

Superman Returns II: Men of Steel

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Rating: T

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Act I, Scene I

Metropolis. A shining beacon of civilisation, its tall buildings pristine and proud in the dazzling summer sunshine that bathes the city. We pan across its avenues and streets, taking in the bustling city life of a busy weekday lunchtime. We swoop, much as Superman might swoop, gracefully from rooftop to rooftop, discovering our own corners of beauty, stopping for a moment intermittently to take in a new vignette of city life - here a family rushing to cross a road, the kids bustling and the mother scurrying to keep a wayward toddler in line, there a young couple walking arm in arm...

...and here, a group of men, quite overdressed for the weather, walking purposefully towards a bank.

They're walking toward a man and woman striding in the opposite direction. The woman, clad in a smart business suit, is young, brown-haired, pretty, and with an air of barely restrained impatience about her. Her name is Lois Lane.

We cut, abruptly, to Lois sitting on a couch in an office in the Daily Planet building. She's the very definition of tension. Sitting opposite her, a picture of radiant calm, is an attractive young woman wearing attractive glasses and smiling an attractive smile. It's immediately obvious that Lois despises her. Her name is Dr. Reed, and she's a psychiatrist.

DR. REED: Why don't you begin by telling me about your day so far.

LOIS: Why don't your questions *sound* like questions?

DR. REED: You feel nervous around me, Miss Lane.

LOIS: Is that a question? What are you writing? Why are you writing something?

DR. REED: Anytime you're ready. And please, feel free to be as detailed and honest as you like.

Lois takes a deep, deep breath, clearly fighting the urge to walk out...or worse.

LOIS: I set off early to cover the latest headline-grabbing lecture at MU by the ever-cuddly Dr. Emmet Vale...

We cut to an establishing shot of Metropolis University, an imposing and grand series of buildings placed rather incongruously in the middle of the urban sprawl. A large crowd files in through the doors, and we cut to inside and a huge lecture hall, packed to the rafters.

LOIS: (voice-over) Dr. Vale was his usual charming self.

We see Dr. Emmet Vale. He's middle-aged, rake-thin, pale, and with an intensity of expression that's both disconcerting and slightly askew. He stalks the stage as he talks.

VALE: Humanity, ladies and gentlemen, is weak. Deny us our technological advances and we suffer. Strip us of our garments and we shiver and freeze. Cut us...

He takes out a small blade and makes an incision in a fingertip, then adjusts a small camera on his lectern so that a zoomed-in image of the blood welling up from his finger is displayed to all. There is a murmur amongst the crowd at this behaviour.

VALE: ...and we bleed. But it is *precisely* these weaknesses that have driven us since we first clambered down from the treetops to drive ourselves forward. We are beholden to our limitations, for they define our goals, do they not?

He presses the button on his presentation clicker and the image behind him changes to one of Superman, pictured as he was in Superman Returns, lowering Kitty's car down to the ground. As Vale goes through the following speech, he clicks the pointer and the picture changes, always to show Superman doing something astonishing.

VALE: Look at him. What do you see? A hero? Do you know what I see? I see the first. The advance guard. The scout. He claims his planet was destroyed at his birth. He gives us the

co-ordinates of some space debris. And we sympathise, with our soft human hearts, because who doesn't love the story of the orphan abandoned on the doorstep? And look, isn't he great, he catches aeroplanes that fall from the sky and poses for pictures at baseball grounds. And not once do we think - what if suddenly this *Superman*, this *God*, decided he didn't *like* us anymore? Or what if a few more of his old friends from the neighbourhood showed up? We are meant to believe he vanished for five years to visit a planet he already *knew* was destroyed? No. No, I don't *think* so.

We cut to the crowd. Most of them look disinterested and sceptical in the extreme.

VALE: A wise woman once wrote an article called *Why The World Doesn't Need A Superman*.

Hearing this, Lois looks up. She sees more than a few people in the crowd turn their heads to stare at her. She colours, but refuses to shrink from their gazes, and instead glares defiantly at Vale, who continues talking, oblivious to her hostility.

Vale's voice fades a little as we move to the side of the lecture hall, and someone standing in the shadows of a doorway there; he sports a heavy coat, a thick blonde mane of hair, and the cruellest eyes imaginable. Lex Luthor is watching proceedings with great interest.

LOIS: (voice-over) Usual Vale nonsense about alien invasion fleets from Krypton, please please don't let the government cut my funding for my incredibly irresponsible weapons program, et cetera et cetera. I met Clark outside and we were coming back to the office, chatting a little I guess...

We cut back to our earlier shot of the young couple walking alongside each other down the Metropolis street and see Lois' idea of 'chatting a little'...

LOIS: ...*still* won't tell me anything about this undercover assignment of his. Then of course we had the 'what's wrong with you' conversation. Which never fails to make me turn cartwheels of joy. I'm trying to plan my kids' fifth birthday party, which - let me tell you right now - makes the Hanging Gardens of Babylon look like a school science project, and *he's* on my case about my moods. Moods! If he can't tell when something is wrong, then why should I tell him if there *is* something, even if there isn't?

The man behind her is hurrying desperately to keep up. Whilst Lois has no trouble barging through the Metropolis masses, her companion simply can't seem to project a physical presence, and as such suffers a constant barrage of people walking into him or through him. This is made worse by the fact that he seems to feel compelled to apologise for each and every collision, despite the fact that none of the collisions are his fault, and that no-one cares.

His name, needless to say, is Clark Kent.

CLARK: Gee Lois, can you slow down a little? Sorry ma'am, my fault entirely...Lois?
Lois spins around.

LOIS: Clark we were due back twenty minutes ago! If you'd stop apologising and get a move on I'd be ordering Jimmy to get me a coffee by now!

CLARK: I don't see what the rus-oof..terribly so...

He's about to say 'sorry' when we - and Clark - see that he's impacted one of the men striding toward the bank. We see the barrel of a gun sticking out of a coat for a single half-second. Clark's eyes widen, but in another instant the men are gone, swept further into the crowd and getting closer to the bank by the second.

We cut back to the psychiatrist's couch. This time it's Clark sitting there. He looks a

little uncomfortable, if not on the epic scales of Lois. Dr. Reed smiles at him engagingly, and he smiles back, pushing his glasses back a little up his nose.

DR. REED: If you'd be more comfortable lying down, Mr. Kent, feel free to do that.

CLARK: Uh...I'm fine sitting, thank you ma'am.

DR. REED: Ma'am? *(she smiles)* Dr. Reed will be fine.

CLARK: Dr. Reed.

DR. REED: Actually, you can call me Vanessa. I think we can risk that, hmm?

