Then suddenly, Lois began to shake as her eyes rolled back into her head. She fainted.

"She's in shock," Bruce said, as he covered her with his cape. "We have to hurry. Jimmy, can you stand?"

"I think so," Jimmy replied, holding his spinning head.

"Follow me," Bruce ordered the disoriented young man. "Wonder Woman, I'll meet you all back at the space station as soon as I make sure Lois and Jimmy are alright. Be ready," he instructed the League confident they would know what he meant by those words.

*Metropolis General Hospital an hour later:*

Lois awoke in the emergency room not knowing where she was. Then it all came flooding into her mind. *Oh, Clark, Clark. The fates wouldn't be that cruel.* She put her hand over her mouth, trying to hold herself together.

"You're awake," Batman said coming to stand beside the bed. "You're going to be alright, Lois."

"Oh, god, the baby," Lois gasped suddenly terrified.

"You're pregnant?" Bruce asked.

"Yes, we just found out the other day," Lois said as her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Is the baby alright?"

"I don't know, Lois, I haven't spoken to the doctor. He wanted to wait until you woke up. I'll go get him for you."

"Thank you, Batman. It feels silly calling you that in this setting ... Bruce."

He decided not to acknowledge his name. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

The doctor arrived several minutes later. "How are you feeling, Mrs. Kent?"

"My head is pounding, but other than that, I feel alright. Doctor, I'm pregnant."

"Oh, there wasn't any bleeding, but we'll do a sonogram to make sure everything is alright."

"Thank you, doctor."

"I'll go and make the arrangements now. Is there anyone you wish to call?"

"I need to get in touch with my son. I should call Richard and Lana. They could pick him up for me."

"I'll take care of that for you, Lois," Bruce said.

"Thank you... Batman," Lois said.

"You're welcome, and once I make that call, I have to go meet up with the League." He took her hand knowing she could use reassurance. "We'll bring him back, Lois. I promise."

Lois tried to say thank you, but her throat closed up and her eyes wouldn't obey her as they started tearing up again.

He patted her hand. "Goodbye, Lois," Bruce said.

"Goodbye," Lois managed to say.

### *The Watchtower Space Station:*

Once the League was assembled at the space station in the monitoring center, Bruce began to make contact with the one person who could help them.

Jor-El's voice came up onto the speaker. "He's gone?" Jor-El asked knowing the answer.

"Yes, it's just as we feared," Batman replied.

"Are you ready to go," Jor-El asked.

"In a moment," Bruce replied as he turned to face the League.

"Was that Clark's father?" Bart asked.

"Yes, we're all about to be transported to Apokolips to bring Clark home."

"Why do I get the feeling we've been kept in the dark about a few things?" Diana asked crossing her arms.

Bruce sighed. "Clark, Jor-El and I have been communicating these past few days, setting up this link just in case what happened today happened."

"I thought we were all in this together, Bruce," Diana said not liking this turn of events.

"We are, Diana. I tried to talk Clark out of this and for him to tell you all what he had in mind, but he saw it as a precaution. He had hoped it wouldn't be necessary to tell you about any of this."

"We need to be able to trust each other," Arthur said, as the other members grumbled in agreement.

"We really don't have time for this. Once Clark returns, you can chew him out, and he can apologize, but right now, we have to get him back." He paused. "And there's something

else you should now. Jor-El came up with a way for Clark not to be put under Darkseid's spell."

"Really? How?" Diana wanted to know.

"Jor-El came up with these crystal eye protectors that would diminish Darkseid's affect on his mind."

"Eye protectors? I wonder if they worked," Diana said.

"Clark wasn't sure if they would, but he did have them on today," Bruce replied.

"So once we get to Apokolips, we won't know for sure if Clark is faking or if he really is under Darkseid's spell?" J'onn asked.

"I'm sure Clark will give us a sign," Bruce said hoping the eye protector's worked.

"It's time to go," Jor-El said.

### *The Daily Planet bullpen:*

The doctor released Lois and Jimmy from the hospital not long after they were examined. The sonogram revealed no problems, but she was given instructions to go home and rest. They both left the hospital and headed to the Planet, hoping the League would make contact soon. She called Richard to make sure he would bring Jason there. He told her that he would there as soon as he could. The city was still in chaos.

"Lois Lane-Kent, why are you here?" Perry asked as Lois arrived in the bullpen looking like someone who barely survived a helicopter crash. "I can't believe you," Perry admonished her. "I sent Jimmy home. Poor guy needs the rest."

"I'm fine, Perry, really I am. Has there been any word from the League?"

"No nothing yet," Perry replied wondering if he should call an ambulance for his star reporter.

Lois sighed, starting to feel the strain on her nerves, as a half hour went by and no word had come down from the League. Perry couldn't hold it in any longer, but before he could say anything, a television news anchor came up onto the monitor.

*"We have just received word that the League will be making an announcement in about five minutes from the newly constructed Watchtower space station."*

Lois couldn't stand the suspense. She got up and started to pace. When she thought she would go insane if they didn't hear something in the next minute, a somber-looking group of superheroes came up onto the screen. Batman spoke to the world from the Hall of Justice:

*"Ladies and gentlemen, citizens of the world, we are about to embark on the single most important mission we have ever gone on before, either as individuals or as League members. Let me assure you, we will not fail. Failure is not an option. We will bring Superman home. He will return to us, no matter how long it takes. We will try to make contact when and if we can, but we can't be sure if that is even possible. Batman signing off."*

The announcer came back on. *"There you have it ladies and gentlemen. The League will bring Superman home. We all hope they succeed. We now return you to your regularly scheduled programming."*

Perry turned off the monitor and watched Lois closely. The truth was all over her face.

Lois turned to face him feeling weary of telling lies. "You know, don't you?"

"Yes, Lois, I suspected when he showed up the exact same day as Superman, but when I apologized to you both the other day, well, it all came together."

Lois sighed relieved she didn't have to lie to Perry anymore about Clark, where he was, or what he was doing. She suddenly had to say the words out loud. "He will come back to us,

Perry. He will. I believe that with all my heart," she said barely getting the words out. She took a deep breath, trying to get some control over her emotions. "Where's Jason? He should be here by now." She stood up to leave, but then the door opened and Jason came in. Richard and Lana were right behind him.

"Mom!" Jason cried as he ran into his mother's arms.

"Jason!" Lois exclaimed as he put his arms around her waist holding her tight, just a little too tight, but she didn't mind. It reminded her of Clark. She stroked and kissed Jason's hair. *Oh, Clark, please come back to us. You have to come back.*

## Chapter 13: The Hand Of Fate

Jason could sense something was very wrong. After hearing the sirens and announcements all over town earlier in the day, he just wanted to go home and be with his parents. Daddy Richard and Ms. Lana wouldn't answer any of his questions. Maybe his Mom would now. He looked at his Mother's face and he could see she had been crying. "Mom, are you ok?" Jason asked worried about his Mom.

Lois glanced at Richard and he nodded his head indicating he hadn't said anything to Jason. "I'm fine, honey. I'm just a little tired that's all."

"Where's Dad? Is he here at the office?"

"No, honey," Lois replied, knowing she couldn't put it off. Jason had a right to know. "Come and sit down for a minute." She brought Jason over to the sofa, sat down and took his hands in hers.

Lana, Richard and Perry watched Mother and son dreading what was coming.

"Mom, what is it? Where's Dad? Did something happen?" Jason had a feeling something wasn't right. He could see it in the faces of his Daddy Richard, Uncle Perry and Ms. Lana.

"Sweetie, your Dad had to go away for awhile, but he'll be back soon." Lois prayed that wasn't a lie.

"Where did he go?" Jason wanted to know.

Lois wasn't sure how to answer him. "There was an emergency. Those sirens and announcements you heard earlier today, those were activated to stop people from going out into the street because there was ... someone who wanted to hurt people here in Metropolis."

"Is he still here?" Jason asked worried for his family's safety.

"No, honey, he's gone, but your father ... he ... ummm ... he tried to protect everyone, and ... ummm ... he was taken away," Lois said barely holding herself together.

Jason thought about that for a moment. "But I don't understand. When is Dad coming home?" He asked lip quivering, as he was starting to get upset.

Richard came over to his son and sat down next to him. "Jason, your father will come home as soon as he can. Your mother believes that and so should you," he said stroking his back.

Lana came over to stand by Richard. "I believe it too, Jason," Lana said.

Jason turned to his Mom. "Is that true, Mom? Dad will come home, won't he?" He pleaded with his Mother to tell him the truth.

Lois pulled him into her arms, stroking his hair. "Yes, Jason he will come home to us. I have no doubts about that. We have to be strong for each other honey."

"I will, Mom." Jason said sounding stronger than any six year old should sound.

Lois pulled back and stared at her son. She suddenly realized how strong her son was, inside and out. "I know you will. I love you, son," Lois said pulling him back into her arms.

"I love you too, Mom," Jason said holding his Mother tight.

Perry came over to the group after discretely wiping at his eyes. "Lois, why don't you head on home now? There's nothing more you can do here," Perry instructed her.

"Perry, I can't just go home and wait. I'll go crazy. I have to do something to help Clark," Lois said but she had no idea what that might be.

"Lois, you look exhausted. I know you. You'll stay here and work until all hours of the night and not take care of yourself. Clark wouldn't want that," Richard said knowing she couldn't ignore that argument.

Lois's thoughts suddenly went to her other child. She looked down and touched her

stomach. *Maybe a few hours rest will do me some good, I can clear my head and maybe come up with a way to help Clark.* "Alright, I'll go home and rest for a while."

Perry was relieved. He was not up for any arguments. "Alright, everybody, out of my office so I can get some work done around here," Perry said shooving everyone out.

"You'll call me if you hear anything?" Lois asked her boss.

"You know I will," Perry said.

"Bye, Uncle Perry," Jason said.

"Bye, Jason. Take care of your Mom son."

"I will," Jason said meaning it.

Richard, Lana, Lois and Jason all left Perry's office. After Perry closed the door behind them, he picked up a recent issue of the Planet and stared at a photograph of Superman in all his costumed glory. He shook his head. *Wow, talk about being right under my nose.*

Richard was so intent on Jason and Lois's conversation, that as soon as they left Perry's office, he suddenly turned and stared at the closed door. *Perry knows?!!*

*Later that evening at Riverside Drive:*

Richard and Lana stayed with the family and made dinner for them. Lois was exhausted. She tried to hide it from her family, but right after dinner, she went upstairs and went to bed. Richard and Lana decided to stay. Soon, the house was quiet as everyone was in bed for the night.

Lois stood at the foot of the bed like a statue dreading going to bed without her husband. *I know this is temporary. I know it. Just go to bed, Lois. You've slept in this bed when he's been gone before. This is no different. Oh, but it is,* her mind argued. *I don't know when or even if he's coming back. I can't believe this is happening. Fate really is that cruel.* She took a deep breath and climbed into bed falling asleep moments after her head hit the pillow.

Soon she found herself on Clark's side of the bed tossing and turning as images of him fighting Darkseid invaded her dreams. It was a nightmare. All she could do was watch as Clark tried to get the upper hand, and then just before he disappeared with Darkseid, Clark screamed her name. Lois awoke with a start calling for her husband.

Richard was in the hallway heading to the guest room when he heard Lois's scream. He slowly opened the door and Lois's head was on her knees, her hands covering her eyes and she was crying. Richard hesitated for only a moment. He came into the bedroom sat down and pulled her into his arms. "Everything will be alright, Lois."

Lois held onto Richard for dear life. She felt like she might actually fly apart. Lana heard Lois crying and came to help. She witnessed Richard comforting Lois and she felt so bad for her. She went to get some water from the kitchen. "Lois, here drink this," Lana said handing her the water.

"Thank you, Lana," Lois said wiping at her eyes, and taking a sip. "I don't know what I would do without my friends here. Thank you both for staying," she said truly grateful.

"Was it a dream, Lois?" Richard asked. "I heard you scream Clark's name. It might help if you talk about it."

"Oh, god, I don't know if I can," Lois said sniffing as the dream came into her mind again. "I still can't believe he's gone," she whimpered.

Richard took her hand trying to offer some comfort. "Lana and I will stay as long as you want us to. Try and get some rest. We're right down the hall if you need anything."

"Thank you," Lois said lying back down.

"Good night, Lois," Lana said.

"Good night," Lois said sighing. After her friends left her alone, she left the bed dreading closing her eyes again. She went to the window and looked up at the stars. *Wherever you are Clark, know that I love you. I know you'll come back to us. I know you will and when you do, I'm never letting you out of my sight again.* Shaking her head at that ridiculous thought, she turned and went back to bed knowing deep inside that her husband would come back to his family where he belonged.

A few moments after Lois was in bed, there was tentative knock on the door. "Come in," Lois said sitting up.

"Mom, are you awake," Jason asked peeping his head in.

"Yes, honey, I'm awake. Here, come sit with me. Can't you sleep?"

"I tried to, but I can't stop thinking about Dad and where he could be."

"I know me too," Lois said as she enveloped her son in a hug.

Jason tried to forget his father's words. "Mom, he promised us," Jason said lip quivering.

Lois knew she couldn't let Jason believe Clark would willingly leave them again. She turned him to face her. "Jason, you have to listen to me and listen carefully. Your father was kidnapped. Do you know what that means?"

"Yes, I think so."

"It means he didn't want to go. He was forced against his will. Your father loves us dearly, and he would never leave us if he had a choice. You have to believe that Jason. Tell me you believe that," Lois asked trying to make him understand.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I believe you. I just miss him so much," Jason said hugging his Mom and trying very hard not to cry, to be strong for his Mom.

"It's alright sweetie," Lois said. "I miss him too. He'll be back soon, and when he does come back, we'll let him know how very much we love him and that we believe in him."

"I do love him and I believe in him too," Jason said thinking about his father and their recent talks.

"I know you do. You're just afraid for him," Lois said stroking his back, and kissed his cheek. "Go on back to bed and try not to worry too much."

"Alright, I'll try. Goodnight, Mom. I love you."

She gave him another hug. "I love you too. Goodnight, sweetie."

As Lois watched her son go back to bed, she slid under the covers on Clark's side of the bed, said a few prayers for him, and tried to get some rest. She instinctively touched her stomach and smiled thinking about their little one and how happy he'll be once he lays eyes on her. *Humm, a girl? I can see her now, with bouncing black curls and eyes the color of the sky. Our little girl; you will see her Clark. You will.* And with that thought, she closed her eyes and went to sleep dreaming of happier times in the not-too-far-off future.

The next morning, the family was having breakfast when the front door bell rang. Lois got up from the table and answered the door. Martha and Ben were there with open arms. Lois gladly went into Martha's arms trying to be strong for both of them.

"There, there, honey, everything will be alright. We saw what happened," Martha said.

Lois pulled back surprised by that statement. "It's on the news? Oh, no, I should have realized. There were helicopters around besides Jimmy and me," Lois said then she whispered, "I can't have Jason watching that." She sighed. "Come in, come in."

"Grandma, grandpa!" Jason exclaimed running to his grandparents.

"Jason sweetie, how are you honey?" Martha said giving her grandson a hug and a kiss.

"I'm alright. Dad is missing, grandma," Jason said.

"I know, sweetie. Your grandpa and I are here to help," she said hugging him again.

"I'm so glad you're here," Jason said giving his grandpa Ben a hug.

Ben picked up his grandson. "We love you and your Mom. Where else would we be?"

Ben asked hoping to cheer up his grandson.

"Would you like some breakfast? Richard and Lana made plenty," Lois asked.

"We'd love some. We left the farm pretty early this morning. Hi, Richard, Lana," Martha greeted each of them with a hug, happy to see them in spite of the circumstances.

"Have you heard any news from the League," Ben asked.

Lois sighed. "No, nothing yet, but Batman did say he may not be able to contact us," she said sighing again. Lois suddenly began to pace. "I can't sit around here doing nothing. I have to do something to help Clark," she said to no one in particular.

Everyone stared at Lois not knowing what to say to her to calm her down.

Lois suddenly had an idea. "I know what I'll do. I'll make sure that nothing like this ever happens again. I'll make sure that Edge and the DA are behind bars for a long, long time. Clark and I know they're behind it, and they will pay for what they've done."

"So, were you and Clark able to find some proof of their criminal activities?" Richard asked.

"Yes, we have a witness, an informant, and we have the drugs and we can make someone talk. It's only a matter of time before someone cracks under the pressure."

Richard went over to her then. "Lois, have you thought about this? You could be putting yourself in danger."

"He's right, Lois, maybe you should give this more thought," Lana said thinking about what Clark would say if he knew.

"I'll be fine. I'll be working with the police and my sources, and Perry will be in on everything I do," Lois said wondering about telling them about the baby. *If everyone knew about the baby, I'd be locked up in the house for sure.* "You know I have to do this. I have to help Clark, and this is the only thing I could think of that will secure our future, our family's future." She instinctively touched her stomach again.

Martha couldn't help but notice the gesture. She watched Lois and there was something there. She did have that look about her. *I noticed it when we came to visit before, but I put it off as being a newlywed and how happy she was, but now.* She decided to speak with her alone. "Lois, could you show us where Ben and I will sleep?"

Richard spoke up then. "Martha, Lana and I were happy to stay, but now that you're here, we'll be heading back to Gotham. We just didn't want to leave Jason and Lois alone."

"You don't have to leave," Martha said.

"Well, Lana did just start her job and I can help with Lois's story back in Gotham," Richard said.

"You'll help me, Richard?" Lois asked happy for his help.

"You know I will," he smiled.

"Thank you, thank you," Lois said giving him an impulsive hug.

He patted her back. "We have a lot of work to do. I know Clark will be happy once he reads what we come up with," Richard assured her. "We'll go get our things and head back to Gotham. Are you ready, Lana?"

"Yes, I'm ready. We'll be back down to say goodbye in a few minutes," Lana said as she and Richard headed upstairs to change and pack.

"Ben, Martha, have a seat, and I'll get you some eggs, bacon and toast," Lois said and headed to the kitchen.

"I take it you've had this plan on your mind for a while now, Lois?" Martha asked curious about her decision.

"Clark and I have been working on this story since the news conference, and a follow-up piece to our earlier story will keep Edge and the DA on everyone's mind, especially when everyone finds out that Edge was behind bringing ... umm ... this person back here," said and glanced at Jason. "Honey, have you finished your breakfast?"

"Yes, I'm finished."

"Well, go on upstairs, wash up and get dressed. I'll be up in a little while."

Jason knew they wanted to talk without him being around. "Ok, Mom," Jason said sighing as he left the table.

Lois shook her head and smiled at her son. *He's growing up so fast.*

Martha smiled too watching him go upstairs. "You won't be able to do that much longer, Lois."

"I know, but I didn't want Jason to hear about ... what happened. He doesn't need to know why his father disappeared."

"Lois, I don't think that's realistic. We saw it on the news, and kids at school will talk about it. It's inevitable."

Lois sighed, knowing that was true. She brought them their breakfast. "I'll tell him later," she said not wanting to think about it, let alone talk about it.

Martha took her hand. "You don't want to talk about it. Is that it?"

Lois lifted her head and tears were in her eyes. "I can't. I don't want to think about it, but I can't get the image out of my mind, Clark disappearing like that," she whimpered putting her hand over her mouth but her eyes refused to listen, and then she burst into tears.

Martha went to her then, pulled her into her arms holding her tight. "It's going to be alright, honey. Clark will be home soon. I know he will."

"Oh, Martha, I know, I know, but ..."

"No buts, Lois," Martha said and took her by the shoulders. "You have to be strong Lois for Jason ... and the baby."

Lois gasped. "You know about the baby? Did Clark tell you?"

"No honey, I suspected it," Martha said, not really sure until she confirmed it.

Lois went into her arms again and sighed. "Oh, Martha, Clark was so happy about the baby. He tried to hear the heartbeat the other night, but he couldn't. I wanted him to hear it, but it was too soon," Lois said rambling on needing to talk about her husband.

"Shshhh, it's alright, everything's going to be alright," Martha said stroking her back trying to give some comfort.

Lois suddenly pulled back, feeling embarrassed by her actions. "I'm sorry, I guess I just needed to get that out," she said wiping at her eyes with a napkin. "No more tears."

"Oh, sweetie, it's alright to show your feelings," Martha said, and then she lifted Lois's chin. "You can't hold it in all the time. It's not good for you or the baby."

"But Jason can't see me like this. He'll just get confused and upset."

Jason was sitting at the top of the stairs listening. Richard and Lana came up behind him. "Jason, you know it's not polite to eaves drop," Richard said disappointed in him.

Lois heard that remark and went to stand at the foot of the stairs. "Jason?"

"I'm sorry, Mom. I heard you talking about Dad and I wanted to know what was going on. I'm not a kid anymore."

"Of course, you're not, but ..."

"Please Mom. Tell me what happened to Dad."

Lois sighed. "Alright, Jason, I'll tell you," she said knowing she had to find the courage somehow. She took her son to the sofa, sat him down, and explained to him about Darkseid, how powerful he was, why he came back to Earth, why he took his Dad and how the Justice League went to bring him home.

Jason was very upset and on the verge of tears. "Why, Mom, why did this have to happen?"

She pulled him into her arms holding him tight, having no answer for him. "I don't know, honey, I don't know," Lois said sighing.

Martha couldn't think of a better time to show Lois what she had brought for them. "Lois, Jason, I have something for you." She went to her luggage and pulled out a photo album of Clark's youth. "Clark loves you both so much. He will be back sweetie, please remember that," Martha said handing the album to her grandson.

Lois was so pleased and so thankful. She went to her and pulled Martha into her arms. "Thank you, Martha."

"You're welcome, honey," Martha said hoping to cheer them up if only for a little while.

"Mom, look it's Dad. He's so little, just like me," Jason exclaimed smiling at a dark-haired little boy playing with his dog.

## Chapter 14: Far From Home

*Darkseid's lair on the Planet Apokolips:*

Clark awoke in a room that was all too familiar to him. *I've been here before. I know where I am.* He closed his eyes realizing the truth. He had hoped never to see this place again. Then, everything came flooding into his mind ... the fight with Darkseid, seeing Lois's chopper crash, losing consciousness and now being back on Apokolips again.

Sighing, he tried to sit up and then a voice came to him from the door.

"I see you're awake. Welcome home, Kal," Granny Goodness said coming into the bedroom.

Clark had only one thought. *At least my mind is still my own.* "Yes, I'm awake," he said playing along.

"It's time to go. Your father is waiting for you. Come with me," Granny said.

Kal was surrounded by Darkseid's underlings, as he was led through the castle. He noticed the layout of the place, as Granny brought him to Darkseid's chamber.

"Hello, son," Darkseid said testing him.

"Father," Kal said, still playing along.

Darkseid continued to taunt him. "This is your home now, Kal. Get used to it."

Kal tried to keep control over his emotions after those words. *No way am I staying here and I will not be a slave.* "Yes, Father. What will you have me do?"

Darkseid was pleased, but not completely convinced. He turned and walked away from Kal and proceeded to tell Kal what he wants him to do. "There's a planet I want you to conquer. You may have heard of it. It's called ..." He paused for effect and then turned back to face Kal. "Krypton," he said and waited for Kal's reaction.

Clark was stunned, but he managed not to reveal his feelings. "Yes, I've heard of it, but ... I've also heard the planet was destroyed thousands of years ago," he uttered hoping he hadn't said too much with that statement. He hadn't.

"You heard correctly, but recent findings have revealed life forms on a smaller unnamed planet not far from Krypton. They could very well be survivors. I want you to bring them here to be my slaves forever on Apokolips."

Clark's mind was running in circles. *He's making this up. There were no survivors. I've been there myself. I'm the only survivor. I scanned all surrounding planets. Could I have missed one? No, no, that's not possible, but what if it is true?* Kal's mind kept going over and over the possibilities.

"You have two days to prepare," Darkseid said dismissing him realizing that Kal had taken the bait.

Clark was led back to his bedchamber where Granny gave him his new 'suit' of armor along with instructions and the location of the planet he had to conquer. Clark still couldn't believe it. He was staring at the plans and it appeared Darkseid was telling him the truth or was it a trick, a trap to kill him? He didn't know, but he had to go. He had to.

*Meanwhile, at the Watchtower space station:*

"Is everyone ready," Batman asked the League members. After discussing their strategy to bring Clark back, Bruce waited for Jor-El to reveal the wormhole.

Bruce stared at Diana and words are not needed between them. He smiled at her. She smiled back. "I'll go first. Remember, if Clark is not himself, we have a means to stop him. I don't want to use it, but it may be the only thing we can do. He'll understand once he realizes

why we had to do it."

Everyone nodded and they all said they were ready to leave for Apokolips.

"It is time," Jor-El said as the wormhole appeared before them.

They all entered the wormhole one by one and then the wormhole closed and disappeared.

It felt like an eternity to them, but it was only a matter of a few moments and they suddenly inside Darkseid's castle. They were all a bit confused and disoriented, but fortunately for them, they had reappeared inside an unoccupied portion of the castle. They hear noises and manage to hide from the underlings making rounds.

"How do we find him?" Diana whispered to Bruce.

"I have a Kryptonian device that was made by Jor-El. It should work in locating him," Bruce whispered thankful for Jor-El's help. "Follow me," he instructed as they all got behind him.

Kal's bedchamber was not far, and soon they entered it undetected. Clark must be slipping as he didn't even turn around. He was too intent on his calculations for his trip to Krypton.

Bruce spoke up. "Are you ready to go home now?"

"Bruce, what the ...?" Kal said shocked by the League's appearance in his bedchamber.

"How did you get in here without getting caught?" He had to ask.

"Your father was very helpful. Let's go Clark, we don't have a lot of time," Bart said.

"I can't leave," Clark said sighing.

"What did you just say?" Bruce asked shocked, not believing what he'd just heard.

"Bruce, I heard voices, we have to hurry," J'onn whispered urgently.

"You have to go back without me for now," Clark said and showed them the plans.

"Darkseid said there may be survivors on a planet not far from Krypton. I have to check it out. In two days time, I'll know if there are any survivors besides me. I have to do this," Clark said hoping his friends would understand.

"But didn't you say you checked all the planets around Krypton and there were no survivors? Clark, it must be a trick," Diana said.

"Clark, we won't leave here without you," J'onn stated a fact as they all realized Clark might need some persuasion.

"You have to leave before Darkseid finds you here. Go, go NOW" Clark whispered urgently trying to get them to leave.

Bruce stared at his friends and realized they had no choice. "I'm sorry, Clark, we can't let you stay here." He reached inside his cape and took the green kryptonite from the lead lined box.

Clark immediately felt the affects. "Don't ... do ... this, please," Clark begged. He fell back onto the floor. They picked him up and then Bruce revealed the wormhole and they were all gone within seconds.

No sooner had they disappeared from Clark's bedchamber, the door opened and a furious Darkseid appeared not believing Kal had escaped.

*The Watchtower space station a few hours later:*

Clark awoke in his room inside the space station. He sighed as he realized that he was home again.

Bruce came into his room then. "Clark, I have Lois on the communicator."

He left the bed and went to sit at the monitor. He wanted to be cheerful. He knew she must have missed him terribly. "Lois? Lois, are you there?"

"Oh, Clark, you're home. Are you alright?" Lois was at the Watchtower headquarters in Metropolis. Bart had brought her there while Clark regained his powers. It would take a few days for that to happen.

"I'm alright. Are you alright, Lois? I saw the chopper crash. Is the baby ok?"

"Yes, honey, the baby is fine. I'm fine. When are you coming home? We miss you."

"In a few days, I think. We have a few things to do here first before that."

"What things? Why can't you come home now?" Lois was confused. He looked fine to her eyes.

"I'll explain everything in a few days. I promise, honey," Clark said being evasive.

There was a pause as Lois thought about it. "Alright, Clark. Call me when you're on your way home. I love you sweetheart. Bye for now," Lois said smiling.

"I love you too. Bye, Lois," Clark said and turned off the communicator. "That was a private conversation, Bruce."

"Are you avoiding your wife?" Bruce was shocked at Clark's behavior.

"Of course not, I just need to regain my powers, that's all."

"Right, Clark. This is me you're talking to. You have to accept the fact that Darkseid was sending you to your death. You must know that," Bruce said trying to get him to see reason.

"I have to find out if Darkseid was telling the truth," Clark said.

"And how do you intend to do that? Don't answer that," Bruce said knowing what he was going to say.

"I have to go there myself," Clark said as the pain lanced inside his chest at the thought of leaving his family and friends again.

"Clark, you really, really need to think about what you're saying. You're going to be a father again. You can't leave Lois now. She won't forgive you this time. You know that, don't you?"

Clark got up from the monitor and went to lie down on the bed. He felt such pain in his chest that he actually thought he might split apart at the mere thought of leaving his family. He took a shuddering breath as tears sprang into his eyes. *Lois wouldn't forgive me. Jason probably wouldn't either.* He suddenly felt a strong hand on his shoulder.

"Clark, I'll let you rest. Please, please think about this," Bruce said and left him alone.

*Meanwhile at the Daily Planet bullpen:*

Lois returned to the office after speaking with Clark and her instincts were going crazy. Something was wrong with her husband. She couldn't put her finger on it, but she knew him well enough to know when something was bothering him.

Her phone rang just then. "Hello, Lois Lane-Kent here," she answered.

"Hey, Lois, it's Richard. How's Clark?"

Lois sighed. "He seems fine, but ..."

"But what?"

"I can't put my finger on it. Clark isn't himself. Something is bothering him," Lois said thinking about their earlier conversation.

"And he won't talk about it?" Richard asked finding that hard to believe.

"No, he won't. I have to see him in person, so I can get him to open up to me." Lois had to see her husband right now. "I'll call you later Richard. Bye."

"Bye, Lois," Richard said and hung up.

She called the Watchtower headquarters hoping to get someone to help her. Bart answered the special line. "Mrs. Kent?"

"Yes, Bart, it's me. I have to see Clark right now," Lois said getting right to the point.

"Umm, I can patch you through, but you have to come here, Mrs. Kent," Bart said wondering what was going on.

"I'll be there in ten minutes," Lois said and hung up. She grabbed her bag and left the bullpen determined to get answers.

*The Hall of Justice on the Watchtower space station:*

Lois materialized at the station, head spinning for a moment as Batman stood before her. "You'll be alright in a moment," he said steadying her by the arm.

Bruce felt Lois could talk some sense into her husband.

"Where is he?" Lois wouldn't be deterred.

"Follow me," Bruce said.

Within a few minutes, they were at Clark's door. Bruce knocked and peeped inside. Clark appeared to be sleeping, but on second look, he was not asleep but he was lying there wiping at his eyes. Lois was so worried about him. "Clark, what is it?"

Bruce quietly left them alone.

"Lois, what are you doing here?" Clark quickly wiped his eyes and sat up not wanting her to see him like this.

Lois didn't answer him, but sat down on the bed and pulled her husband into her arms. She hadn't seen him in days and she had to hold him to be sure she wasn't dreaming or something.

Clark pulled her tight against him knowing she was alright. *What was I thinking? I couldn't leave her again. I'd die inside, I know that now.*

Lois pulled back and wiped her husband's tears away. "Are you ready to tell me what's wrong?"

"In a minute, just let me hold you for a little while. Here," Clark said as he scooted over a little and Lois lay down beside him. He pulled her close. They both sighed content to be each other's arms again.

"I missed you so much," Lois said as she kissed his cheek.

"Me too," Clark said and kissed her sweet lips. Lois moaned as their tongues met and clashed against each other. Clark pulled back and rested his forehead against hers. "When I woke up and I realized where I was, all I wanted to do was go home and see you and Jason again." He sighed. "Lois, I want to tell you what happened, but it's hard for me to talk about it."

"We don't have to talk at all," Lois said needing to be close to him again as she pulled his head down and kissed him with all the love she felt for him. She thought she had lost him. She knew he would return, but she couldn't help that small part of herself that wondered if he would ever come back to her. He kissed her back slowly coaxing a response that he desperately needed and wanted.

"You're so beautiful. I love you, Lois," Clark sighed against her temple.

"I love you too Clark. Make love to me."

To answer her, he got up, went to the door and locked it.

"Good idea," Lois said smiling.

Clark slowly removed his robe and draw string pants, loving the look on her face.

Lois's eyes swept over her husband, admiring his handsome face, his masculine beauty, his broad chest, and flat stomach. "Come here," she said and held up her arms. She never tired of looking at him. She licked her lips in anticipation of his next move.

After making love, they lay caressing and kissing each other for a few moments. Several minutes passed as they pulled each other close content to be together again.

Lois suddenly realized Clark was being very quiet and she could feel him tensing up. "I know something is bothering you, Clark. Do you want to tell me what happened? Maybe I can help," she said hoping he would open up to her.

He sighed. "Something happened on Apokolips," Clark began. He sat up in bed pulling Lois close to him.

"Tell me," Lois encouraged him as she stroked his chest.

"As I was pretending to be hypnotized by Darkseid's Omega Effect, he told me there were survivors on a small unnamed planet not far from Krypton. At first, I didn't believe him, but as I studied the facts and the coordinates, I realized that maybe it was true. Then, as I was preparing to go there, the League arrived and forced me to come with them."