She winks at him conspiratorially. He seems a little nonplussed by this, and simply nods.

DR. REED: So Mr. Kent....Clark...?...(seeing him nod, she smiles and continues)...Clark, I'm just here to get to know the staff. We'll start by talking about your day, if that's okay. Can you tell me about it?

CLARK: Uh, gee, I guess so. I wasn't able to attend Dr. Vale's lecture due to some personal business elsewhere-

We see a quick flash of Superman arriving just in time to stabilise a derailing train in spectacular fashion and set it back on the tracks, repairing them with pinpoint accuracy using his heat-vision. Passengers cheer him from the windows.

CLARK: *(voice-over)* ...I did manage to catch up to Lois after it had ended.

We cut back to the Metropolis street, and Clark looking back at the group of would-be bank robbers.

LOIS: Next time, barge back. C'mon Clark you're like, what, two hundred pounds and I've seen *ballerinas* with more stopping power.

CLARK: Uh, Lois...you go on ahead. I've got...something to do.

LOIS: What?

CLARK: ...I help out at a homeless shelter a few afternoons a week.

We cut to Dr. Reed. She seems genuinely impressed.

DR. REED: You do? That's tremendous.

Clark grins, a little embarrassed. We cut immediately back to Lois, who gives a different reaction...

LOIS: What is it, community service? Speeding ticket? *(off his reaction)* No, I guess not.

CLARK: See you back at the office.

He's impatient to go, but Lois just won't let him.

LOIS: Have you forgotten that Perry, wonderful Perry White our glorious editor, has added a psychiatrist to his staff after we got sued for the sub-editor's four stress-induced stomach ulcers, and it's our turn to sit in some darkened room whilst some college grad with perfect nails and a pencil dissects our lives for her own sick pleasure?

We cut to Dr. Reed and Lois. Lois is staring at her coolly, looking pleased with herself.

DR. REED: You have quite a memory, Miss Lane.

LOIS: No, I just really liked that little speech.

DR. REED: Do you still believe it's accurate?

LOIS: No, not at all.

DR. REED: That's good.

LOIS: I have some nail repair cream in my desk. You're welcome to borrow it.

We go back to the Metropolis street. Clark is now desperate to get away to deal with the impending bank robbery, but Lois won't let him and won't take her eyes off him. He seeks inspiration and his eyes flit upward, to the top of a nearby building, where a large billboard is free-standing.

Back to the office, with Dr. Reed and Clark.

DR. REED: The general impression I get of Clark Kent, from speaking to your colleagues prior to meeting you, is that you're...how can I put this...not a risk taker.

Back to the Metropolis street. Clark narrows his eyes at the billboard far above, and we see an almost imperceptible shimmering in the air - heat vision. One of the supports of the billboard smokes and bursts into flame, and the giant advertisement swings free.

CLARK: Lois! The billboard!

She spins, sees the billboard...and as soon as she does, time slows down to a crawl. We see each individual strand of Lois' hair move as her head turns. We see everyone looking up...and away from Clark.

And we see Clark Kent for who he really is. With no hint of slowness about his movements, he turns, and speeds through the suddenly static crowded Metropolis street, weaving between people and vehicles with incredible speed, heading away from the falling billboard, toward the four men who have fanned out and are even now striding (albeit in super slow-motion) through the doors of the Metropolis Bank...

We see the mouths of the people open in large O's of shock as the billboard begins to fall, heading directly down for the crowded street below, its shadow of impact growing larger by the moment, at least thirty people contained in that shadow...

With an incredibly fast blur of movement - even in this super-slow world - Clark reaches the four bank robbers and they are tied together securely with one of the crowd-control rope barriers bank queues use in the blink of an eye.

We see him stop for one moment to look back down the avenue at the falling billboard. He seems to judge the situation in an instant, before ripping open his shirt and tie to reveal the classic red and blue suit underneath. With another indiscernible blur of movement his Clark Kent clothes are bundled tightly under his arm. He takes aim, and throws the bundle high...high...incredibly high into the sky, before taking off like a rocket for the falling billboard.

Under it, the people have just realised they are about to be crushed. It's less than twenty feet from the ground now and falling. We see almost-frozen people screaming what they think is to be the last scream of their lives...

...and with a massive, stirring blast of the classic 'Superman' theme, time goes back to normal...just in time for Superman to swoop in, scoop up the billboard, and fly it majestically back to the rooftop from whence it came. The crowds below go wild. He waves down at them, smiling, before settling the billboard carefully down and repairing its damaged strut with a further blast of heat vision.

Then, with a final wave to his adoring public, he launches himself into the azure Metropolis sky. We follow him as he speeds upward a few hundred feet, until we realise he's zeroing in on a falling bundle. He catches it, and in a blur of mid-air motion he's Clark Kent again. We see him look down and we zoom in, in a simulation of his incredible vision, on Lois far below, whose head is just beginning to turn...

...again, time slows down from our perspective, as Superman goes into a nosedive of incredible speed, zooming down hundreds of feet, threading back through the crowds and coming to halt just behind Lois.

Time resumes. Lois looks back at Clark...and beyond Clark, for in a line behind him a massive gust of wind (created by the speed of his descent) has just, from everyone's perspective, blown up out of nowhere. Newspapers, magazines, and a few skirts are blown

upwards, but no-one is hurt.

We cut back to Clark and Dr. Reed.

CLARK: I guess I like to play it safe, yes.

Back to the street.

LOIS: Did you see that?

CLARK: Freak mini-tornado...?

LOIS: I meant Superman! Did you see him just save everyone?!

CLARK: I guess so.

LOIS: You *guess* so?! God, Clark...c'mon!

She grabs him and drags him forward.

CLARK: Where are we going?

LOIS: To interview shellshocked survivors! It's not like a better story is going to fall into our laps today, Clark!

We zoom down the avenue to the Metropolis bank, where security guards are standing, baffled and speechless, around a roped-up bunch of would-be bank robbers, extremely confused by this turn of events.

CLARK: I guess you're right, Lois.

Back to Dr. Reed. She looks over at her patient, and as we cut to what she sees the screen splits into two, with Clark to the left and Lois to the right. During the following we will be flitting back and forth between Clark and Lois' sessions with Dr. Reed.

DR. REED: I'll tell you what I think of you, from first impressions.

CLARK: Okay. LOIS: Oh, goody, would you?

DR. REED: Clark, you're a handsome, intelligent, successful man in the prime of his life, and yet you act like a man who wants nothing more than to run and hide. Why? I understand you recently completed a five-year sabbatical to see the world. When I mentioned this to some of your workmates, at least four of them expressed surprise. When I pressed, they admitted they *hadn't noticed you'd gone*. No-one I asked could tell me much about you bar your name, and that you were useful if they fell behind on a typing deadline. None of them knew when your birthday was or whether you were married or single. Does what I'm saying surprise you?

We see this register on Clark. We, of course, know the reasons for his mild-mannered reporter facade, but hearing the bald truth about how little impact he has made to the people he works with clearly hurts Clark. We see him absorb it, before finally - sadly - shaking his head.

DR. REED: ...and that's what I think.

She's talking to Lois, and has just completed her assessment. Lois looks at her guardedly.

LOIS: That's it?

DR. REED: Yes.

LOIS: Oh thank God, I thought it was going to be *so* much worse than that! (*adding quickly*) And don't ask me why, okay?

DR. REED: So can I expect you to think about what we've talked about here today?

CLARK: (*melancholy*) Yes. LOIS: (*insincerely*) Yes.

DR. REED: Thank you for your time. Please send in my next appointment.

We see Lois fairly jump out of her seat with relief, give a cursory nod to Dr. Reed and fling open the door to the room. Clark is standing outside, waiting to go in.

LOIS: (*thumps him on the shoulder*) Nothing to worry about, Clark.

Clark smiles at her, a little puzzled, and goes in, closing the door. We stay on it and a second later it opens and Clark exits, having just completed his session. He looks over the workfloor, at the little pockets of people talking and laughing together, and suddenly he looks very alone and very small, and despite Lois' cheerful prediction, definitely somewhat worried...

Act I, Scene II

A different world to the one we just left - Smallville, Kansas. No skyscrapers, no avenues thronged with people and heaving with humanity; just a few homesteads dotted about the picturebook rural landscape...and one in particular, with smoke curling from the chimney, and a mailbox bearing the name 'Kent', catches our attention.

We go inside, to a mother and son preparing a meal. It's a mundane thing, and no words are exchanged, but we can tell from the little smiles the mother gives the son when he can't see them that she's enjoying just having him here more than she can say. Though she thinks him unaware, when her back is turned he sends her a look that tells us he knows, and he's glad to be here.

MARTHA: I saw that thing you did over Nicaragua.

CLARK: Did you?

MARTHA: Channel 8 did a nice story on it. You looked so handsome in the interview after.

CLARK: *(embarrassed)* Mom...parts of me were still on *fire* during that interview.

MARTHA: *(waving a hand dismissively)* Always too critical of yourself.

Clark's eyes alight on something rather incongruous sitting on the kitchen sideboard; a water pistol, bright and neon-coloured. He picks it up and examines it, bemused. Martha sees this and chuckles.

MARTHA: I see you've found Clark's gun.

CLARK: Clark? You mean...Pete's son, Clark?

MARTHA: Yes. Pete Ross, in case you've forgotten, which is possible considering how long it's been since you saw him. He drops little Clark over now and again; I'm his favourite babysitter, apparently, if you can believe that.

CLARK: *(softly)* I can believe it.

They potter around for a few more seconds. We can see Martha narrowing her eyes at Clark, who's not doing anything odd insofar as we can tell.

MARTHA: So are you going to tell me what's bothering you, or do I have to wait until I find you sitting on the roof at 4am like when you were thirteen?

We see Clark open his mouth defensively, but in the face of Martha's calm authority his resolve to deny what she's saying evaporates, and he simply shrugs and sits down at the dining table. His mother sits beside him.

CLARK: Who am I, Mom?

MARTHA: Okay...what colour kryptonite caused *this* effect?

CLARK: Mom...

MARTHA: Oh son, I'm teasing. But I can see this is bothering you, so I'm sorry. I guess I don't understand the question. You're Clark Jerome Kent. You're my son.

CLARK: I'm not Superman?

MARTHA: *(shaking her head)* What brought this on?

CLARK: Please, Mom...

MARTHA: No, not to me. He's a part of you.

CLARK: Superman...Superman can go anywhere in the world and the people cheer him, Mom. Everyone knows him, and most...love him, I guess, in their way. But *me*...Clark Kent...I went into *space* for *five years*, Mom, and the world pined for Superman, cried out for him, and not *one* person noticed Clark Kent was gone.

MARTHA: *(angrily)* Not *one*?

CLARK: Mom, I didn't mean...I know it was hard for you.

MARTHA: It wasn't just hard, Clark. *Hard* was when you moved to Metropolis and I knew, heck, if I phoned you and wanted you here I might have to wait a whole three minutes for you to be landing on my porch. So imagine how a mother feels when her son leaves for somewhere a million billion bajillion God only knows miles from her. It's more than *hard*.

CLARK: I'm sorry.

MARTHA: (*sighing*) I know, son. But tell me something - when you first realised what you were here to do, why did you create Superman? Why didn't you just fly around as Clark Kent?

CLARK: To protect you.

MARTHA: Really? Or was it because you knew someone like Superman would never get to live a normal life, and you just weren't willing to give that up?

Clark catches sight of himself in an old mirror, and stares at his reflection; a normal man, wearing normal clothes. He takes off his glasses, his shoulders straighten, his gaze hardens, his jaw sets, and suddenly he's Superman.

His mother comes to stand beside him, hugging his arm. Gently, she takes his glasses from his hand and puts them back onto his face. The transformation begins to reverse himself - and Martha reaches out and thumps him on the chest.

CLARK: Ow, Mom! What was that for?

MARTHA: It's about time you realised that just because Clark Kent can't catch bullets with his teeth, that doesn't mean he has to be a walkover!

Clark glances back at his reflection. He straightens up again, seeming almost nervous, and tries to imbue the confidence and poise of his Superman stance in his Clark Kent clothes. Martha smiles.

MARTHA: You wanted a chance at a real life, son. So start taking it.

And as his mother's advice sinks in, a slow smile starts to break out across Clark's face...

Act I, Scene III

Clark enters the Daily Planet building. Lois is about ten feet in front of him. A man walks past her, engrossed in a newspaper, and slams into Clark hard enough for Lois to turn at the sound of the impact.

MAN: Hey, would ya watch where you're going? Idiot.

Lois rolls her eyes. The man begins to walk away - and a hand shoots out and grabs him by the coat. He's spun around to face Clark - a Clark Kent we've never seen before, wearing an expression that says plainly; don't mess with me.

CLARK: Would I watch where I'm going? Newsflash, pal; if you paid the tiniest bit of attention to where you were going you wouldn't have slammed into me. Now I think an apology is in order.

We move out from the close-up on the two men and discover that everyone - EVERYONE - in the Planet lobby has stopped walking in sheer astonishment at the scene unfolding.

Lois' mouth drops open.