Lois stared at him shocked. "They forced you to come home?" She shook her head, not believing what she was hearing. "So you wanted to stay?"

"No, Lois that was the last thing I wanted. I wanted to find out the truth about this unnamed planet and if there could possibly be any survivors," Clark said trying to explain.

"But Clark, he could have been lying to you. It could have been a trap," Lois said.

Clark sighed. "I know that, but I had to know the truth," he said trying to make her understand.

"So you were willing to risk your life, leave us behind again to *maybe* find survivors on some unnamed planet? I can't believe you would think of doing such a thing," Lois said running her hands through her hair, closing her eyes as thoughts of them being apart again for such a long time.

Clark took her by the shoulders. He could see she was getting upset. "Lois, please try and understand. It was a shock hearing those things. I thought there were no survivors, that I was the last Kryptonian. Can you imagine what it felt like to think maybe, just maybe there was someone, anyone out there just like me?"

She pulled the sheet up to her chest, trying to think, trying to understand what he must have felt. It was hard thinking about being away from him again and to think it could have been for so much longer than just a few days. Her mind couldn't fathom it or understand it.

"I should leave. We both need to think about this. I can see by the look on your face that you're actually considering leaving." She shook her head not believing this was happening to them.

"Lois wait, please don't go. We need to talk," Clark said grabbing her arm to stop her from leaving.

"Clark please, I can't talk about this right now. Just let me go." She pulled free of him, grabbed her clothes and went into the bathroom closing the door firmly behind her. She stared at her face in the mirror, trying not to cry. She splashed cold water on her face, got dressed and steeled her emotions against him.

Clark followed her to the door trying to make things right. "Lois, I know you're upset, but you know I love you."

"I know that Clark, but we can't do this again. I can't do this again." She went to the door

and turned back to face him. "You have some decisions to make. You should stay here for a few days and think about what you really want." And with those words hanging between them, she left him standing there with a shocked expression on his face.

## **A C T   I I I :   D E S T I N Y**

## Chapter 15: The Last Son Of Krypton

*The Monitoring Center in the Watchtower space station:*

Clark tried to put the past few hours out of his mind. He got dressed, went up to the main tower and began piecing together everything that Darkseid had said to him. He remembered everything ... the coordinates of the unnamed planet and how far away it was from Krypton. He felt compelled to do this. He knew it was driving a wedge between him and Lois, but he had to know the truth. He sighed, thinking about her last words to him. *I hope she'll understand in time.*

Bruce, Diana and J'onn were there watching his every move. They had all witnessed Lois's hasty departure from the station. Bruce wanted to say something to her, but what could he say? He could see how distraught she was and he couldn't help but wonder what had happened between them. He decided to tread lightly knowing Clark was still upset. "Clark, we should talk about what happened," Bruce tried to get a conversation started.

"Later Bruce, I have to put in these coordinates," Clark said distractedly.

"Clark, I really hope those are not what I think they are," Bruce said amazed at him.

"Bruce, you know I have to do this, so just let me do it, please," he pleaded hoping they would all just leave him alone.

Bruce proceeded to do the only thing he could think of to make Clark see reason. He had contacted Clark's father upon their return telling him everything that had happened, and now he hoped Jor-El could put a stop to this nonsense.

"Kal-El?" Jor-El spoke to his son.

Clark groaned to himself. "Yes, Father?"

"There are no survivors, Kal-El. You must accept it," Jor-El told his son.

"But how can you be so sure?" *Was there no hope?*

"I have the coordinates, Kal-El. There's nothing there but an uninhabitable rock," Jor-El said trying to convince him.

"But ..." Clark began.

"Listen to your father, Clark," Bruce said.

"I agree, Clark. You must put this all behind you," J'onn said.

Diana went to him then and touched his shoulder. "You should go to your wife, Clark. She needs you and you need her."

Clark sighed, running his hands over his eyes, so weary and so worried about Lois and what she must think of him right now.

"Everything will be alright, Clark," Diana said. "Go on, now," she said.

"She must hate me because of what I said to her," Clark said worried he'd said too much and not enough.

"You know that's not true," Diana said.

"She said she didn't want to see me," Clark mumbled.

"Clark Kent, get out of here. Go home to your wife, now!" Bruce ordered as he pointed to the teleportation chamber.

"Alright, alright, I'm going." He shook his head but he managed a smile. "Thanks guys, and thank you Father," Clark said.

"Goodbye, my son," Jor-El said.

"Bye Clark, and good luck," Bruce said and smiled.

Clark shook his head and took a deep breath as he tried to prepare himself for what lay ahead. He was thinking of his wife ... *I'd rather face down Darkseid again than face Lois and*

*try to explain what a complete fool I was.*

*Riverside Drive, early that evening:*

Lana and Richard had come over for dinner to be there for Lois and Jason. Richard had wanted to talk about the follow-up article on Intergang and what he had found out from Commissioner Gordon in a recent interview, but Lois was not in the mood for work. She had told them what happened to Clark while he was away.

Richard tried to feel for Clark and what he was going through, but he couldn't find it in him. *How could he even consider the idea of leaving Lois and Jason again? If I could, and not break my hands, I would thrash him.*

Lana, on the other hand, felt pity for Clark. She knew first hand how he had lived his life, always alone, even though he had a family growing up, there just wasn't that connection he'd always wanted from people who were just like him.

"Come on, Lana, you can't possibly think Clark was right in his thinking about this?"

"Of course not, Richard, but I can understand it," Lana said.

"It's alright, guys. Please don't argue over it. Clark and I will work this out. I just don't know how or when that may be," Lois said and sighed, as she went to get some juice.

Jason came down the stairs then. "Mom, I'm finished my homework. When can we call Dad? I want to talk to him," he wanted to know.

The front door opened then. It was Clark. "I'm home," he said hoping he wouldn't get kicked out.

"Dad, you're home," Jason said and ran to his father as Clark picked him up, kissing him and holding him close.

"Yes, I'm home son. Are you alright?"

"I'm fine. I'm so glad you're back. We missed you," Jason said hugging him again.

"I missed you too, son," Clark said as tears sprang into his eyes.

Lois and Clark stared at each other unable to look anywhere else even if they wanted to.

"Lois, do you want us to stay with you for a while?" Richard asked.

Lois managed to tear her eyes away from her husband. "No, I'll be fine, and thank you both for coming," Lois said hugging each of them.

Richard couldn't help giving Clark the look at the front door. "I'm glad you came to your senses Clark," he whispered.

"Bye, Clark," Lana said.

"Bye," Clark said putting Jason down.

"Jason, honey, your father and I really need to talk," Lois began not taking her eyes off her husband.

"Ok, I'll be in my room," Jason said pouting.

"I'll be up in a little while, son," Clark said stroking his son's back.

"Ok, Dad," Jason said smiling at his father as he went up the stairs.

Clark put his hands in his pockets, wanting so much to go to her and beg her forgiveness but the words were stuck in his throat.

"Lois?"

"Clark?" They both spoke at the same time.

"You first," Clark said coming into the living room.

"Are your powers back?" Lois asked not knowing what else to say.

"No, not yet, but they should return tomorrow."

She sighed. "Oh, I see."

"Lois, I ... I'm sorry," Clark said also not knowing what else to say.

Lois closed her eyes and when she opened them, Clark was standing directly in front of her. He tentatively reached out to take her hand. She didn't stop him. "Clark, I don't know what to say," she said not looking at him.

He reached down and lifted her chin. "Don't say anything. I know I have to make things right between us. I want that more than anything."

"But how can you? I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the idea that you would actually even consider leaving again. I just can't ... I'm sorry." She removed her hand from his.

Clark sighed realizing what a terrible mistake he had made. "Do you want me to leave?"

She stared at his face for a moment. She shook her head. "No, this is your home. You can stay in the guest room."

"Lois?"

"That's all I can give you for now, Clark. Please don't push," Lois said and headed upstairs. "I'm tired. Good night. And please say good night to Jason. He cried himself to sleep last night worrying about you."

"Alright goodnight Lois, I'll see you in the morning," Clark said and sighed. He ran his fingers through his hair wanting to scream and hit something. Sighing heavily, he went upstairs to see Jason. He was in bed waiting for him. "Hello son. Do you want a bedtime story tonight?" Clark asked as he searched for Jason's favorite story.

Jason nodded as he watched his father. Even though his door had been closed, he had heard his mother and father arguing. He hadn't understood most of it, but then he had heard something that had worried him. "Dad, are you leaving us again?" He asked lip quivering, eyes tearing up.

Clark turned from the bookcase and Jason's shoulders were shaking. "No, no, son, I'm not leaving." He went to him, picked him up and cuddled him under his chin. "Ssssh, don't cry, please don't cry," he soothed him, stroking his back.

Lois was in the hall about to check on Jason when she heard him crying. She peeked in the door and Clark was with him. She knew that he could see her but she didn't care. She wanted to hear what was being said.

"But Mom said..." Jason started.

"No, son, your Mother and I were just talking about a problem we're having, but I'm here to stay. Everything is fine now. Please don't cry. Here, lay down and I'll get the book and read to you." He tucked him in, smoothed his hair away from his forehead, went to get the book and started to read his favorite story about training a baby dragon. When he sat back down, he happened to glance up and he saw Lois in the hallway listening. He inwardly smiled, took a deep breath and read his son a bedtime story.

A few hours later, Clark was in bed but he couldn't sleep. He wasn't used to the guest bed. It was way too small for him. He sighed throwing the covers back and got up and went down the hall to the stairs. His hearing suddenly picked up moans. It was Lois. He turned and went back to the master bedroom and listened through the door.

"Clark?" Lois spoke his name in a dream.

He opened the door and Lois was tossing and turning in the throes of a dream or a nightmare, he couldn't tell. Then, she screamed his name, louder this time, and bolted up from the bed. He came into the room then, sat down and took her by the shoulders. "Lois, Lois,

wake up."

Lois was disoriented, but her husband was home. "Oh, Clark, you're back," she whispered and threw her arms around his neck. Clark took advantage and held her close savoring this closeness even though he knew it wouldn't last.

He pulled her arms from around his neck and tried to get her to wake up. "Lois, you were dreaming. Do you remember the dream?"

"Clark? What are you doing in here?" Lois asked pulling away from him and tucking the covers under her chin.

"I heard you moaning and then you screamed my name. Do you remember the dream? It may help to talk about it."

Lois sighed and lay back down. "It's the same dream I've had since you disappeared."

"Tell me about it," he hoped she would open up to him and not kick him out. They needed to confide in each other like they used to.

"I don't know," she pulled the covers tighter under her chin.

He reached out, afraid to touch her afraid she might pull away from him again. "Lois?" He said touching her shoulder.

She sighed. "Alright, I'll tell you. I hope talking about it will make it go away."

"It probably will. Go on," he said and scooted closer to her.

"Well, I was in the chopper watching you fight Darkseid and suddenly the chopper crashed and I must have blacked out for a moment, but I saw you, Clark, I saw you disappear right before my eyes. I screamed your name. You screamed my name. Then you were gone. I saw everything. I kept screaming for you to come back, just please come back." Lois tried to hold it in but she couldn't. She suddenly burst into tears then. He sat up at the head of the bed and pulled her into his arms. She didn't push him away.

"Ssshh," he said, soothing her just as he did Jason. "Don't cry, honey. I'm home now. I'm home."

She clutched him closer for a moment. "I promised myself I wouldn't cry anymore," she said and wiped at her eyes with the sheet. "I'm alright now," she said leaving his arms, and laying back down.

"Umm, do you want me to leave?" He asked pushing his luck.

Lois stared at him for a moment considering what to do. "Well, if you promise to stay over there, you can stay," she said scooting as far away from him as she could without falling out of bed.

Clark smiled as he lay down on his side of the bed watching her. "Good night Lois, sweet dreams," he couldn't help saying.

She rolled her eyes. "Good night, Clark."

*Meanwhile back at the Watchtower space station:*

Diana was about to leave the station for the evening when she entered the monitoring center, where she could see Bruce busy at the communicator.

"What's going on, Bruce?"

"Nothing," he stated, not looking at her, punching in quickly and logging off. "Aren't you on your way out?"

She crossed her arms over her chest. "I was until you sent up warning bells. Why did you log off just then?" Diana asked getting suspicious.

"Just finishing up," Bruce said sounding guilty to his own ears.

She studied him for a moment. "Bruce, are you going to tell me what you were working on or not? You can trust me, you know." Diana wanted to believe him and everything they'd shared in the past few days.

Bruce sighed and turned to look at her. "You know I trust you, Diana. It's just better if I'm the only one who knows."

"Knows what?" No answer. "Just tell me what it is, Bruce."

"You're not going to stop, are you?" Bruce sighed resigned, as he smiled at her.

"You know me well enough to know the answer to that," Diana said and couldn't help but smile back.

He logged back on and showed Diana what he was working on. "Clark's coordinates, I ran them through NASA's mainframe ... twice."

"You found something, didn't you?"

"At first I didn't, but I decided to double check, and there was something there."

"You mean Darkseid was telling the truth?" Diana was shocked.

"No, he wasn't. I think Darkseid wanted Clark to go there and not find anything right away. The planet is uninhabitable according to NASA's readouts, but there is a small portion of the planet that could sustain life."

"But how is that possible?"

"It is possible, Diana, if this unnamed planet was in Krypton's orbit and the survivors went there."

Pacing, Diana thought about what this could mean for Clark. She had to admit this news would devastate him ... to have to choose between Earth and Krypton again. "What now?"

"I really don't know. If we destroy this information ...?" Bruce started.

"You can't destroy it. Clark has a right to know. He has to make a choice again. It will be a difficult one for him, but I think he will choose to stay here. His family, his life, his entire world is here."

Bruce wasn't entirely sure that was true. He then stated the facts. "You and I both know that Clark can't make that decision, not right now. You saw Lois when she left. Just the thought of him leaving again would destroy them."

"But Bruce, I think they're strong enough to get through this. We have to give them the benefit of the doubt. He'll make the right choice. We can't keep this from him, Bruce. We have no choice in the matter," Diana said not wanting to think about the consequences of Clark finding out they had hid this from him.

Bruce sighed. "I know you're right, but ..." He rubbed his hands over his eyes, wishing he'd hadn't found out the truth. "We need to think long and hard about this, Diana. They need time to work things out between them. Then, we'll tell him. I hope you're right about him making the right choice."

Diana thought about that. *There really are no right or wrong choices here. The answer is what is right for them and no one else.*

*The Daily Planet bullpen the next morning:*

Lois was at her computer trying to focus on her work, when her mind drifted back to earlier in the morning waking up in bed with her husband. She couldn't help also remembering how good her night's rest had been and how it had felt being wrapped up in his arms. *Just stop it right there. Clark doesn't know what he wants. But damn, it was awkward between us this morning.*

*Riverside Drive, a few hours earlier:*

The birds were chirping and the sun was up. Lois slowly awakened in bed with her husband. *He's here.* She sighed not fully awake, and pulled him closer feeling content and happy. She hadn't felt this good since ... Clark. Her eyes flew open and then she remembered. "Clark!?" She yelped.

"What, what is it, Lois?" Clark mumbled not fully awake.

Lois didn't answer him, instead, she gave him a shove and he landed on the floor with a thump, all entangled with the bed clothes.

"Lois! What in the world is going on?" Clark said shocked at his wife's behavior.

"I told you to stay on your side of the bed, didn't I?"

"Lois, this is my side of the bed. You were on my side of the bed," Clark said explaining the situation.

"Oh," she said realizing it was true. "Well, never mind," she said and got up. "I'm going to take a shower. Be gone when I get out, please," she huffed and went into the bathroom.

Clark just rolled his eyes, sighed and went to get his clothes so he could shower and change in the guest room.

Lois slowly opened the bathroom door and watched him leave. Closing the door, she leaned against it and wondered not for the first time ... *what am I going to do with him?*

Clark came into the office, walked up to his desk and watched Lois for a moment. "Lois? Earth to Lois?"

She looked up at the question. "Oh, it's you. What is it, Clark?"

"How's the article coming?" *I wonder where she was just then.*

"It's good. I should have something for Perry in a few days."

"Umm, Lois, you haven't asked for my help," Clark said feeling left out of her life.

"Richard and I have everything under control," Lois said distractedly.

"Oh, you and Richard?" Clark asked wondering what was going on.

"Yes, he's gotten a lot of good information from Gotham. He's been very helpful."

"I'm sure he has," Clark said feeling a twinge of jealousy.

Lois didn't like his tone. "He's been a friend, Clark. A good friend," she said watching him under her lashes. She wrinkled her nose then. "What's that smell?"

"What smell? Oh, it's my coffee. I know you can't have any," Clark said taking a sip.

Suddenly, Lois was all green around the gills. She covered her mouth and ran to the bathroom.

Clark had a feeling he knew what it was. He followed her into the bathroom. She was throwing up. He gathered some paper towels together, ran some cold water on them, and went to help her. He held her head and pulled her hair away from her face while she emptied her stomach. "There, there, it's alright. It'll be over in a minute."

*How could I have forgotten about the morning sickness?* Lois sat back on her heels, realizing it was over. She couldn't help herself. She leaned back onto her husband's chest. He wiped her forehead and stroked her cheek.

"Oh, Clark," she whimpered.

He stroked her hair. "Lois, I know where I belong ... here with you and with our children," he said hoping and praying she would believe him.

She closed her eyes and sighed. *Can I believe him? Should I believe him?*

## Chapter 16: More Than A Memory

*Lana Lang's office in Wayne Towers:*

"Richard, my assistant could come in at any second," Lana giggled at her boyfriend's antics.

"Umm, call her and tell her you're busy for the next hour," Richard said nuzzling his girlfriend's smooth and sweet-smelling throat.

"Richard, stop, this is not why I called you over here today," Lana smiled at his pouting.

"I know you're worried about Lois and Clark," Richard said sighing.

"Yes, aren't you?" Lana said.

"Of course, I am, but I don't see what we can do to help them. Once Clark comes to his senses and wakes up, everything will work out."

"But what if he doesn't," Lana said worried about her friends.

"He will. He's a smart guy."

"You need to talk to him Richard. You need to talk some sense into him."

"Lana, he came home last night."

"Yes, but he needs a good talking to so that this doesn't happen again."

"Alright, alright, I'll talk to him."

"Call him right now, and set up a meeting."

Shaking his head at Lana's determination, he dialed Clark's number. "Hello, Clark, it's Richard, what's up?"

"Nothing, Richard, I'm working," Clark said wondering what he wanted.

"I'll be in town in a few hours, so can you meet me for lunch? I wanted to talk to you about a guy's weekend with Jason."

"Alright, Richard, I'll meet you in the DP lobby around Noon," Clark said.

"Great, bye, Clark," Richard said and hung up.

"Sure, bye, Richard," Clark said staring at the phone wondering if a lecture was coming.

*Downtown Metropolis, a few hours later:*

"So, you wanted to talk about Jason?" Clark asked after they had placed their lunch orders.

"Yeah, but before we get to that, I wanted to find out how things are between you and Lois. Lana and I know what happened on Apokolips."

"Lois and I will work things out, but it won't happen overnight," Clark said fidgeting. He didn't want to talk to Richard about this. He could not be objective.

"I know I'm the last person you want to talk to about this, but I can listen to your side of the story and not judge you."

"Really, Richard? I didn't get that impression when I came home last night."

"I'm sorry about that, Clark, but you know as well as I what Lois and Jason went through while you were away. I know you don't want to hurt them," Richard said knowing that statement was true.

"Of course, I don't. How could you think that?"

"It doesn't matter what I think, Clark. What matters is what Lois and Jason think and from what I could see, they're both hurting."

Clark sighed. "I know that, Richard. I never wanted to hurt them, but I did."

"Tell me what happened and maybe there's a solution that will make everyone happy."

"I don't see a solution, Richard. All I know is if I leave for Krypton to see if Darkseid was

telling the truth, then I can say goodbye to my marriage and my family. She pretty much gave me an ultimatum."

"Oh, I didn't think it had gotten that bad."

"Yes, it has. Either I stay here and forget about Krypton or say goodbye to my wife and children."

"There must a middle ground here, Clark."

"Tell me what it is, because I'm at my wits end here. I've apologized over and over. I told them I wouldn't leave. What else can I do?" Clark asked his friend, desperate for answers.

Richard sighed. "It's going to take time, like you said, but you must be persistent, Clark. Don't let up. Tell them over and over how much you love them and need them, but you know what they say ... actions speak louder than words."

"Perfect, Richard," Clark said. Shaking his head, he then thought of something that would help convince his family how much he loved them. "I just thought of something."

"Well, tell me," Richard said getting excited for Lois and Jason.

The waitress brought their lunches to the table just then.

"I might if you pay for lunch," Clark said and smiled.

"You drive a hard bargain. Deal!" Richard said and returned his smile.

*Riverside Drive, early evening:*

Clark was ready for his surprise. It took him a few days to get all the details worked out, but it was time to go.

"Clark, what in the world is going on?" Lois asked her husband as he started packing for her and Jason.

"You'll see, it's a surprise," Clark said and smiled.

"Clark, I'm in the middle of a very important story. I can't leave now."

"Lois, it's just overnight. Please work with me here, please," Clark begged with that puppy dog face Lois knew so well.

Lois rolled her eyes. "Oh, alright, but tell me where we're going."

"It's a surprise, remember?" Clark laughed at her expression. "Are you ready? It's time to go."

"I suppose so," Lois said wondering where they were going.

"Jason! Come here, son," Clark called to his son.

"I'm ready, Dad," Jason said bouncing into the room.

"Wait, Jason knows where we're going?" Lois asked crossing her arms over her chest.

"Of course, he does. It's a guy thing," Clark said laughing.

"Yeah, right," Lois smirked.

"Here we go!" Clark twirled into the suit, picked up his family and flew out the window.

"Clark?! Will you please slow down?" Lois asked holding on for dear life.

"Wheeeee!" Jason squealed loving flying with his Dad.

"Lois, we have to be high in the sky before we level off, so people won't see us.

"There, how's that?"

"Better, so tell me already. Where are we going?"

"Las Vegas."

Lois's mouth dropped open from shock and confusion. "Las Vegas?"

"Don't you remember on our honeymoon when you said you would never go to Vegas with me, because I didn't know how to win a bet?"

Lois chuckled. "Yes, I remember," she managed to say, still chuckling.

"Well, I have a bet for you. I bet that by the end of this weekend, you will take me back into your bed and we'll be back on track."

"Humm, you seem very confident of that bet, buddy. We'll see about that," Lois said ready for a challenge.

"Oh, we'll see alright," Clark said smiling.

*Caesars Palace, the Vegas Strip:*

Once they had checked into their hotel, Clark was having second thoughts about bringing Lois here. When he had first thought of coming here, he thought they could have some fun and not think about their problems, but now that they were here, the memories were coming back.

"So, I'm waiting to hear what you have planned for us tonight Clark." He didn't answer her. "Clark, are you listening to me?" Lois asked her distracted husband.

"What did you say, Lois?" Clark asked as he turned from the window overlooking the bright lights of the city.

"Clark Kent, what is with you? It was your idea to come here."

"I'm sorry, Lois, but now that we're here, I don't think it was such a good idea after all," Clark said being cryptic.

"And why is that?" Lois asked confused by her husband's words.

"Well, I..." Clark began but was interrupted.

"Mom, Dad, I'm hungry," Jason said coming into the living room.

"Jason, you had dinner two hours ago," Lois told her son.

"But we didn't have dessert," Jason said hoping his parents would agree.

"It's alright, Lois. I'll run out and get something. So, what would you like, Jason?"

"Well, how about ice cream?" Jason eagerly suggested.

"Sure, I'll be back in few minutes," Clark said. "We can talk when I get back, Lois," he said and left.

"Alright, Clark, hurry back," Lois said wondering what was on Clark's mind.

As Clark searched for a local supermarket for ice cream, he was wondering if it was such a good idea to tell Lois what happened to her all those years ago and why he did what he did. *Would it be so wrong to tell her now? Am I being selfish? Would it even make a difference if she knew what I did to save her? This is the last of the secrets between us, the one secret I convinced myself she never needed to know. I've carried this around for so long, but now, this may be the right time. Lois needs to know how much she means to me and why I would never leave her or take her for granted ever again. It may be the only way to convince her.*

After ice cream and Jason was down for the night, Lois was in their bedroom getting ready for bed. Clark was in the living room, practicing how he was going to come clean to Lois after all this time. She had a right to know. He took a deep breath and entered their bedroom. He decided to knock first. Lois had just slipped off her robe about to climb into bed.

"Clark, you don't have to knock. What is it?"

"Are you too tired to talk? There are some things you should know."

"This sounds serious," Lois said and frowned as she slipped her robe back on. "Go ahead."

"I'd rather we talked in the living room, if you wouldn't mind," Clark said finding that huge bed distracting. He hoped she would agree. Once Lois was seated on the sofa, Clark took a deep breath, took her hand in his and began his story about how she had died and how he

had brought her back to life. "Lois, what do you remember about Lex's mad scheme to destroy California?"

"Goodness, Clark, why are you bringing that up now? Is that what you meant about regretting coming here because you didn't want to remember what happened?"

"I remember what happened, Lois, but do you?" He paused. "It's important, please try and remember."

"But why, Clark? Why is it so important that I remember?"

"There are some things you may not remember because I changed the course of history," Clark said and looked down.

"But how is that possible? Look at me, Clark. What happened?"

"Now Lois, please stay calm," he said squeezing her hand.

"I'm perfectly calm, just tell me what it is," Lois was getting worried now.

Clark closed his eyes for a moment. He opened them and stared into her beautiful eyes, eyes that would have been closed forever in death if not for him. "Do you remember when the earthquakes started and you were driving along a dirt road in the desert?"

"Yes, I remember. I ran out of gas, but then you showed up and I was angry, but you explained that you were busy helping people, so I forgave you," Lois said remembering that tender moment when they had almost kissed.

He squeezed her hand again. "Something happened just before that, Lois. After you ran out of gas, aftershocks rocked the area. The road split open, your car plunged into the ground and you couldn't escape. The aftershocks continued to compress the car, dirt and rock poured inside and hindered your escape." He closed his eyes and kissed her hand. "You suffocated ... and died."

"I died, but how...?" Lois couldn't finish, too shocked and unbelieving to continue.

"Once I pulled you out of the ground, I realized you were dead. I was too late to save you," Clark managed to say, on the verge of tears now.

"But I'm here with you now," Lois said confused and then it hit her. "Oh, my god, what did you do?"

Clark took a deep breath and answered her firmly. "I did what I had to do to bring you back. I couldn't, no, I wouldn't accept it, so I flew as fast as I could around and around the earth until ... the earth rotated the other way, and you were alive again. I had to bring you back, Lois, I had to. I couldn't live without you. I couldn't be in this world without you," he said letting her know what she meant to him.

Lois's mouth was open in shock. She was speechless. *He's telling me the truth. He couldn't make this up.* She let go of his hand, stood up and went to stand at the window. Clark came up behind her and pulled her into his arms, holding her close. Her arms came up to hold him as she leaned her head back on his chest. They stood there silently for a few minutes, neither one saying anything.

Clark kissed her temple and sighed into her hair. His voice was rough. "And I would do it again."

Lois turned around and pulled her husband close trying to hold herself upright so she wouldn't break down. "Please don't say anymore," she said, her voice just as rough.

Clark picked her up and took her into their bedroom. Lois put her arms around his neck, holding him close as she kissed him with all the love and gratitude in her heart. Clark closed the door and brought Lois over to the bed and laid her down. Their eyes held as he lay down beside her and slowly reached up and wiped her tears away, as she did the same for him.

"Clark," she began.

"Ssshh, no talking," Clark commanded. He drew her into his embrace and stroked her back tenderly, feeling so much love for this amazing woman. There were no words.

"But I have to say this," Lois said needing to say it, as she pulled back and stared into his eyes. "Thank you," she whispered and closed her mind to tomorrow and their differences. It paled in comparison to what they shared all those years ago.

He smiled and stroked her cheek as he leaned down and kissed her long, slow and deep bringing forth moans and sighs. Lois melted against him wanting them to be rid of their clothes so they could touch skin to skin. He knew her need as he helped her remove her robe and her nightgown and she helped him remove his clothes as well. They both sighed and came into each other's arms content to be together like this again.

"I've missed you so much," Clark couldn't hold back saying it.

Lois sighed knowing how he felt. She only had two words to say. "Show me," she whispered in his ear.

Clark closed his eyes and smiled against her throat and immediately began doing exactly that. The room was so still that the only sound was their ragged breathing. Lois moaned as he kissed his way down her throat to her breasts applying his tongue to her aching nipple. She moaned again louder this time as she arched her back, stroking his hair loving his mouth and hands on her breasts. His hands stroked and admired the changes their child had brought to her body. He could see a bump on her stomach and he knew at that moment, that nothing and no one would part them ever again.

Their days of abstinence had them both starved for that closeness again and Clark showed her just how much he loved and needed her. He dropped a kiss to her stomach and went even lower to her long shapely legs and smooth thighs. He stroked her between her legs and Lois opened them wider for him to pleasure her and he did. He went even further and kissed the dark curls moist with desire for him. He breathed in her unique scent loving her sighs and her hands in his hair stroking him with her desire for him.

Lois was trembling with desire as she cried out repeatedly as he used not only his lips and tongue, but his nose and chin as well to make love to her. Tension coiled tight and hot in her belly and she could feel herself coming. Clark pulled back and Lois whimpered. "I want to feel you come around me. I've missed that," he said as he rubbed the head of his erection against her swollen lips exciting them both. He closed his eyes as he felt her tight sheath close around him. He took her mouth in a hot wet kiss as he gathered her tightly against him. "I love you so much, Lois," he whispered in her ear, as he began that ancient rhythm and Lois matched that rhythm stroke for stroke.

"Oh, Clark, I love you too," Lois managed to say between pants and moans and then she cried out wrapping her arms and legs around him. She pulled his head down and kissed him long and hard as he drove into her again and again. Lois's climax caused him to come as pleasure shot through to his very soul moments later. They still lay gasping for breath a few minutes later.

He slowly pulled out of his wife's warm body and pulled her close to his chest sighing into her hair. "Go to sleep sweetheart," Clark said and kissed her temple.

Lois sighed in answer to him and went to sleep content with their reconciliation. They both knew that tomorrow would bring new challenges but they were together now and it was like a new beginning for them.

Clark closed his eyes, content as he too fell into a dream world.

The next day dawned sunny, warm and beautiful. After checking out of their hotel, Clark felt they should talk some more about their shared memory, and then they could put it all behind them and never speak of it again. As the family took off and made their way to Hoover Dam, he found a relatively secluded park to have lunch.

After they finished lunch and making sure Jason was enjoying himself in a child's play area, Clark tried to bring up the subject from last night. "How are you feeling Lois? Are you alright?" He asked as they took their seats on a park bench as they both turned to watch their son.

"I'm fine Clark. Why did you bring us here? It's beautiful." Lois asked as she took a sip of soda.

"It is lovely here, Lois, but I wanted to talk some more about last night. I know it was hard hearing what happened and ..." Clark began but Lois stopped him by touching his lips with her fingers.

"Clark, you've been carrying this secret for so long and I understand your need to talk about it, I do, but talking about it won't change what happened."

"I realize that. It's just I never let myself think about the consequences of my actions that day. I know I saved a lot of people, but ..."

"Clark, there are no buts. I remember hearing there were very few casualties that day. You saved hundreds maybe thousands of lives, so please let's not talk about this anymore. What's done is done." She touched his cheek and smiled into his eyes. "All we can do is look to the future and think about how blessed we are to have each other and Jason." She paused as they both looked to their son. Jason waved to his parents. "And not to mention our little one growing inside me," she said as she took his hand and placed it on her stomach. "Please, let that be a comfort to you."

"But will I be forgiven for what I did, Lois? I wonder," he closed his eyes and sighed.

"You know I'm not a religious person, Clark, but I believe every soul will be forgiven. All we have to do is ask."

His head came up at that. He smiled and touched her cheek. She leaned into his hand. "I believe that too, honey. Are you ready to go home?"

"Yes, let's go home."

"Jason, come here son," Clark silently called to his son and smiled still amazed they could communicate in this way. This was the second time it had happened, but he decided to keep it a secret for now. He picked him up and gave him a hug and a kiss.

After what had happened the past few days, Jason was very happy his family was together again. Clark held up his other arm and Lois came into his arms as they all looked up at the sky.

## Chapter 17: Not Alone

*The Watchtower space station the next day:*

Clark arrived at the station in good spirits, ready to get back to work. He and Lois, with Richard's help had completed the Intergang/DA article and were assured by the Police Commissioners both in Gotham and in Metropolis that an investigation would be forthcoming. Once they were told that Edge was behind Darkseid coming back, they couldn't wait to investigate.

"Good morning, everyone," Clark saluted the League members as he entered the Hall of Justice.

"Aren't we in a good mood," Bruce said happy to see him again.

"Yes we are," Clark said not elaborating.

"Does this mean you and Lois?" Bruce had to ask.

"Yes, we've reconciled. Everything is fine," Clark said.