MAN: Uh...s-sorry, Clark. I guess you're right.

CLARK: *(beaming)* Apology accepted, friend. Good day to you.

He lets go of the man's coat and pats him comradely on the shoulder. The man flinches slightly, then realises he's now the centre of much bemusement from the masses. He tries to regain his dignity as much as possible before striding out.

Lois enters the crowded elevator, still looking stunned. Clark steps inside. We see a small circle forming around him as people edge out of his way.

CLARK: *(cheerfully)* Morning Lois.

LOIS: Yeah.

CLARK: Ready for another day?

LOIS: Yeah.

CLARK: Are you...feeling okay?

LOIS: Yeah.

We cut to later in the day, at a Planet round-table staff meeting being chaired by Perry White, editor-in-chief of the Planet, experienced newshound and affable curmudgeon at-large. He stalks around the table, punctuating his words with gestures as he talks.

PERRY: ...we've got a city of a million stories out there! Scoops, exposes, exclusives about the stars', what they're eating, what they're not eating, who they're dating, who they're divorcing, what crazy religion they've invented this week...

He lets this sink in.

PERRY: None of these stories sell papers, people! They may shift a few copies of some downmarket rag, but we are the *Daily Planet*, and our readers out there want one thing above all else - can one of you geniuses tell me what that is, or do I have to go put on my firing hat?

Everyone looks to the heavens. They know what's coming.

CLARK: Superman-

PERRY: Right, Kent! Right!

CLARK: Actually Chief, I wasn't finished.

Perry stops mid-gesture. Someone further down the table chokes on their water. Tedious as Perry White's regular Superman-related rants are, it is generally recognised to be extremely unwise, bordering on downright suicidal, to interrupt him in the middle of one.

PERRY: You weren't *what*?

CLARK: (*calmly*) Basing our entire newspaper around every Superman-related story we can draw out...well, what do we do if the world doesn't have a big disaster every few days? And how long before the public start saying - yeah yeah, Superman saves people, big deal. As you say, we're the biggest newspaper in the world. We need to broaden our horizons a little and act like it.

PERRY: You mean cover that Gotham freak too? Forget it-

CLARK: Chief, there's more to the world than superheroes. What about human-interest stories, stories about real people living real lives, people of courage, pride, strength, dignity? People just like the readers you're trying to reach.

Everyone around the table, who until now had been following the exchange like a tennis crowd, holds their breath and watches Perry White as he digests what Clark is saying. We see a tiny frown melt away on his forehead before his face clears and he says-

PERRY: Kent, you're out of your mind! People don't want stories about bozos like them! They want romance, escapism! Go get me more Superman stories, all of you! Now! Out!

Everyone files out, a little dejected. Clark gets a pat on the back from a male colleague.

COLLEAGUE: Nice try, Clark. That took some nerve.

CLARK: Thanks.

He reaches his desk and sits down. A shadow falls over him. It's Lois.

CLARK: Hey, Lois.

LOIS: What's up with you today, Clark? Get stuck in a lift with Tony Robbins?

CLARK: Decided to give up ballet.

Lois smiles. Clark smiles too - he's clearly delighted with how well this new image is going, and for just a fleeting moment, in the way Lois looks at him, there's the slightest hint that for the first time, she sees a kernel of potential in Clark Kent.

The moment ends with the arrival of Richard White. He's slightly out of breath, and from the way Lois tenses up at the second she sees him, we can tell all is not as well between the two as it could be.

RICHARD: Hey, honey.

LOIS: Hey.

They move in for a kiss and, in a scene reminiscent of Clark's reunion with Lois in Superman Returns, for an awkward moment they're caught between stools - proper kiss or cheek kiss or just plain hug. Eventually they settle for cheek kiss. Clark diplomatically engrosses himself in his computer screen, but we can see he's noted and filed the moment.

LOIS: How's the secret assignment that you don't trust me enough to tell me about going?

RICHARD: (*mock-cheerfully, clearly tired of arguing about this*) Very well, thank you. Sorry I missed the meeting. The usual 'get me Superman' rant?

LOIS: (*looking at Clark*) Mostly.

RICHARD: Can we...talk?

LOIS: Yeah. I'm feeling particularly *mood-free* today, why not?

She walks off. Richard glances at Clark, embarrassed. There is an awkward pause.

RICHARD: They say they're from Venus. Nah. Too close by. Krypton sounds more like it. (*he's about to move off, but then he pauses*) Wonder if *he* ever has this trouble.

There is a clear note of resentment in how he says the word 'he' that leaves us in little doubt as to whom he's referring to. He walks off in pursuit of Lois.

CLARK: (*softly*) You have no idea.

A fist comes toward Clark, out of nowhere. He has ample time to spin in his chair and

grab it mid-flight, before realising that its owner is a rather nonplussed Jimmy Olsen, who has just come perilously close to spilling a cup of steaming coffee over himself.

JIMMY: Um...ow?

CLARK: *(releasing him)* Sorry Jimmy. Startled me.

JIMMY: Just coming to give you your favourite coffee and a well-deserved thump on the shoulder - I heard about your little tete-a-tete with the guy in the lobby, and now standing up to Perry in mid-rant? CK you have *officially* moved up my heroes list.

CLARK: *(taking the coffee cup from Jimmy)* Really? To what number?

JIMMY: *(diplomatically)* You've moved up, and that's the main thing.

Jimmy continues talking, but in the corner of Clark's vision he sees Richard and Lois enter an unoccupied office. They begin talking animatedly, before Richard goes and pulls the blinds, cutting off the view...for about a second, as Clark's X-Ray vision cuts through the barrier effortlessly. We close in on the side of Clark's face as his enhanced hearing zeroes in on the conversation...

RICHARD: ...I'd appreciate it if you didn't broadcast our problems to your workmates, Lois.

LOIS: So we have *problems* now?

RICHARD: I think arguing every other day for the past few months means we do, yes!

LOIS: You disappear for days at a time. When you're here, you're spend more time locked in Perry's room than you do with me. And the other day, I get a call from a woman asking for *John*.

RICHARD: You know I can't talk about that, Lois. It's for your own good.

LOIS: Oh, cut the crap.

We move to inside the office. The two lovers are standing facing one other. Richard reaches out his hand to touch her arm and there's the slightest recoil from Lois. His hand curls away at this and he points a finger at her instead.

RICHARD: *There*. Right there is what I'm talking about. More than five years together and the woman I love, the woman I'm engaged to, starts *flinching* when I try to touch her. And we don't have problems, Lois?

LOIS: So you're not using some undercover assignment as an excuse to...

She trails off, unable to say it.

RICHARD: No. No Lois, I'm not. So you're not still in love with Superman?