"Did you come to an agreement about ... Krypton?" Diana asked hoping Clark would open up.

"We didn't get a chance to discuss it, but we will," Clark said being evasive.

"I hope so, Clark. She was pretty upset when she left here the other day," Diana said remembering Lois's tear-stained face.

"We'll get through this, guys. Please don't worry," Clark said wanting to change the subject.

Bruce and Diana exchanged glances.

Clark noted it but didn't think anything of it. "Who's going to get me up to speed around here?"

Bart stood up and went to the monitor. "Well, Clark, while you were away, we managed to contact our 'friend' who was helping us with Edge and we may have some idea where he may be hiding the 'transmitter,' you know, the one he used to contact Darkseid. If we can get our hands on it, then case closed, it's over for Intergang."

"I agree, but where do we start?" Clark asked.

"We know he was in Gotham the night of double drug busts, and if I were a betting man, I would say it's still there," Bruce said.

Clark smiled thinking about Vegas, betting and his wife.

"Hello, Clark?" Bart said snapping his fingers.

"Oh, sorry, yes, yes, Gotham it is. Bruce, what do you suggest? That's your territory," Clark said trying not to get distracted again.

Diana smiled and Bruce was finding it hard not to roll his eyes. "Well, first I'll contact the Commissioner and let him know what's up and to see if he has any ideas. We'll probably want to get the police involved. We want to be on the up and up with this one, guys. We want to nail Edge once and for all."

"I agree. The last thing we need is Darkseid making a return visit. I'm sure he's pretty furious we snatched you right from under his nose," Diana said.

Clark couldn't help remembering again what Darkseid had said to him. He shook his head trying to forget about it. It was all a trick, a way to kill him. He knew that for a fact.

Bruce could tell what Clark was thinking. It was time. "Everyone, you have your assignments. Diana, Clark and I have a few things to work on here before we put together our plan for Gotham. We'll see you all back here at 10:00 tonight and be ready to put all of this behind us forever," Bruce stated hoping that was true.

As J'onn, Arthur, Hal and Bart left, the rest of the League took their seats at the table.

"That was subtle, Bruce, what's up?" Clark asked wondering what Bruce had on his mind. Bruce and Diana exchanged looks again.

"I'm waiting, and what's up with the looks? What's going on?" Clark asked getting worried.

"It's a good thing you're sitting down, Clark. Depending on the way you look at it, it could be good news or bad news," Bruce said sounding cryptic.

"Go on," Clark said.

"Diana and I found something on the coordinates you punched in the other day," Bruce said worried about what Clark's reaction was going to be.

"What? But I thought there was nothing there," Clark said finding this unbelievable. He stood up and went to the computers. "Show me what you found."

"We found life forms on a planet not far from Krypton," Diana said feeling awful about this entire mess. "But there's something else we found Clark just this morning. Apparently, the planet is unstable. The kryptonite radiation is slowly killing it. The survivors don't have much time."

Clark stopped what he was doing and slowly turned to face his friends. "And you couldn't tell me about this before? Were you going to keep this from me?"

"No, Clark, we're telling you now," Bruce said.

Clark tried to rein in his feelings. "How long ... how long do they have?"

"It's hard to tell. Diana and I have been communicating with NASA for several days now and there's just no way of knowing."

"And there's nothing we can do?" Clark asked desperate for answers.

"Well, maybe ..." Bruce wasn't sure he should tell Clark about this.

"What, what is it Bruce? Please, I want to know everything," Clark said desperate for any hope.

"There just may be an answer if we could communicate with them in some way, we could tell them to come here to Earth before it's too late," Bruce said thinking it may just work.

"Diana and I have come up with a plan. We could enter the inter-dimensional wormhole again, and try and communicate with them, we will have to avoid Darkseid, of course, but it may just work."

"You're serious, aren't you?" Clark said amazed at his thinking. Bruce nodded. "And exactly how long would this take?"

"Well, we haven't figured that part out yet, but you can't come Clark, so don't get any ideas. The planet is surrounded by kryptonite radiation. You wouldn't survive it," Diana said.

"But you said there are life forms? How are they surviving?" Clark was finding this all unbelievable.

"I wish we knew, but there are life forms," Bruce said also finding it hard to believe.

"So when do you leave?" Clark wanted to know.

"We'll leave in a few days. We're going to ask J'onn to come along and your father will have to be told. I know he wants to help, Clark," Bruce said.

"Yes, he has been very helpful," Clark said shaking his head. "I'm so grateful to you both. I really don't know what to say," he said at a loss for words.

"We'll be in touch before we leave. Let's get this Edge business taken care of first, then we can help rescue the survivors," Bruce said slapping Clark on the back.

"Thanks, Bruce," Clark said. "Thank you, Diana," Clark said giving her an impulsive hug.

"You're very welcome. We'll be in touch and we'll see you later tonight," Diana said.

"You know I'll be here," Clark said as he turned to go. He didn't think he would ever be able to repay them.

*The Daily Planet bullpen an hour later:*

Perry was coming out of his office headed to Jimmy's desk, when Clark stepped off the elevator straightening his tie and smoothing his hair. Their gazes locked for a moment. Clark looked away, lowered his eyes and headed to his desk, pretending nothing was amiss.

"Umm, morning Chief," Clark said glancing sideways at his boss hoping he would leave it at that.

"Morning, Kent," Perry said playing along, but couldn't help staring at his star reporter who was also Superman.

Lois looked up and witnessed the exchange, not quite sure what to make of it. She had told her husband that Perry knew the truth.

Perry watched them for a moment, then shaking his head, went to talk to Jimmy.

"Umm, Lois, could I speak with you for a minute in private?" Clark asked his wife.

"Sure, let me finish this email. There, what's up, Clark?"

"Come with me," he said as he took her hand and led her to *their* private office. As soon as the door was closed and locked, he took her into his arms and kissed her senseless.

Lois was shocked but turned on nonetheless, and she kissed him back with fervor. Soon though she came to her senses and tried to get him to tell her what in the world was going on. "Clark, what is with you, not that I don't like it," she smiled.

"Can't I kiss my wife good morning?" Clark asked nuzzling her neck.

"Well, you already did that and more just a few hours ago," she sighed and leaned her head to the side as he continued to kiss her throat and her ear.

Clark decided he had better stop before things got out of hand. He rested his forehead against hers. "Lois, I have wonderful news," he said hoping she would see it as such. "Here have a seat," he said as they both headed for the sofa.

They both stopped short and glanced at each other. "Let's go up to the roof instead," Clark said quirked an eyebrow at her.

"Yes, let's," Lois said giggling.

Once on the roof, he told her about his meeting with Wonder Woman and Batman.

"Let me get this straight. Batman and Wonder Woman are going to this unnamed planet to rescue survivors of Krypton, but you can't go because it's too dangerous for you? Am I getting this right?" Lois asked stunned by the news.

"I still can't believe it, but it's true. It's really true. There are survivors," Clark said still not quite believing it.

Lois digested that for a moment. She stared at Clark hating to ask this question but she had to know for sure. "But ... you would go if you could, wouldn't you?"

He knew what she was asking. He took his wife by the shoulders. "No, Lois, I wouldn't."

"But are you sure? I don't want you to have any regrets Clark," Lois couldn't help asking as she suddenly became emotional.

"I'm very sure. I thought I made that clear in Vegas," he smiled touching her cheek.

Lois smiled remembering their trip. "I guess I needed to read between the lines, huh," she said trying to lighten the mood a little.

"I meant every word. No regrets. I belong here with you and my children," Clark stated

again and pulled into his arms holding her close.

Lois pulled him close and sighed. "I'm glad that's settled," she said sighing again.

"Me too," Clark said relieved.

"So, tell me, when are they leaving?" Lois wanted to know.

"In a few days, but we have to take care of Edge first."

"What can I do to help? I have a few ideas about that," Lois asked getting excited.

"Nothing," Clark said giving her a look, hoping she would get the message.

"What do you mean nothing? I've worked on those articles for weeks. I want to know what I can do to help."

"Honey, we'll be in Gotham. There's nothing you can do there. We're looking for the transmitter that Edge used to contact Darkseid. We're concentrating all our efforts to find it. There's really nothing you can do."

"Well, I may have some idea where it could be," she said getting his attention.

"Really and where might that be?" Clark asked curious about her thinking.

She left his arms and walked toward the spinning globe, smiling over her shoulder at him. He returned her smile and followed her. "Well, you know Clark, Lex and Edge were very tight awhile ago," she said getting more of his attention, not to mention his fascination with her legs and backside.

"Yes, I remember," Clark getting even more distracted.

"Well, I think the transmitter is here in town. I think you should search Lex's hideouts and anywhere else he may have stashed his 'belongings,'" Lois said as she turned and smiled at Clark's dawning expression.

Clark had to admit, she had a point. She was amazing. He couldn't resist her. "Come here, you!" He grabbed her and proceeded to kiss her senseless again.

They were just a bit windblown and flushed when they returned to the bullpen.

Jimmy grinned, but Perry just rolled his eyes at his 'star' reporters.

#### *Lex Luthor's hideout, Metropolis underground:*

The League had decided to split up. The Flash, Superman, and Wonder Woman went to Metropolis, while Martian Manhunter, Batman, Aquaman and Green Lantern headed to Gotham.

Superman was able to find Lex's hideout pretty quickly, because he'd been there before, but Clark couldn't go inside because there was lead everywhere. Kryptonite could be hidden anywhere, so he had to stay out. He peered through the walls and he could see not much had changed. The swimming pool was there, although stagnant, Lex's office, it was all still there, even the books on the shelves. It was so frustrating for him. *We could close this case and put Edge and the D.A. in jail for a long time if we could only find the transmitter.* The drugs would keep them locked up for a good while, but unleashing a known murderer and lunatic on the city would put them away for life, he was sure of it.

"How's it going in there ... Flash, Wonder Woman, can you hear me?" Clark asked speaking through their communicators.

"There's nothing here, except more kryptonite hidden inside lead crates. Don't come in here, Superman. It's obviously a set-up for you," Bart replied. "We'll take care of it and make sure it's all gone in no time."

Batman, meanwhile, located Edge's meeting place in Gotham. After contacting the Commissioner and getting the police involved, they searched the meeting room, the entire

building, heck the entire block and found nothing. Batman knew it was a long shot at best. He then contacted Superman. "No luck, Superman," Bruce said. "Any luck finding anything there?"

"Nothing yet, just a lot of kryptonite," Clark responded.

"Typical Luthor, still a pain in the ass even in jail," Bruce added.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Clark said getting worried. "Edge is taunting me. He must have known I would come down here eventually. Luthor probably told him." Clark's instincts were going crazy now. "They've been in there too long," he said and then his voice became urgent. "Flash! Wonder Woman! Let's go, I don't like this. Get out of there NOW!"

Bruce heard everything. "Superman, what's happening?"

No sooner had Diana and Bart exited Luthor's lair, Clark could hear a ticking sound. "Everybody, get behind me NOW!!"

Suddenly, a bomb exploded sending kryptonite and rock everywhere. Clark covered everyone's body with his own protecting his friends, but the kryptonite rocks were scattered up and down the tunnel. Bart was the first to react. Clark wasn't moving. "Clark, Clark, can you hear me? We have to get him out of here. Diana, help me. He weighs a ton," he said.

They managed to get Clark out of the tunnels, where he slowly came out of it. "You're alright," Diana said. "That was too close for comfort."

Clark sat up feeling groggy, but much better. "I wonder what triggered the bomb. Did either of you see anything in there besides lead?" He asked them both.

"There wasn't much to see. There were lead crates everywhere and not much else, just a lot of dust. It was a trap set up for not only you Clark but for us as well," Diana said realizing they were all at risk.

"We're missing something. He wouldn't keep it in the Slums. That's too easy. He wouldn't have it on his person, that would be crazy, so where is it?" Clark said thinking out loud.

The police cars and EMTs arrived then. Superman told them a bomb had detonated. No one was hurt, but that they should send the bomb squad down there first, to be sure there were no more of them. The police took Superman's advice.

"Is everyone alright?" It was Batman's voice fearing the worst.

"We're alright Batman. We should regroup at the station and put our heads together again and pin this down. I know we can find it but it may take longer than we realized," Clark said as he began to worry that the search for the transmitter may delay getting to the survivors on Krypton in time.

*On an unnamed planet inside the domed City of Argo:*

Zor-El was inside his lab frantically putting together his plans to transport his only child to Earth. After punching in the coordinates for Kara's journey, he realized that their time in Argo City was about to end. Zor-El, father to Kara and husband to Alura, was thinking the worst. Their home for the past five years was doomed to destruction, just as Krypton was years ago. The lead shield that was fashioned to protect them from kryptonite radiation was weakening from meteorite collisions and other outer space debris. People were getting sicker and sicker. He had no choice now but to save as many of his people as he could.

His wife, Alura, came into her husband's lab, along with their daughter Kara, who was now ten years of age. "What did you find, my husband," Alura said fearing the worst.

"It is time, Alura," Zor-El said without preamble.

"No, no, there must be some other way," Alura pleaded hoping she wouldn't have to send

their only child into space alone.

"Kal-El will be there for her. We can't wait any longer, Alura," Zor-El said trying to find the courage to do the unthinkable. He stared at his little girl. Once she would arrive on Earth, she would have aged three years, old enough to understand and know about humans and how they interact. He and his wife had been teaching her for several years now.

"Kara, come here my child," Zor-El called to his daughter.

"Father, what is it?" Kara asked suddenly afraid after seeing the looks on her parent's faces.

"How are you feeling today, Kara?"

"I'm tired, but it wasn't as bad as yesterday," Kara said.

Zor-El touched her cheek. "Remember what I told you the other day, how the planet is making us all sick and that we would have to leave here very soon?"

"I remember," Kara said.

"Our time is up, Kara. We're sending you to Earth to be with your cousin, Kal-El. You'll be asleep for your entire journey and when you wake up, Kal-El will be there waiting for you. I'll be using the same calculations as your Uncle Jor-El, when he sent Kal-El to Earth just before Krypton exploded."

"But you and Mother, aren't you coming with me?" Kara asked suddenly terrified.

Alura smoothed Kara's hair away from her face and turned her to face her. "No, Kara, your father and I will be here trying to convince everyone that we can't wait anymore. Your survival is what matters to us, Kara, nothing else."

Kara knew inside that arguing would not do any good. They had been preparing her for this day for a few years now. She was ready to go. "I understand and I'll wait for you to join me on Earth as soon as you can," Kara said determined to show her parents how grown-up she was in spite of the terror she was feeling inside. She tried very hard to be strong but she was just a little girl. Her father sensed her fear and sighed, held up his arms, and Kara went into his arms wondering when she would get to hold him again.

Alura and Zor-El glanced at each other so proud of their daughter, they had no words.

## Chapter 18: Return To Krypton

*The Watchtower space station:*

Once all the members were assembled, Clark was the first to speak. "It's possible there could be more explosives planted around the city to kill all of us. We have to be very careful in our search from now on."

"The task seems impossible at this point, Clark. Edge is leading us on a wild goose chase. We don't know where to search next. He could have tossed it into the sea for all we know," Arthur said.

"Edge wouldn't do that. Its way too valuable to him," Bruce said.

"Maybe there's some other way to connect Edge with Darkseid without the transmitter. I just wish I knew what that was," Diana said thinking out loud.

Clark stared at her also thinking another direction and another plan may be needed. They were running out of time. Bruce, Diana and J'onn needed to plan their trip through the interdimensional wormhole. Time was running out for the Kryptonian survivors.

Clark stared at his friends coming to a decision. "Bruce, Diana, J'onn, I'll leave it up to you. Our search for the transmitter will take longer than we had hoped. Are you ready to go?"

"Go, go where? What's going on?" Arthur asked.

"Bruce, Diana and J'onn will be entering the wormhole again to try and make contact with survivors on an unnamed planet not far from Krypton. We're hoping they won't be too late to save them. Apparently, the planet is unstable and leaking kryptonite radiation. I won't be going, not because it's too dangerous, but I made the decision days ago that I would stay here with my family. I won't be going on this trip."

"Wow, guys, are you sure about this?" Bart asked. "It sounds pretty dangerous. What about Darkseid? It's possible he could become aware of what's happening and come after you."

"We won't be there that long," Bruce said. "Once we arrive, the first thing we'll do is make contact with the survivors, let them know they're not alone, and we want to help them in any way we can. Clark's father will help with communicating with them."

"But how large is your spaceship anyway, Bruce?" Arthur asked.

"Large enough to hold about 30 survivors, no more than that," Bruce answered him.

"But what if there *are* more than that? What will you do then?" Arthur asked.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. I imagine the women and children would be the first to leave, but then we can't be sure."