There is a massive howl from outside the office.

JIMMY: OWWWWWWGOD!

Curious despite herself, Lois goes to the door and opens it. Jimmy is frantically dabbing at a wet coffee-coloured patch on his shirt just above the navel. Clark, the coffee-spitter, is trying to help him and apologise at the same time. Lois frowns at the scene for a second before closing the door again.

LOIS: That is the most *ridiculous* thing I've ever heard-

RICHARD: Prove it. Let's set a date. It's been over two years since I gave you that ring, Lois. I'd like to make good on it before my son sees too many more birthdays.

Conflicting emotions rage inside Lois, guilt clearly one of them. Richard White is a good man, a decent man, and she knows deep in her heart that every single one of the arguments recently has been her fault.

LOIS: Okay. Let's talk about a date.

RICHARD: You...you mean it?

We cut to outside the office. Clark, who has just heard this, stares through the walls to where Lois stands, looking heartbroken.

LOIS: I mean it. We'll announce it at Jason's party, tonight.

Richard hugs her. But as we move around the couple we go from his face, a beacon of happiness, to hers - and she's wearing the exact same expression we just saw on Clark Kent.

Back outside, Jimmy is still ruefully dabbing at his shirt.

JIMMY: And my day started off so well.

CLARK: Yeah. Mine too.

Act I, Scene IV

It is approaching dusk, and somewhere off the East Coast, a small fishing boat is preparing to come into port. The crew are working their positions, the captain at the wheel.

CAPTAIN: Brewster! Get those nets in or I'll use that bald head of yours as a new lure!
We see a bald-headed man working to haul in the nets.

BREWSTER: Yes, captain.

The ship pulls up alongside its moorings and the crew disembark and stand on the pier. They separate into two groups, with the captain and crew standing apart from Brewster, who's walking away clutching a large, bulging burlap sack.

CAPTAIN: Sure you won't reconsider, Zorba? We got kinda used to having you around.

The crew chime their agreements. We see 'Brewster' for the first time - it's a face that can occasionally, as now, look quite normal, but we're more accustomed to seeing those eyes deaden, the lips thin and drawn, and the gaze cruel and piercing. It's the face of a fanatic, of a madman...of Lex Luthor.

LUTHOR: Let me recap. I promised you all half a million dollars, each, for four months service on your ship and salvage of any of the...objects...you came across in the course of your fishing, gentlemen.

He hefts the sack, and one of the 'objects' sticks out a little. It's crystalline and green-hued, and there are no prizes for guessing what it is.

LUTHOR: I trust you've all kept quiet about my identity as I specified?

The crew all answer enthusiastically in the affirmative.

CREWMEMBER: For half a million big ones? Hell, I'd have sown my mouth shut if you'd asked.

Everyone laughs, including Luthor, but his laughter is odd, the laughter of someone who knows, on an intellectual level, what laughter is, what it sounds like, when it should be used, but not ever someone who has found something to be genuinely amusing.

LUTHOR: Your severance package awaits you back on the ship, gentlemen, in what used - laughably - to be termed my cabin. I thank you. It's been...educational, in a horrifically banal sort of way.

He bids them farewell and continues along the dock, the bag heavy on his shoulders. We see the crew hesitate for about a quarter of a second before charging back to the ship, vaulting from the pier to the deck, squabbling amongst themselves a little, before eventually vanishing into the ship's depths.

Lex stops, apparently exhausted by the weight of the sack. A young couple with the look of tourists are leaning against the pier beside where he stops. They look at him and take him for a fisherman. The man shyly approaches him with a small, inexpensive-looking camera.

MAN: Hey, do you mind...?

LUTHOR: Not at all, friend.

The couple get into position with their backs facing the harbour, catching the sun's red rays.

WOMAN: I'm telling you, there's not enough light. And that damn flash still won't work.

Hearing this, Luthor smiles, and worryingly, this one looks close to being genuine.

LUTHOR: Madam, that's not going to be a problem.

We see the photograph he takes a second later; the couple, screaming in fear as behind them the fishing boat Luthor just disembarked from is annihilated in a massive explosion, raining debris down all over the dock.

The couple are cowering and whimpering in fear, the woman crying against the man's chest as he hugs her tightly, terrified.

Luthor taps him on the shoulder and gives him back the camera. The man accepts it numbly.

LUTHOR: Don't let that put you off travelling by boat. Statistically speaking, they're still a pretty safe way to travel.

And with that, he turns and walks away.

Act I, Scene V

The roof of the Daily Planet building. Lois walks from the access elevator onto the surface of the roof, looking up at the early evening sky of Metropolis. She seems nervous, as if she's not sure she's doing the right thing.

LOIS: (*softly*) I need to talk to you. I hope you can hear me.

She waits. Around ten seconds pass. We can see she feels somewhat foolish doing this. She sighs, and sits down on a ledge adjacent to the revolving Daily Planet globe.

LOIS: Yeah, Lois. Ask a superhero to take time out from saving people to talk to you about your latest crisis. *That'll* get you some karma.

SUPERMAN: I told you. I'm always around.

She turns. He's hovering about twenty feet above her head and descending slowly, until he lands a few feet away. They regard each other for a second, two people with a wealth of history between them, trying as ever to find the best way to speak to one another.

LOIS: I need to tell you something. It's about Jason.

SUPERMAN: Lois...I know. Somehow when you told me - I can't explain, I know I was in some sort of coma, but I heard everything. And I think...I think it might have saved my life, hearing it. So thank you.

LOIS: (*slightly stunned*) Well...I'm glad. But to be honest, I knew that you knew - I've seen you, outside his window sometimes, at night.

SUPERMAN: You have? I thought I was keeping pretty low-profile. (*he indicates his outfit somewhat sheepishly*) It's only really something I can do at night.

LOIS: You were low-profile, don't worry. I just...I can always see you.

She blushes slightly at the admission, and moves on quickly before either can dwell on what subtext it might contain.

LOIS: The thing about Jason is...he wasn't born until after you left. Almost *two years* after you left.. I must have carried him for that long.

SUPERMAN: Okay. Maybe that's normal for Kryptonian gestation. Or half-Kryptonian, anyway. I'm sorry, I don't know. If Luthor hadn't stolen the crystals from my home, I could have asked...but that's gone now.

LOIS: Gone?

We see a quick flash of Superman in the Fortress of Solitude. He tries to piece together crystals from the exotic control panel. No matter what he does, the mysterious technology behind the Fortress remains silent. We see Superman calling-

SUPERMAN: Father...

-but no answer comes, and he stands there, alone.

We go back to the rooftop.

LOIS: What I'm trying to tell you...is that because he wasn't born until that time-
Realisation begins to dawn on Superman's face as to what Lois is trying to say.

SUPERMAN: You thought he was Richard's.

LOIS: ...and Richard still does.

SUPERMAN: Oh.

LOIS: Oh?

SUPERMAN: What do you want me to say, Lois? You called me here to tell me this. You must have done that for a reason.

LOIS: I'm getting married to Richard.

SUPERMAN: (*sounding a little bitter*) That's standard procedure for an engaged couple,

isn't it?

LOIS: I mean we're actually getting married. We've set a date. It's next week.

SUPERMAN: Why waste time?

LOIS: Would you stop this?

SUPERMAN: Stop what, Lois? What's next? You've hired a wedding carriage but the driver cancelled, so I could I fly it to the church on time? Am I missing anything, or did you call me here to try to make me feel as bad as possible?

LOIS: Do you love me?

SUPERMAN: If you can't tell, Lois, then why should I tell you?

LOIS: What are you, Supergirl now?

Despite the extreme tension and high emotions, the pair actually share a small, if painful, smile at this weak joke.

LOIS: I can't tell Richard about Jason. Not yet. Not...not for It would destroy him to know.

SUPERMAN: You may be right, Lois. But what happens if he's told he can't have a puppy and he puts a hole through the wall in a tantrum?

LOIS: What did you do?

SUPERMAN: Me?

LOIS: Yes, you. You were a kid once, or at least I assume you were-

SUPERMAN: I was a child. When I landed on Earth, I was a baby.

Lois frowns at this - we sense she's never really thought about this before, but now that Superman has admitted the circumstances of his arrival, her keen journalistic mind is working the scenario through and examining it from all angles.

LOIS: Someone took care of you?

SUPERMAN: *(looking distinctly uncomfortable)* Yes. I was...found. Taken in.

LOIS: By who?

SUPERMAN: *(in a 'drop it' tone)* By my mother and father, Lois.

LOIS: *(sensing that's all she's going to get)* Okay. So how did they cope with a superpowered son? They must have been a lot stronger than I am.

SUPERMAN: You're strong, Lois. Stronger than you realise.

LOIS: *(angrily)* Don't give me that motivational speaker crap, okay? My son throws pianos like they're dinky toys before he's five years old. How the hell is he going to hide that from the world? And if the world finds out, what then? Is he gonna be expected to go into the family business and juggle airplanes and have bullets bounce off his chest? Over my dead body. He is my *son*.

SUPERMAN: He's our son.

LOIS: Listen to me-

SUPERMAN: No Lois, you listen to *me* now, OK? I accept the fact that Richard has been Jason's father and it looks like he's going to go on being his father. It hurts like you wouldn't believe, but I accept it. But Jason *needs* me, if not as a father...then as a guide. Lois, he *killed a man* when he threw that piano.

LOIS: *(unable to look at him, upset)* I know.

SUPERMAN: We can't let that happen again, Lois. I'm the *only* person on this planet who's capable of training him in how to control his powers, control them so completely he can conceal who he really is, so well that he can walk and live and love amongst humans and have a normal life, and no-one around him will know what he can do.

LOIS: What makes you think you can do that?

Superman doesn't answer for a moment, and Lois' face clears as the truth dawns on her.

LOIS: Because *you* did it.

Superman cocks his head to the side. We zoom in a little on his ear and we hear calls for help coming from an unidentified source.

SUPERMAN: I have to go.

He lifts off and begins to soar through the Metropolis sky, but we don't follow him - instead, we stay on the rooftop with Lois. She's staring after him, after Superman, the world's most famous icon.

LOIS: (*wonderingly*) You walk among us...

Act I, Scene VI

A high-rise office building, somewhere in America. We cut inside to an extremely high-tech laboratory. Computer displays of complex data flash past.

Into this technological world steps Dr. Emmet Vale, looking as if he was born here and quite frankly as if he hasn't quite gotten out as much as he should have done since. Two hapless lab assistants trail in his wake.

VALE: Must my life's work be defined by the whimsy of morons who wouldn't know progress if it teleported into their offices? And where the hell is Corben? He should be here!

ASSISTANT: Corben's gone to a meeting. Sir, without government funding or approval, we're looking at a complete shutdown of the project. There's really nothing we can do.

VALE: (*darkly*) I have another backer interested in this project.

ASSISTANT #2: But Dr. Vale...the government would never allow-

VALE: This work is too important! Don't you realise that? My God, after eight months working with me can't you see that? The future of humanity on this planet *depends* on the work we're doing here!

The two assistants exchange an uncomfortable look with each other. We get the impression they've heard this kind of talk from Vale before, and it never gets any easier to hear with time.

ASSISTANT #2: Dr. Vale, with all due respect...

LUTHOR: Why is it that when the phrase *with all due respect* is used, you can bet something disrespectful in the extreme will follow?

He's walking across the lab, carrying a large briefcase with him.

ASSISTANT: This...*this* is your other backer? Lex Luthor? Dr. Vale, are you insane?

ASSISTANT #2: I have to agree. There are other ways to raise the money, sir. There has to be.

VALE: It may surprise both of you to learn that I am a very wealthy man. I'm not bringing Mr. Luthor aboard for his deep pockets. He has something much more valuable to offer.

Sensing his cue, Lex places the briefcase down on a nearby table. We see up from the case as the faces of the four men crowd around. Luthor opens the case and a greenish glow suffuses upward, bathing them in an eerie jade light.

ASSISTANT: What is it?

VALE: (*reverentially*) Fuel...

Luthor shuts the case.

ASSISTANT #2: Fuel? But the prototypes aren't anything more than schematics...

VALE: Yes. I'm afraid an apology is in order.

He presses a button on a control panel adjacent and, like something from a Bond movie, the lab remodels itself, hidden panels and displays rotating into view. A large sarcophagus-esque casket rises slowly from the centre of the room in a rattle and hiss of machinery, coolant clouds billowing out from all sides.

Vale and Luthor look thrilled. The assistants are horrified.

The sarcophagus tilts upward, until its occupant is revealed through the toughened glass front panel; it's the rough shape and size of a man, but is clearly a machine; a horrifically strong, solid looking machine, not smooth and sleek but squat, powerful, almost cruel, with an approximation of a face and two horizontal slits in place of eyes.

VALE: I call him Metallo.

LUTHOR: (*wincing*) You're still on Metallo? I was hoping you'd get bored of it and move

on.

VALE: It's retro. I like it.

ASSISTANT: (*spluttering with rage*) Sir!! I cannot believe you went ahead with construction - the weapon systems alone...this is *illegal!*

ASSISTANT #2: Sir, I'm begging you. Stop this.