"You should start your preparations now, Bruce. Let us know when you're ready to go," Clark said.

"We should be ready to go in the morning, Clark," Diana said.

"We'll all be here before your departure to see you off and we'll be here when you get back. If all goes well, how long will you be gone?" Clark asked.

"I can't say for sure," Diana said looking to Bruce for answers.

"I'll let your father answer that one Clark. Jor-El, could you give us any indication how long this trip might take?" Bruce asked punching in a few codes.

"Barring any unforeseen emergencies, we should be able to contact the planet and return with survivors in a matter of few days," Jor-El said.

"Days, really?" Clark replied stunned. It had taken him five years to get there and back. It was mindboggling.

Bruce smiled at his friend's reaction. He too had felt the same way when he and Jor-El had gone through the calculations. "Wormholes are an amazing discovery, Clark. Years and

years ago, they were thought of as fantasies, completely impossible to believe. When wormholes were first discovered, scientists thought that time travel were their initial purpose, but they have also found that space travel could be reduced significantly if the wormholes could be manipulated."

"I'm still amazed at the entire phenomena, Bruce. I've only experienced it twice and I admit it's something that I'd like to know more about," Clark said still in awe at Bruce's words.

"And this coming from someone from another planet," Bruce said chuckling and shaking his head.

"Hey, I don't know everything, but I'm always willing to learn," Clark said chuckling. "Anyway, I can't thank you enough, all of you ... thank you," he said getting emotional. He went over to Bruce, Diana and J'onn and shook their hands. "Be careful out there and when you get back, we'll have that transmitter in our hands, and soon after that, Edge and everyone in his circle will be behind bars. Count on it," he said.

"Can we quote you, Clark?" Diana asked chuckling.

"You can bet on it too," Clark said smiling.

*Deep space, not far from where Krypton exploded:*

The next day, Bruce, J'onn and Diana exited the wormhole on the other side of the galaxy in a different time light years away from Darkseid.

J'onn was checking his calculations and something was not right. "Jor-El, am I reading this correctly?"

"Yes, J'onn, it appears we have miscalculated our time position."

"What is it, J'onn, what's wrong?" Bruce worriedly asked.

"It appears we were correct in our destination, but the time was not right. The planet we were looking for ... is gone," J'onn said not believing it.

"Oh no, we're too late? They're gone?" Bruce asked stunned by the news. "Jor-El, can you figure out what happened here?"

"One moment," Jor-El said as he appeared to be calculating what happened. "The planet exploded several days ago, but a small vessel was launched hours before the planet exploded, and a lone life form was on board. Its destination ... Earth!"

"Are you sure about that, Jor-El? There's only one person on board and the ship is headed for Earth?"

"Yes, the ship will land on Earth in approximately ... three Earth years," Jor-El said.

Diana, Bruce and J'onn stared at the empty space where the planet had exploded, all thinking the same thing. *How will we tell Clark what happened?*

*Somewhere in Suicide Slum, Metropolis:*

Morgan Edge paced back and forth in his office as he could feel himself panicking. After watching the late evening news of the explosion in the underground tunnels, he knew exactly what had happened. He also knew what Superman was looking for. The transmitter was safely hidden away, but he was worried that he would get his hands on it before he could move it again.

He had a map of Luthor's hideouts and there were still plenty of them out there and most of them were lead lined, but it was only a matter of time before Superman found them all. *Maybe I should destroy the transmitter. It is my only connection to Darkseid and he didn't take care of Superman like I had planned. Both Superman and the League had returned in a*

*matter of days not months like I had hoped. The drug shipments will be stopped now; there's no way around it. All my plans have gone up in smoke and for what? The city will take years to recover from Darkseid's rampage, not to mention Lane and Kent's recent articles and their constant meddling in my affairs.* He suddenly yelled for Frank.

"Yeah, what is it boss?" Frank was worried too. Edge had been quiet for the past few days, and when Edge was quiet, it didn't bode well for anyone.

"What do you know about Lois Lane? I know she's married to Kent, but what do you know about her?" Edge asked his lackey.

"Well, she has a kid," Frank said absently.

"A kid?" Edge asked sounding thrilled.

"Yeah, why?" Frank immediately regretted telling him about the kid.

"No reason," Edge sobered as he pondered this information. *Leverage, that's what I need, leverage.*

Lois was running late again. She had finished her final edits to the follow-up article on Edge and Intergang and had given it to Perry, now she was headed to Jason's school to pick him up. She pulled up in front of the school and there was no one there. Ms. Johnson, Jason's teacher came out the front door and locked it.

Lois looked around and her son was nowhere in sight. "Ms. Johnson, where's Jason? Did my husband pick him up?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Kent. The children were let go about a half hour ago. I assumed you had picked him up."

Lois's heart began to pound, as she pulled out her cell and called Clark. "Clark, is Jason with you? He's not at the school."

"No, Lois, I'm at the Watchtower. What did his teacher say?" Clark asked, heart pounding, as he immediately took to the skies and headed to the school.

"Oh, no," Lois took a shuddering breath trying to calm down. "She said the children were let go thirty minutes ago. Clark, where is he?"

Clark landed behind the school two minutes later, changed into his work clothes, and went to his wife's side. "I'm here, honey. We'll find him, don't worry. Ms. Johnson, I was in the neighborhood," he said. "Please tell me exactly what happened today."

After listening to the teacher tell him the same thing she had told Lois, he told her to call the police, that he was taking his wife home with him, and to send the police to his residence as soon as possible.

Ms. Johnson did as she was told. Clark took Lois's arm and brought her to her car and they drove down the road for a few miles. Lois stopped the car and Clark got out. "Go home honey, I'll find him, don't worry."

"But Clark, I have to look for him. I have to. Please don't tell me to go home and wait. You know I can't do that."

Lois's cell phone rang just then. She didn't recognize the number. Clark told her to put it on speaker.

"Lois Lane-Kent, here, who's calling?" Lois answered the phone.

"Mrs. Kent, I have something that belongs to you," the caller said.

Clark's jaw went rigid. Lois's eyes filled with tears.

"Please, please don't hurt him," Lois pleaded.

"I won't hurt him, if you do as I say," the caller said.

"Yes, anything," Lois managed to say.

"I want you to give Superman a message," the caller began.

"Superman, but ..." Lois said staring at her husband.

"Tell Superman to stop looking for it," the caller said.

Clark knew who was behind this and Edge would pay. If it was the last thing he did, Edge would pay for this. He wanted Lois to try and get more information from him. He made a swirling motion with his hand knowing she would understand.

"Did you hear me Mrs. Kent?" The caller asked getting impatient with her.

"Please just let me speak to my son. I need to know he's alright," Lois said trying to stall.

"You have thirty seconds," the caller said.

"Mom," Jason's voice came out of the phone.

"Jason, sweetie, are you alright? Did they hurt you?" Lois asked trying not to lose it.

"No, I'm ok," Jason said.

"Your Dad and I will be there soon, sweetie. Everything will be alright. We love you, sweetie," Lois said barely holding it together.

Clark squeezed her shoulder, about to lose it himself.

"Times up," the caller said. "Once you talk to Superman, call me back on this line and I'll let you know where you can pick your son up. You have twenty-four hours to call me back, if not, say goodbye to your son," the caller said, then the line went dead.

"Oh, my god, this can't be happening," Lois said staring at the phone. "Clark? Please, you have to find him. He said twenty-four hours; you have twenty-four hours to find him. Please, please," Lois practically screamed at him.

Clark climbed back inside the car, grabbed his wife and held her tightly stroking her back. "I'll find him, Lois, I promise. Now, I have to go. The League can help us. Please go home, call Richard and Lana, they'll come to be with you. Please honey, go home. Tell the police about the call, the school, everything, please," he pleaded with her, kissed her cheek and exited the car.

"Clark wait, here take this number, it may come in handy." With shaking hands, Lois wrote down the kidnapper's number that had come up on her cell and gave it to him.

"Thank you, honey," Clark said. He touched her cheek, looked around, twirled into the suit and took off.

Lois took deep breaths, tried to see past her blurred, tear-filled vision, said a few frantic prayers, and drove home.

Clark felt as if his heart was about to burst, he was so terrified for his son. *This happened because of me, all because of me. You will pay for this Edge.* He called the League and told them what happened, but for them to stay put for a few minutes, and that he had a plan to get his son back.

Jason White was consumed with fear, but the one thing his father had taught him was that it was nothing to be ashamed of, and not to let it take over everything. He took deep breaths trying to stay calm. The man who had taken him had left him alone in a room with a very small window. He had him tied up to a bed, his mouth was stuffed and covered with cloth, but he could hear water outside, boats and people around, and the kidnapper talking to someone over the phone. He lay still listening to all the different sounds coming into his head.

Suddenly, a familiar voice came to him. Jason closed his eyes and listened trying to tune out everything else like his Dad had taught him. It really was his father speaking to him inside

his mind. He calmed down even more, as smiling to himself, so happy to hear his father's voice. He silently answered his father's question. "Yes, I'm alright," Jason silently responded. "I can hear water and I think I'm on the top floor. I remember climbing stairs. Please hurry," he silently pleaded to his Dad.

Superman immediately flew to the waterfront and listened for any incriminating conversations when he picked up Edge talking to the kidnapper. He followed the kidnapper's voice and then he spotted the small window Jason had told him about.

He then called Watchtower and said to contact the police, to collect Edge and confiscate his cell phones. He had the number of the kidnapper and he would probably have the same number on his phone, and it would be the evidence they needed. Then he instructed them to have the police come to the waterfront. He had a feeling he knew exactly where to find his son.

The warehouse window was very small, but Jason could easily fit through it if he had to. Then Clark saw his son. He was tied up on a bed, but he was alright. His heart finally left his stomach and he could breathe again. He silently spoke to him. "Jason, release the bonds now. You can do it son."

"Alright, I'll try," Jason responded in his head. He pulled on the knot as hard as he could and it came loose. He pulled the cloth from his mouth and went to the window. His father was hovering just outside waiting for him. Clark quietly lifted the window out, lifted his son into his arms and shot straight up into the sky. They both hugged each other tightly as he flew faster toward their home.

"You can speak now, son. Are you alright?" Clark asked aloud.

"I'm good. It really worked, Dad, we did it!" Jason exclaimed excited they were able to use their special gift.

"Yes we did, son," Clark said. "I'm so proud of you," he said pulling him closer. "I have a quick call to make to the League and then we'll head home." He called Flash and told him where to find the kidnapper and he also told him to hurry before he realizes Jason was gone. Seconds later, Bart was at the warehouse and the kidnapper was in custody before he had even hung up the phone. Clark shook his head at his speedy friend. *I thought I was fast.* "Thanks, Flash," he said and hung up.

"Now, Jason, when we get home, we have to tell your mother what happened and how I found you," he said.

"Can I tell her? I want to tell her," Jason asked getting even more excited.

"Sure, son, but remember it will be hard for her to understand at first, so we'll take it slow."

"Ok, Dad, I understand," Jason said.

Clark smiled and shook his head at his son, as he suddenly realized how much Jason had grown up since their awkward first meeting in the bullpen all those months before, not only in the way he had accepted his powers but emotionally as well. *He has been through a lot, but his recent trials have made him a stronger person.*

*Meanwhile, at Riverside Drive:*

Lois had just hung up the phone with Richard and Lana, when a knock came at the door. *It's probably the police,* she thought. She opened the door and there standing on the doorstep was Jason and Clark looking no worse for wear.

"Jason, honey, you're home, come here," Lois pulled him into her arms and kissed his

check, so happy to see him. She ran her hands all over his arms his head and down his legs.

Clark watched his wife and couldn't help chuckling. "Lois, are you looking for something?" He asked amused.

"I'm just checking to make sure there are no injuries. Are you alright, honey? They didn't hurt you did they?" Lois asked wanting to make sure he wasn't hurt.

"He's fine, Lois," Clark said. "Actually, Jason has a few things to tell you about what happened to him."

"Mom, here, have a seat," Jason tugged his mother by the hand and sat down next to her.

Lois's mouth dropped open. Clark couldn't help but grin at his son. "Go ahead, Jason, it's alright," Clark said.

Lois squeezed his hand. "Are you sure you're ready to talk about it? I'll understand if you need time," she said knowing it must have been traumatic for him.

"I don't mind, Mom. You see, Dad and I ... we umm, we ..." He hesitated.

"Go ahead son," Clark encouraged him.

Jason forged ahead with his story. "Dad and I can talk to each other ... with our minds," he said hoping his Mom wouldn't freak out.

Lois was stunned speechless. She shook her head not believing it. "Do you mean telepathically, without speaking?" She asked turning to her husband.

"Yes, Lois, it's true," Clark said and sat down next to her. "The first time it happened was by accident. I thought at first that I had imagined it, but then it happened again in Vegas."

"When was the first time, Jason? I want to hear about it," Lois asked turning to face her son again.

"The first time was when Dad and I talked about what happened on the island, remember Dad?" Jason asked his father. Clark nodded and smiled. "I asked you if you could read minds, and you said no, you couldn't," Jason said smiling.

"I was pretty shocked by it, son. I didn't think we could do it, I mean both of us, having a conversation in our minds. I'm still in shock actually," Clark said chuckling.

"But Clark, I don't understand why you didn't tell me about it. Today would have been so much easier if I had known," Lois said realizing they had kept this from her.

Clark took her hand. "Lois, we've never had a real conversation between us until today. Jason spoke to me telepathically but he didn't realize he had done it. The second time happened in Vegas. I called to him in my mind and he heard it. It took me totally by surprise. And then when Jason was taken, I had to see if it wasn't a fluke, that we could really communicate, and it worked." He squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, but I didn't want to get your hopes up, honey. Do you understand now why I never mentioned it?"

Lois thought about it and it did make sense that he hadn't told her. "And you've never done this kind of thing before?"

"No, I haven't. It's not possible to do it, unless the other person is Kryptonian. Jason is half-Kryptonian, but I never for a moment thought we could connect on that level."

Lois was so amazed at this new ability and just a bit jealous. "You're right, Clark. I would have been even more devastated if it hadn't worked, so I suppose I can understand your reasoning, but what really matters is that it did work, and you're home, honey, you're home," Lois said giving Jason another hug.

Father and son shared a look over her shoulder. They both smiled.

## Chapter 19: World's Finest

*Later that night on the Watchtower space station:*

Bruce, J'onn and Diana had just told Clark about their mission to save the Kryptonian survivors and how they had failed, and that there had been only one lone survivor.

"Only one?" Clark asked crestfallen.

"I'm so sorry, Clark," Diana said touching his shoulder hoping to give him some comfort.

Clark took a deep breath trying to get control over his emotions. "And you said three years, father? Is that right?" He asked his father.

"Yes, Kal-El. Three years from now, barring any unforeseen problems, the lone survivor will be here on Earth at the exact coordinates where you landed, my son," Jor-El said.

"In Smallville?" Clark asked amazed.

"Yes, Kal-El," Jor-El responded

"Unbelievable," Clark said shaking his head at the irony of the situation.

"Amazing," Bruce said.

"Father, you said unforeseen problems? What did you mean by that?" Clark asked concerned.

"I was referring to the lone survivor's health, Kal-El. The read-outs indicated that the entire population was very sick at the time of the explosion, but there was hope that once the ship had been launched into space that the survivor's health would improve once the ship left the planet's orbit."

"I hope you're right, Father. I really do," Clark said as he closed his eyes and prayed for the best.

Bruce decided it was time to change the subject to a more pleasant discussion. "So, how's Jason? We were all so relieved you found him so quickly Clark. We all want to know how you did it."

"Yeah, how did you do it, Clark?" Bart asked as everyone else chimed in questions about Jason's rescue.

Clark realized what Bruce was doing, but he had to admit he didn't mind talking about his brilliant and amazing son. "Well, what happened was quite extraordinary actually," he said smiling at everyone's confused expressions.

"Well, what happened?" Diana asked wondering what it could be.

"Tell us, Clark, don't keep us in suspense," Bart said.

"Well, Jason and I had a talk ... in our minds," Clark said and smiled and looked around the table and waited for everyone's reaction.

"What did you just say?" Bruce asked shocked.

"You're joking, of course," Bart said. "Come on, Clark, what really happened?"

"You don't believe me?" Clark asked. "It really happened. You see, Kryptonians have the ability to speak telepathically. They've been doing it for generations, but when Jason and I spoke to each other today, it was for the very first time."

"Wow, I'm impressed," Arthur said. "I can communicate with sea creatures, but this... this is something else entirely. How did it feel, Clark?"

"Incredible, unbelievable and wonderful," Clark said trying to find the words. "That's how I found him. He told me where he was," he said shaking his head still not quite believing it actually happened.