VALE: (*to Luthor*) Ready?

LUTHOR: Oh yes, Doctor...

He puts the Kryptonite-filled briefcase on a nearby panel, takes out a single green brick of the substance, and gives it to Vale. Vale walks over to the sarcophagus containing Metallo and presses a certain sequence on a keypad embedded within; the glass panel slides back, and Metallo's chest opens and unfurls in a complicated series of metallic whirrs and whooshes. There is a cavity within exactly the size of the Kryptonite brick; clearly the alien rock has been cut to fit neatly inside.

Vale is about to place the brick inside when, from behind him, one of the lab assistants reaches inside his white lab coat and produces a handgun.

ASSISTANT: Hold it right there!

The other assistant does the same thing, pointing his gun at Lex Luthor.

ASSISTANT #2: You too, Luthor.

Vale turns. He looks at the two men, betrayed.

VALE: You're not even scientists, are you?

ASSISTANT: We're CIA, *Doctor Vale*. Did you really think your little psychosis and private experiments would go unnoticed? We've been tracking you for months.

ASSISTANT #2: I can't believe we netted Lex Luthor. Talk about your bonuses. You dropped off the grid after that stunt you pulled in the Atlantic so well we were beginning to think we'd never catch you. What'd you do, spend four months at the bottom of a hole?

LUTHOR: (*breezily*) I went fishing. But my hat's off to you gentlemen and your undoubted talents. Although it seems, sadly, that powers of observation aren't amongst them.

ASSISTANT: Meaning?

Vale steps to the side, allowing the CIA agents - and us - a better look at Metallo. And it's now, with the light illuminating it a little better, that we see that Metallo's chest cavity ALREADY contains one of the Kryptonite power cells.

VALE: Activate.

And at his single word, those sinister horizontal slits for eyes glow green with life, and from deep within the machine a deep, harsh, artificial and pitiless voice emanates.

METALLO: Threats detected.

The agents, panicking, begin retreating backwards, firing at the machine. The bullets ping harmlessly off the thick armour. Metallo frees himself of the sarcophagus with frightening speed for something that seems so cumbersome.

ASSISTANT #2: Vale! Call it off! Switch it off NOW-

That is as far as he gets. With one spring and leap we might think impossible for a machine, Metallo is upon him. We hear a snap and see his body hit the ground, limp as a puppet with snipped strings.

Metallo's head turns to look at the second agent. His eyes wide as saucers, he gibbers in fear.

ASSISTANT: I surrender! I surrender!

He throws his pistol to the floor, where it clatters along until it comes to a rest by

Metallo's foot. The robot tilts its head to the side, almost inquisitively.

LUTHOR: Metallo! Activate *enemy surrender* protocol.

For one glorious moment, the agent looks relieved. And then his eyes widen again-

ASSISTANT: AAAAGHHH!

We cut to Vale and to Lex Luthor before the agent meets his fate, but we do hear another loud snap from the direction of the doomed man. Luthor smiles. Vale looks away.

And as quickly as it began, the lab is silent again. Metallo stands motionless, his hands at his sides. His thick metallic fingers, which at first look simply coloured red, betray their true origins as a drop of blood forms from a single digit and plummets to the floor.

LUTHOR: I see the surrender protocols are working perfectly, Doctor.

Vale remains turned away from the scene. His hands grip the console and we can see his knuckles are white, so hard is he gripping, almost as if he fears collapsing. He is breathing deeply. He remains this way until Luthor appears at his side.

LUTHOR: It had to be done, Doctor. They sought to close you down. Close us down. We can't let that happen.

VALE: (*bitterly*) Did you enjoy it?

LUTHOR: We don't have time for weakness, Doctor.

He turns Vale around and speaks to him passionately, articulately, as only Lex Luthor can; every word of the following is a lie, we know instinctively that Luthor doesn't believe a single word of it, but it's oh so plausible and sincere...

LUTHOR: You and I know the truth about what *he* represents. We have to send a message to his kind, that this planet can fight back. If we don't, more like him will come, and he and they will stop this *charade* of helping us. They will come to rule us, Doctor.

VALE: I know. I know.

Luthor walks to the imposing, silent statue of Metallo; he barely measures up to the robot's midriff, but somehow he projects just as menacing a presence as his burly bodyguard.

LUTHOR: With this...with your creation, we can finally target the scout they sent to Earth. The first of the invasion force. Tonight, Doctor, we will *destroy* Superman.

Act I, Scene VII

Lois Lane and Richard White's residence. A little boy's birthday party, and all of the chaos that entails, is in full swing. A clown is making balloon animals. One little boy, no more than four or so, takes one long look up at his painted face and bursts into extremely loud sobs. His mother swoops and picks him up moments later. The other kids watch. Some giggle. We see large platters of kiddy-friendly snacks and cakes being gobbled down by legions of little tykes.

Through this menagerie Lois Lane wanders, smiling absent-mindedly at the children in her way. She taps another mother on the arm. We don't hear her question, only see the other mother think for a moment before shaking her head no and shrugging her shoulders apologetically. Lois moves on, and this sequence repeats itself with a few other mothers and one father she encounters.

Eventually she encounters Richard, exiting the kitchen (a room filled mostly with Dads desperately seeking sanctuary and alcohol, by the looks of it). She asks him a question and he considers for a moment, before nodding grimly and leading her upstairs. They leave the noise of the party downstairs behind and enter a room - Jason's room.

They find Jason standing at his window alone, staring out at the Metropolis night.

LOIS: Jason? Jason honey?

She goes to him and he turns, looking up at her with big doleful eyes.

LOIS: Your party's in full swing downstairs, honey. The kids are wondering where you are.

JASON: No they're not. Most of them don't even know me.

RICHARD: Well in that case, we miss you, son. Won't you come down with us? It's almost time for your presents and...well, your Mom and I have a little extra surprise announcement to make.

JASON: Okay.

RICHARD: That's my boy.

Lois looks faintly pained at this tender exchange, all the more so because Richard has such a natural rapport with Jason; he's a natural parent, even if he's not the natural father. That just makes it harder.

JASON: Mom, are you gonna let Clark in?

LOIS: Did the doorbell ring?

The doorbell rings.

RICHARD: *(laughs, ruffles Jason's hair)* How about that? We should let you pick the lottery numbers, kiddo.

JASON: *(confused)* I heard him.

Richard looks at his son, still wearing a bemused 'kids say the darndest things' smile. Lois, however, is clearly a little rattled by Jason's childlike honesty.

LOIS: I'll get the door. You try and get us some peace and quiet downstairs for the presents and the...other surprise.