Silence followed that statement.

Clark looked around the table. "It's true. Jason told me where he was," he said

emphasizing every word.

"We believe you, Clark. We're just trying to digest this," Bruce said.

"It is a lot to believe, I know. He's one amazing little boy. I never in my wildest dreams would have thought we could connect in that way. I still can't believe it," Clark said still in awe of his little boy.

"You must be so proud, Clark. We're all very happy for you," Diana said.

"Thank you, Diana. Lois and I are very blessed to have him," Clark said smiling.

"Well, we have one more thing to discuss and I think we can call it a night ... Edge," Bruce said.

"Isn't he in jail?" Clark asked. "What about the kidnapper?"

"Yes, they're both in jail," Bruce said.

"That's a relief," Clark said.

"But the transmitter is still out there though and so are Edge's traps set for all of us. I think the transmitter is in one of Lex's hideouts," Bruce said.

"But why even bother trying to locate the transmitter now? Edge can't use it," Bart asked wondering why they were even discussing it.

"Lex has too many contacts out there. Edge was just one of them. If Lex or one of his cronies finds the transmitter, we could have another visit from you know who," Bruce said trying to make a point. "We have to find the transmitter and destroy it."

Clark sighed knowing what Bruce said was true. "I agree, Bruce, but what we need are the exact locations of Lex's hideouts," he said.

"And who has this list?" Bart asked doubtful of this entire mission.

"Lex, of course," Clark said.

"Of course," Bart said shaking his head, not the least bit surprised by that answer.

#### *Edge's office in Suicide Slum, the next day:*

Lois was on a mission. Clark had told her that Edge was behind Jason's kidnapping and she had to be sure that nothing fell through the cracks and that he would pay for what he had done to her family. "Lois Lane-Kent, Daily Planet," Lois said to the policeman as she held up her press badge for the officer to see. She was attempting to get inside Edge's office.

The policeman sighed knowing exactly who she was. "The forensics team isn't done yet, Mrs. Kent. They should be done in about half an hour," the policeman stated.

Lois wasn't going to let that stand in her way. "I'll wait," she said. She looked around at all the police vehicles and forensic trucks looking for someone to give her more information about Edge's arrest and what they had on him. She spotted a good friend from the force, Detective Maggie Sawyer. Maggie and Lois went way back to their days in college. "Detective Sawyer, got a minute?" Lois asked her friend walking up to her.

Maggie Sawyer had been a hard-nosed detective on the force for many years. She had paid her dues as a woman on the police force and had made many strides moving up in the ranks of the Metropolis PD. "Hey, Lois," Maggie said waiting for the inevitable barrage of questions from her friend.

"So, what ya got?" Lois asked getting right to the point.

"You know I can't talk about evidence, Lois," Maggie said.

Lois wouldn't be deterred. "Maggie, he kidnapped my son," she strongly stated staring at her friend hoping she would help her.

Maggie stared right back and found it hard not to be moved. She looked away then. "I'm

sorry Lois, but I can't help you. The D.A..." Maggie began but Lois interrupted her.

"The D.A. is probably in bed with Edge. Don't you read the papers, Maggie?" Lois couldn't believe she didn't know they were partners. "You know what we're up against here. If we can't nail him on this kidnapping charge, he'll be back in business as usual in no time."

"We have him this time Lois. He won't get away," Maggie said realizing she'd said too much.

"Really, you have him?" Lois asked feeling a bit more satisfied with her answer.

"I have to go now, Lois," Maggie said giving Lois a look. "Trust me," she said.

Lois didn't say anything after that. She nodded at her friend and Maggie nodded back.

*Gotham City, Daily Planet offices:*

Richard was on the phone with Lois. He continued making edits to their article as the phone dangled from one ear. They were putting the finishing touches on the Edge article. Perry was pleased with it, but now that Edge had been arrested for kidnapping, it had to be updated with the news. "Yes, Lois, I know Maggie. What happened at Edge's office?"

"She pretty much gave me the hint that Edge was going down this time, Richard," Lois said relieved.

"What did she say? Is there anything we can use in the article?"

"I'm afraid not, but I think we can say that the police are confident in their arrest this time. It gives the impression that it's a done deal," Lois said.

"Are you sure you read her right?" Richard wanted to know.

"I'm very sure, Richard, we should run with it," Lois said.

"Alright, I'll run it by Perry and if he says go for it, then we'll do it," Richard said happy Edge would be behind bars for a long time, especially after what he had done to Jason.

"Great, call me once you get the go ahead from Perry. I'm headed back to the office. Bye Richard, and thanks," Lois said.

"Bye, Lois," Richard said and hung up.

*Several days later, Federal Prison, upstate New York:*

Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a daily metropolitan newspaper, stood in the waiting area of federal prison waiting to speak with Lex Luthor. Lois thought he was insane to go see him and the League was split in two by the idea. A few thought it was brilliant, while the others wanted to pull out the green stuff to stop him.

Alexander "Lex" Luthor was six months into his second stint in prison, but it was only a matter of time before he would convince the parole board he was no threat to anyone and that he wasn't crazy. He hated to admit it, but his last scheme to thwart Superman and to take over the world had been a complete bust, but he hadn't given up taking down the Man of Steel; no way, it was what kept him going in this hellhole.

There were two things Lex was allowed to do... exercise and read the Daily Planet newspaper. As he read the latest article about Edge and how he had completely blown Intergang wide open, he realized that the organization was now in shambles with Edge's arrest and imminent departure to prison. The police seemed pretty confident according to the front page story written by Lois Lane, Richard White and Clark Kent, three of his favorite people, he had to admit.

The guard came to his cell then. "You have a visitor, Luthor," he said opening the door.

Lex knew it wasn't Edge. *He is in jail, so who could it be? Kitty wouldn't come to see me*

*after turning state's evidence against me, but she would pay for that in due time.* "Who is it?" Lex asked.

"Clark Kent," the guard said.

"What does he want, an interview?" Lex asked the guard.

"Come on, move it, Luthor," the guard said ignoring his question.

Lex was led to the visitor area and there waiting for him was Clark Kent. Clark didn't stand up to greet Lex. He wouldn't show any kind of courtesy to the man. He had to force himself to stay seated. Seeing him again after what happened on the island, he felt the urge to rub his back where Luthor had stabbed him, but he refrained.

"Clark Kent, what brings you here?" Lex asked sitting down.

"Answers to a few questions and ... I have a proposition for you," Clark said coming to the point.

"Let's hear the proposition, and then maybe I'll answer your questions," Lex said finding this conversation interesting despite warning bells going off in his head.

"You may have heard about your friend ... Morgan Edge going to jail for a long time?"

"Yes, I've read about it and who said we were friends?" Lex asked now leery about where this was going.

"Well, he did come to see you a few weeks ago. It's a known fact that you two know each other. It appears the police have uncovered a few things about Edge's involvement in bringing a certain ... individual to Earth who caused considerable damage to the city, not to mention his kidnapping of Superman. Do you know anything about that?" Clark asked knowing Lex would deny any involvement with Edge.

"I don't know what you mean," Lex answered now completely baffled where this was going. Lex was also thinking he should stay as far away from Edge's schemes as possible. It certainly would not help his parole hearing coming up in a few months.

"Oh, I think you do and the police have proof of your involvement. Now, you give me the location of all your hideouts, the police may be lenient with you and you may be given a few more privileges in here, like maybe a television in your cell."

"A television, really?" Lex asked getting excited. He hadn't seen a television in months. He would do anything for a television. "Is that all, just my hideouts, nothing more?" Lex said warming to the idea. *The police won't find anything. I have no use for them now anyway, but a television, now that I could use, and it may help grease the wheels with my parole hearing.*

"Yes, that's all the police want," Clark said as he inwardly smiled, took out a pen and a pad for him to write on and handed it to him.

Lex didn't need to think about it any longer, as he eagerly wrote down the addresses of all his hideouts and gave them to Clark. "Now, when do I get my television?" He asked rubbing his hands together.

"I have no idea, never probably," Clark said standing up, not in the least bit upset about tricking him.

"But you said ..." Lex started confused.

"I lied," Clark said. "Guard, I'm done here," he said and left Lex sitting there with mouth agape.

*The Watchtower later that evening:*

After Clark stopped bowing to everyone's applause, Bruce smirked but he had to admit Clark's idea had been brilliant and to think it actually worked. He shook his head amazed. He

had been one of the members who wanted to bring out the green stuff. He remembered and chuckled again at Clark's expression when he had mentioned it.

"You wouldn't dare do that to me again," Clark had said shocked at Bruce's words.

"You know I would. Don't even think about going to see that lunatic," Bruce had answered.

"Bruce you have to admit, the idea has merit, and it will save us a lot of time, and it could save our lives. Clark can do this, and I think it's a brilliant idea," Diana had said.

"Of course, you would agree with him. You always do," Bruce had mumbled aloud and had dared her to deny it.

Bruce and Diana stared at each other not liking the direction of the conversation.

Clark had picked up on their vibe, had frowned and indicated it was his decision and he was going and that was that.

Bruce came back to the present and stared at Diana. She wouldn't look at him. He was an idiot for saying those things, but a part of him did feel Diana was always on Clark's side in any conversation. *I hate feeling this way. Jealousy is such a useless emotion. We need to talk about this.* He went to her then, whispered in her ear, and asked if she would join him later in his room downstairs.

"I remember someone mentioning something about a launch party for this place?" Bart asked as he couldn't wait to have a party.

Another hour went by while they made preparations for the launch party, setting a date after Lex's hideouts were destroyed and the transmitter recovered, and after that everyone left for the evening.

After they had changed into their regular clothes so they could be more comfortable, Bruce and Diana were in his room but neither knew how to begin. Bruce couldn't help staring at her. She looked lovely with her hair brushed out like that, and that outfit, the skirt and that halter top.

Diana couldn't help noticing his outfit too. *He really fills out those slacks and that tee shirt fit him to a tee. Damn, he's distracting,* she thought. She crossed her arms trying to stay mad at him. "Well, are you going to explain that remark?" She asked finding it hard to believe that Bruce could be jealous of Clark.

"I think you know what I meant," Bruce said not apologizing for his feelings.

"Let's not play games, Bruce. Clark is a dear friend, that's all. I hate conflict and you two are always at each other's heads. I hate it sometimes," Diana said.

*Oh, so that's it,* Bruce thought. He came closer then. "Diana, Clark and I, we always disagree, that's just how it is." He shrugged, trying to explain. "You know us, most of the time we don't even remember half the stuff we argue about."

"Well, I remember and I hate it. Most of the League members take it in stride, but I don't like it at all," Diana said.

"So you take his side in everything to keep the peace? You could take my side sometimes," he said pouting a little.

Diana chuckled. "Well I would, if you were right," she said and laughed at his expression.

"Hey, watch it," Bruce laughed and pulled her to him. All too soon, they were in complete agreement about everything!

*Later that evening at Riverside Drive:*

After a late dinner, Lois and Clark were in their bedroom getting ready for bed. She

smiled at the look on his face. "You must be feeling pretty proud of yourself?" Lois asked smiling at her smirking husband. Lois shook her head still not quite believing he had pulled it off.

"Yep, feeling pretty good right now," Clark said smiling at Lois's expression.

"Um, huh, I'm sure you are. So, what's the plan now that you have the addresses of Luthor's hideouts?"

"First of all, I gave the list to the police, keeping a copy of course," Clark stated. "They have a lot to go through, and the Chief was very pleased with what we accomplished. Once the bomb squads can go through all those places, they can search them out and find the transmitter. I'd do it myself, but most of them are lead-lined. It wouldn't do me much good to search them."

"The Flash, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern will be working with the police. As soon as they get the transmitter, then we can all breathe a little easier."

Lois was so happy about that. "Then, that's it, no more Edge, no more Darkseid, and no more D.A.?"

"Speaking of the D.A., no one has seen or heard from him since Edge was arrested."

"Why does that not surprise me?" Lois asked not surprised he would just disappear.

"Don't worry, he won't get far," Clark said.

"I have no worries on that score," Lois said smiling. "Oh my," she said looking down at her stomach. "Clark?"

"What is it, Lois, is it the baby?" Clark said coming to take her arm. "Here, sit down for a moment."

"The baby ... she feels like ... a butterfly ... it's so strange," she said smiling. Taking his hand, she placed it on her stomach. "I think you can hear the heartbeat now, Clark. Do you want to try?"

"Did you say she? It's a girl?" Clark was overjoyed. "How can you be so sure?"

"It's just a feeling I have. I could be wrong, but I had a dream about her while you were away," Lois said smiling remembering the dream.

Clark touched her cheek and taking a deep breath, he smiled. "Well, here goes," he said and got down on his knees in front of her. He then leaned in toward her stomach, closed his eyes and tuned out all other sounds and listened, and there it was. The fast and steady heartbeat of his little girl drumming in his ears, a sound so beautiful, so amazing, tears sprang into his eyes. It was a true miracle.

Lois stroked his hair. "Well, do you hear it?"

Clark raised his head, eyes shining, giving Lois an answer without speaking. "That was wonderful Lois. I'll never tire of hearing that sound."

Lois smiled, her eyes shining too. She stroked his cheek. "Anytime."

Taking her hands in his, he sat down next to her. "Now that things have quieted down a little, can we plan our trip to the Fortress? You know Jor-El has been wonderful through this entire Krypton situation. I don't know what I or the League would have done without his help. Will you think about it?"

She smiled. "How does this weekend sound? We should go in the late afternoon, get all that morning sickness out of the way. I'd hate to think of that happening while we were flying." She wrinkled her nose at the thought.

Clark tried not to laugh, but he couldn't do it. He burst out laughing.

"Haha," Lois said smiling and then swatted his arm for good measure.

Jason was on top of the world, literally. When his Dad had told him they were going to the Fortress of Solitude to meet his grandfather, he was very excited, but he did manage to control the urge to float as his father had taught him. Now, there they were flying high in the sky heading north. He wasn't cold like his mother was and he kept his eyes open every second. He didn't want to miss a thing.

Soon enough, they landed just outside the Fortress, as his Dad punched in some security codes, they went inside, it came alive with lights and he could feel a little heat too. "I'll take you on a tour in the moment, son. I want to make sure your Mom is warm enough."

"I'm fine, Clark," Lois said actually feeling a bit overheated. Clark had her bundled with at least six layers of clothes.

"I don't want you to catch a cold or anything," Clark said. "We could have done this at the station, Lois, but I don't want you going through that teleportation chamber now that you're entering your second trimester."

"Clark, I'm fine," she said.

"Jason, are you alright?" Clark asked his son.

"I'm great, Dad. Is grandfather here now?"

"My son," Jor-El's giant floating head slowly appeared before them.

"Father, this is Jason, my son," Clark said.

"Hello, Jason," Jor-El said.

"Hello, grandfather," Jason replied in awe at what he was seeing.

"And you know, Lois," Clark said hesitantly.

"Yes, hello, Lois," Jor-El said.

"Jor-El," Lois said waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"Umm, father, Lois and I have wonderful news." He pulled Lois next to his side. "Lois and I will be welcoming another member of our family soon. We're having another baby," he said smiling at Lois.

Silence followed that statement.

Lois became tense all of a sudden. "Clark, you said he would welcome us," she whispered worried that Clark would be devastated if Jor-El acted up now in front of his family.

"He's digesting the information. His programs are making adjustments. Please be patient, honey," Clark said hoping to reassure her.

Just when Lois was about to say they should leave and never come back, Jor-El's image began to fluctuate for a moment, and then images of Clark as a baby began to appear before them.

"Oh my goodness," Lois exclaimed not quite believing her eyes.

Clark gasped at the sight before him, amazed his father would do this now. It was truly a beautiful sight to behold. It was Jor-El and his mother Lara and they were smiling and laughing with their son.

"Dad, is that you?" Jason asked pointing and smiling at his Dad.

"Yes, Jason, it's me as a baby. That's your grandmother, Lara, and ... your grandfather, Jor-El," Clark said barely able speak past the lump in his throat.

"Oh, Clark," Lois said on the verge of tears. "It's beautiful. Thank you, Jor-El," Lois said speaking clearly.

"No, thank you, Lois," Jor-El said.

## Chapter 20: The Ties That Bind

*Seven Months later: The Kent house:*

Lois tried to get comfortable but it was an impossible task. "Lucy!" She called to her sister. Lucy was on summer break from grad school and had agreed to stay with her sister for a month.

"Coming, Lois!" Lucy exclaimed coming from Jason's room. "I'll be right back, Jason," she told her nephew.

"Ok, Aunt Lucy," Jason said getting back to his summer studies.

"I thought I had this getting out of bed under control. I guess I was wrong," Lois mumbled to herself. "Oh, there you are. I'm officially an invalid, sweetie. I can't seem to get out of this bed. Help me, please," Lois begged arms in the air.

"I guess the extra month has taken its toll on your body," Lucy explained.

"I suppose so. I'm so ready to have this baby, I can't tell you," Lois said as she wobbled down the hall. "I'm due in a week, but I think we can get this baby to come just a little early."

"And how do you suppose we do that?" Lucy asked dreading her answer.

"Take a walk with me?" Lois asked not waiting for an answer as she entered Jason's room. "Honey, we're going for a walk," she said. "Follow me!"

"Lois, I don't think this is such a good idea. Shouldn't we call Clark? Does your doctor know about this?"

"Where are we going, Mom?" Jason wanted to know.

"We're going for a walk, sweetie. We'll be back in a little while," Lois told her son as she headed down the stairs.

"Lois, did you hear me?" Lucy asked helping her sister down the stairs.

"It's time, Lucy. I talked to my doctor last night, and he agreed with me," Lois said stretching the truth just a little.

"Really, he really said that?" Lucy asked not believing her.

"Dr. Hamilton said the baby is healthy and ready to be born. She's just being stubborn, but I can be just as stubborn. This baby is coming today, so let's go, move it!"

Lucy sighed knowing arguing would do no good. "Alright, alright, let's go."

*Metropolis Courthouse:*

Clark and Bruce were at the courthouse waiting for Edge and the D.A.'s sentencing hearings to get underway. They just so happened to be scheduled on the same day.

"Who knew it would take this long?" Clark asked his friend. Both Edge and Washington had been convicted of conspiracy, drug trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping, and countless other crimes.

"Lawyers and their money-grubbing ways is my guess," Bruce replied. Once the police had found the transmitter, it was over for the both of them, not to mention Luthor's petition to the parole board which had been denied without hearing.

"I know you're right, but I was hoping all of this would be behind us by now, and I could concentrate on helping Lois for a few months at least once the baby comes. You know Lois is due any day now," Clark said sighing.

"How is Lois handling her forced seclusion?" Bruce asked chuckling.

"She's handling it very well actually," Clark replied.

"Really, I'm finding that hard to believe. She must be climbing the walls by now," Bruce said.

"She's doing fine," Clark said. "You know, Lois, she's very determined and she wasn't going to let this get her down, especially now, with everything we've worked so hard to accomplish is just around the corner. She's been writing and keeping herself busy," he continued.

"Now that I can believe," Bruce said.

Clark's phone vibrated just then. "It's Lois. I'll take this out in the hall," he said leaving the courtroom.

"Lois, honey, what is it?" Clark asked immediately on alert.

"My water broke. Lucy, Jason and I are on our way to STAR Labs. We'll meet you there," Lois said without preamble.

"I'm on my way," Clark replied as butterflies took root in his stomach.

He went back inside the courtroom and tapped Bruce on the shoulder. The first hearing had just started.

"What is it? Is it time?" Bruce whispered.

"Yes, she's on her way to STAR Labs now," Clark replied. "I just hope ..." He sighed not finishing afraid to put his worries into words.

Bruce knew what he was going to say, as he squeezed his arm. "Lois and the baby will be fine. You know I wish you guys all the best." He paused. "I'd like to come by later to see the baby, if that's ok?" Bruce asked hoping Clark wouldn't mind.

Clark couldn't help but be surprised by that question. He knew that Bruce and Diana had been together for a while now. Maybe Bruce was ready to settle down? He inwardly smiled at that thought.

"Sure, come on by. Lois and I will be happy to see you," Clark replied.

"Thanks, Clark. You'd better hurry now. You don't want to miss the grand entrance," Bruce said and smiled.

Clark smiled in return, then hurried out into the street, entered an alley, twirled and leapt into the sky.

*STAR Labs, twelve hours later:*

Lois was getting weaker by the hour. She was exhausted and worried that the labor was taking too long. She had delivered Jason in a little over six hours. Another contraction hit, as she watched the doctor and Clark speaking in the corner of her room. She had wanted to deliver this baby normally, no drugs, just her and their child, but she wasn't sure how much more of this she could take.

"We may have to do a C-section, Mr. Kent," Dr. Hamilton informed the worried and distraught young man.

"You know Lois doesn't want that. We agreed, doctor, that under the circumstances, we don't want any drugs in her system. We don't know what they could do to the baby," Clark replied so worried for Lois and their child.

"I realize that, Mr. Kent, but the baby is getting weaker too. We have to weigh the health of both of them."

Clark turned his head and watched Lois struggle valiantly through another contraction. She was so brave and strong, but if the baby wasn't coming, then they had to do something.

"I'll tell her, Doctor," Clark said dreading the conversation.

"I'll get the operating room ready," Dr. Hamilton said and left.

Clark sat down, took Lois's hand in his and smoothed her hair away from her sweaty forehead with a cool cloth. "Here, honey, have some ice," he said giving her a few small cubes.

"Thank ... you ... Clark," she closed her eyes knowing what was coming. "No, C-section, Clark, and ... you can't ... talk me ... into it," she panted between contractions. Another contraction hit after that. She squeezed his hand as it subsided after a minute. "That ... one ... was ... different."

"Lois, please?" He asked as his eyes filled with tears. "I don't know what I would do if anything happened to you or the baby. Please, Lois," he begged her.

Lois tried to focus on his face, but the pain was becoming unbearable. Then, another one hit, and this one was even stronger than the last. "I ... have ... to ... push, Clark! NOW!!!"

"Mr. Kent, the baby's coming. I can see the head," the nurse said as she told Clark to go get the doctor.

Clark ran to the door and the doctor entered before he could call for him. "The baby's coming, Doctor," he said as it appeared his prayers were answered.

"I know. I saw the monitor. You can push now, Mrs. Kent. On the count of three, now, 1, 2, 3, PUSH!" The Doctor instructed her.

Clark was there right beside her helping her as best he could, holding her so she could sit up, supporting her as she rested between contractions and telling her how well she was doing. "You're doing great, honey!"

"One more should do it, Mrs. Kent. NOW! 1, 2, 3, PUSH!" Dr. Hamilton instructed.

That one did the trick, as Jessica Marie Kent, their first daughter, came into the world at 10:30 pm, June 25, 2009. She weighed in at 8 pounds, 2 ounces and 19 inches in length. She was healthy and strong, just as they'd prayed and hoped for. She was the image of her mother with hair the color of the night crowning her head.

When Lois and Clark first laid eyes on her, they both stared at each other smiling through tears. "She's really here, Clark."

Clark couldn't speak. He just stared at the baby, as the nurses took her away, cleaned her up and wrapped her tightly in a blanket and handed her to Lois. "You were right, Lois. She is beautiful just like her mother."

"Here, you can hold her," Lois said handing him the baby.

Clark felt huge and clumsy with such a tiny person in his arms. He wasn't sure how to do this, but he managed alright, as long as he supported the baby's head and held her close to his body, she would be alright. He got the handle on it pretty quickly.

Lois smiled at her husband. Clark lifted his head and smiled back. "Thank you, Lois. I love you," he said, leaned down and kissed her lips.

"You're welcome, sweetheart. I love you too," she said and sighed. "Jessica Marie Kent. I love the name we came up with, honey."

"Me too," Clark said staring at his little girl's face. Jessica's eyes opened for a moment. Clark was in awe of his little girl, as he kissed her tiny head.

Soon, Lois was moved to her private room and the family was brought in to welcome Jessica into the family. Jason, Martha, Ben, Lana, Richard, Bruce, Lucy and Sam were all there to welcome her as congratulations, handshakes and hugs were handed out with plenty to spare. Martha sat in the rocking chair, humming to her granddaughter, as Lucy took picture after picture, then everyone realized how tired Lois was and Clark didn't look much better. It had been a long day and night for everyone.

As Jessica was put in her hospital crib next to her mother, everyone said goodnight. Jason

didn't want to leave his family, but Lois assured him that they would see him tomorrow, and that they would be home for good in a one day or two. Lois and Clark hugged and kissed their son as Martha, Ben and Lucy took him home for the night.

Jessica was asleep and Lois scooted over as Clark climbed up onto the bed to hold his wife close as she snuggled against him. "You were so brave today, Lois. I love you so much," he whispered. He kissed her temple, realizing that she was asleep. He smiled then, closed his eyes as he too fell asleep.

The next morning, as Lois, Jason and Jessica bonded for awhile, Clark took Martha by the hand, left their room and sat down in the waiting area. It was time he told her about the Kryptonian coming there in a little over two years.

Martha was in shock by the news. Another little one, just like Clark would be arriving in Smallville. She shook her head amazed at this turn of events. "So you have no idea if it's a boy or a girl, or if he or she is a child or an adult? Is that right?"

"Yes, Mom, I had hoped the League would have been able to save more of them, but it was not to be. I know it will be a lot to ask but I'll need your help once the Kryptonian arrives. It feels strange saying that, but until we know his name, he'll be the Kryptonian. It will be an adjustment for him. I think it's best if he stays with you in Smallville. The big city with its noise and distractions is not what he'll need when he first arrives."

Martha took his hand in hers. "I agree, Clark, and of course, I'll help in anyway I can. Did you even have to ask?"

He pulled her close. "I knew what your answer would be, but I had to ask," Clark said smiling. "I haven't told Jason yet, but I will once we all get settled back at the house with the baby."

"Jason will be thrilled to have someone else he can talk to about being 'special,'" Martha said smiling.

"I think you're right, Mom. Jason amazes me everyday. He's smart, caring, friendly, just the best son ever."

Martha smiled. "I agree, son," she said. "Come on, I want to see my granddaughter."

*The Kent Farm, early evening, two and a half years later:*

Clark had just returned from the Fortress after getting a more accurate date and time of the spaceship's arrival. Today was the day, if Jor-El's calculations were correct. When he arrived back at the farm, the house was overflowing with people. The entire League was there, as well as Richard, Lana and their one year-old, red-haired son, Lucas James. Lana and Richard had gotten married a little over two years before in a lovely ceremony in Metropolis. Also there were Lucy and Sam, and of course, Martha and Ben too.

Suddenly, the kids came bounding down the stairs. "No running in the house guys," Lois said and eight year-old Jason, two year-old Jessica, and lagging slowly behind Lucas James, looked sheepishly at the woman, slowed down a bit and headed to the kitchen with Martha for cookies and milk.

Jason and Jessica ran to their father as he entered the house. He picked up his little girl and kissed her on the cheek. "How much longer, Dad?" Jason asked getting impatient. He couldn't wait to meet the Kryptonian, who was just like him and his Dad.

"He should be here in about an hour, son. Now, listen up, everyone. I'll be heading out to Shuster's Field to wait for the ship to arrive. Once there, I'll check everything out, make sure

everything is fine, that the Kryptonian is fine, and then I'll bring him here to meet everyone."

"Dad, I want to come with you, please?" Jason begged in perfect Kryptonese.

Clark stared at his son amazed how easily he had picked up a few words in his native language. Jason was determined to be able to communicate with the Kryptonian. Clark smiled wavering a little, but he couldn't think of a reason why he shouldn't come. He glanced at Lois asking her approval.

"Jason, come here honey," Lois called to her son. She took his hands in hers. "Jason, I really think you should stay here with us. We don't know what your father will find once the spaceship arrives. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?" She asked him thinking her son was old enough to understand what he could be facing.

"I guess so," Jason replied disappointed, but he understood.

"I'm sorry son. It'll be just a little while, and I'll call once I check everything out," Clark said coming to pat his son on the back.

Suddenly, the television picture showed a bit of snow and the sound popped in and out. "I think this could be it," Clark announced. "Everyone, come out onto the porch, we should be able to see the spaceship from there. Come on!"

Everyone gathered on the porch and a few minutes later, a fireball streaked across the sky and landed in the exact same spot as Clark had all those years ago. As everyone gasped and pointed to the sky, Clark glanced at Lois, squeezed her hand, handed Jessica to her, then he stepped down from the porch, held up his hands to get everyone's attention. "Everyone, I'm going now. I hope my cell works once I get out there and the interference won't stop me from calling," he said as he glanced at Lois and smiled. "There's one more thing I wanted to say before I go," he began as he suddenly became emotional. "I wanted to thank all of you for everything you've done to help Lois and I get through this difficult time these past few years. We love you all very much. We don't know what we would have done without your love and support, and no matter what I find out there, I'll never be able to thank you enough." He smiled once more at his family and friends, twirled into the suit, waved goodbye, and streaked out to the spaceship.

"Good luck, Clark!" Bruce hollered at his retreating back, as everyone else chimed in their good wishes.

Once Clark arrived at the spaceship, it was just the same as when he had landed on Earth that second time. Fire was scorching the ground and the ship was covered in dirt after it had apparently skidded to a stop. He quickly blew out the fires and blew away the dirt. He then slowly approached the ship wondering how to open it, but he didn't have to worry, because a door slowly opened directly in front of him. He tried to peer inside, but the ship must have been shielded with lead because he couldn't see anything. He suddenly stepped back not knowing what to expect. He pulled out his cell and called Lois. "Lois, Lois, are you there? I'm at the ship. I can barely hear you. Yes, the ship appears to have taken the landing very well. It is shielded by lead so I can't see inside. Wait, I thought I heard something. I'm going in."

"Be careful Clark," Lois said as she glanced at everyone's concerned faces. "He said the ship is shielded by lead, but that he's going in."

Meanwhile, back at the ship, Clark tried to reach out to the Kryptonian. "Hello," he called in Kryptonese. "Is anyone there?" He asked and then he suddenly heard a moan. "Are you hurt?" No answer. "I'm coming inside. Please don't be afraid," he said entering the ship.

Kara heard a voice calling to her. It was a man's voice and he was speaking in her language. He asked if she was alright. She tried to answer but her voice wouldn't cooperate. All

she could manage was a moan. She remembered then. *Could that voice be Kal-El, my cousin?* She hoped with all of her heart that it was him. Kara then managed to open the hatch of her hibernation chamber. She slowly stood up on wobbly legs, looked up and there standing before her was ... "Kal-El?"

Clark couldn't believe his eyes, but there standing before him was a beautiful girl. She must be a teenager, maybe a little older. She had long golden hair, her eyes were shaded and a little sad and she wore blue, red and yellow on garments he recognized as clothing his parents would have worn if they had been younger. The El family crest was on her chest in colors of red and gold. *She must be related to me.* He smiled at her hoping that was the case. Kara smiled back feeling stronger.

"Yes, it is I, Kal-El," Clark said and held out his arms.

"It's really you?" Kara asked not quite believing it was him, but he had the family crest on his chest and the colors were the same. *I know it's him. It had to be.* Kara slowly moved forward as her legs were still a bit wobbly.

Clark moved forward too as they met halfway and then they were in each other's arms, holding tight to each other. Kara began to cry.

Clark soothed her by rubbing her back. "You're safe now. Please don't cry. Everything will be fine now, it's alright." Clark picked her up and took her out into the night.

Kara began to pour her heart out then. "Everyone is gone, Kal-El, everyone," she cried harder then pulling him closer. "My parents, my friends, all gone," she cried.

"I'm so sorry." He pulled her closer stroking her back. "I know it will be hard for you to accept it, but your home is here now. I want you to meet my family. They're your family now and a few friends of mine too. Everyone can't wait to meet you. Are you up for it?"

"I am a little tired, but I suppose so," she said sniffing.

"Good girl. Now, hold on tight, here we go," Clark said.

Kara held him tightly around the neck as he speeded to the house. Everyone was still anxiously waiting on the porch for him.

Clark sat Kara down then, but held her close to his side. "Everyone, this is ..." Clark began suddenly realizing he had forgotten to ask her name. "What's your name?"

"My name is Kara," she said in perfect English.

***The end!***

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A/N: Yayy!! It's Supergirl!! \*smiles\* Once I realized where my Muse was taking me, I did a lot of research about the 'other' Kryptonian. What a great character she is, but unfortunately she has been neglected in the film and television media for a long time. It's too bad she wasn't on *Smallville* very long. I hope she returns next season for a visit at least. This generation doesn't know that much about her and I think that's a shame. Heck, I didn't know that much about her at first.

I so enjoyed writing this story. It gave me fits at times, but I would not have wanted it any other way, and you know I would love to write a follow-up to this story with Kara, Jason, Jessica, the League, and Lois and Clark, of course. We'll see! Thanks again to my 'super-beta' Hana for all her hard work. \*hugs\* And thanks so much to all my readers, and yes even those who read but didn't review. I know you're out there and it feels good to know you took this journey with me. I feel so blessed to be able to write and to know that a few people read my stories and enjoy them just a little means so much. I truly, truly appreciate it. Please review this final chapter because reviews are love, but of course you knew that! :D