We cut to Lois approaching her front door.

LOIS: Coming, Clark. *(under her breath)* At least I can rely on you not to surprise me.

She opens the door, to reveal Clark with large present under one arm...and attached to the other, Dr. Vanessa Reed, the blonde psychiatrist from Act I, Scene I Lois so despised.

LOIS: Oh my God.

DR. REED: Good evening.

CLARK: Uh...is there a problem, Lois?

LOIS: *(through gritted teeth)* Problem? No...

Richard appears behind Lois, with Jason in his arms. We see Clark registering this.

CLARK: Hey, birthday boy.

JASON: Hey, uncle Clark.

Clark starts in surprise at the 'uncle' part. Richard grins at Clark and Dr. Reed.

RICHARD: The uncle part was my idea. Hope you don't mind?

CLARK: No. Not at all.

RICHARD: Great. Vanessa, glad you could make it. You didn't sound too hopeful when I invited you.

DR. REED: *(glancing at Clark with a smile)* Changed my mind.

Clark is still somewhat stunned. On the one hand, it hurts to have Jason call him 'uncle' when his actual relationship is much closer, but on the other, he's touched that Richard should make the gesture. It's another reminder of how essentially decent the man is. Lois, meanwhile, has a smile so jaw-straining in its ultra-sincerity that we begin to fear it might cause her permanent muscle damage.

There is an awkward moment as we go beyond the time it should take for someone at the door - namely, Lois - to invite the people outside to come in. Eventually Lois comes to life.

LOIS: Do come in.

Act I, Scene VIII

The party. Richard White straightens himself nervously - it's time. He displaces the clown from the rudimentary stage - the clown visibly sighs with relief - and, with Jason in his arms and Lois by the hand, stands before the assembled crowd of parents and tykes.

DR. REED: *(faintly alarmed)* So many children...

Perry White and Jimmy Olsen appear beside Clark and his date.

PERRY: Clark. Vanessa. *(double take as he realises they are a couple)* Clark...?
Vanessa?

CLARK: Yes, Mr. White?

PERRY: Mmm. Nothing. You look lovely tonight.

CLARK: Thank you.

PERRY: I was talking to -! Ah. I see. Good one, Kent.

JIMMY: *(whispers, to Clark)* I'm just glad he wasn't drinking coffee.

RICHARD: If I could have everyone's attention, please?

He untangles Jason, somewhat reluctantly, from his arms and sets the boy down on the stage. Jason turns away from the eyes of the crowd and practically hugs Richard's leg. Richard laughs a little nervously and bends down to have a quick whispered word with the boy, and eventually succeeds in getting him to at least turn around, though his eyes are still shyly fixed to the floor.

We see Clark watching this simple father-son exchange, a world of hurt lurking behind his eyes, made worse by the fact that he knows what the announcement is concerning - a wedding date for Lois and Richard.

RICHARD: Lois and I have an announcement to make. It's, uh, some might say a little overdue...

And that's when Clark hears the voice.

LUTHOR: *(voice-over)* Superman. I'm now broadcasting on Canines-And-Kryptonians FM, so don't fret about anyone else eavesdropping on this little conversation.

JASON: Superman?

LUTHOR: Well...except for the birthday boy of course.

Clark is close to panic. He begins to scan the building with X-Ray vision, sweeping his head around to search from basement to skylight, trying to source any possible location of danger.

RICHARD: *(confused)* Superman couldn't make it tonight, son.

LUTHOR: He doesn't know yet, I'll bet. You're probably right. Too young, bless him.

JASON: Daddy, who's the man talking?

RICHARD: I don't hear anyone, son.

LUTHOR: I knew you'd be there tonight, Superman. And it got to me; no-one knows when your birthday is, do they? How sad. So I've got you a little something. It should be arriving about now...

A low humming sound begins to build from somewhere outside the house. Clark and Jason hear it first, but after a second or two we see that the remainder of the crowd are beginning to hear it, too. Everyone begins to look concerned.

DR. REED: Clark, do you hea-

She turns. Clark is gone. She frowns.

One side of the house disintegrates.

Thankfully, since everyone had assembled around the makeshift stage, it is at the far

edge of the house. Nonetheless, everyone is thrown off their feet by the force of the blast. The children (and quite a few of the parents) scream for all they are worth. Richard instinctively cradles Lois and Jason close to him. Wood and debris rains down.

Through the smoke, a shadow forms. The terrified parents and children, huddling together in the smoke, cringe back as it approaches, especially as with each step its silhouette grows more and more horrifying and the noise of servomotors and machinery increases.

LOIS: Oh my God...

Metallo steps from the wreckage and surveys its handiwork. Its massive head swivels until it settles on the huddled group of Richard, Lois...and Jason. We see horror in Lois' eyes as she realises this thing, whatever it is, has taken special notice of her son.

METALLO: Secondary target, identified.

And before it can get any further, a red and blue blur appears from nowhere and piledrives into the monster's stomach, sending it high into the Metropolis night. Superman stands there, his fist still extended from the punch. Swinging it hurt him, but he doesn't show it to the people behind him as he turns.

SUPERMAN: Go. All of you. I'll handle this.

With a spring, he's airborne and gone in an instant, leaving only the former partygoers behind. Amazingly, the kids all begin to cheer wildly.

KID: That was way better than that lame clown!!

KID #2: Jas, your parties rock.

JASON: Uh...thanks.

Richard begins to carry Jason out of what remains of the Lane household. Lois hurries along beside him.

RICHARD: Secondary target?

LOIS: What was that thing...

Richard doesn't reply, but he bears a strangely haunted expression on his face...

We cut to the skies above. Superman comes to a halt in mid-air, scanning the surrounding space with every one of his super-attuned senses for any trace of the creature he just uppercuted to the lower fringes of the planet's atmosphere.

In the distance, he sees something moving. Moving closer. Closing at an incredible rate. It's Metallo, stretched horizontal, his metallic arms outstretched before him in a grotesque parody of Superman's own flying style. His thin, inhuman eye slots glow a deep shade of jade. His legs, we now see, contain powerful rockets which are now firing, giving him the power of flight.

Superman narrows his eyes. He means business. He makes no effort to get out of the way, and instead simply pulls his fist back for another earth-shattering blow...and blinks. We see his eyes defocus for an instant and he seems to lose concentration. We intercut between this and the green glow emanating from within Metallo. The Kryptonite is having its desired effect.

It's all the opening Metallo needs. He rips into Superman at close to the speed of sound, sending the Man of Steel sprawling, arcing down gracelessly toward the waters of Metropolis harbour, before Superman is able to adjust his fall and crash-land on the surface of the suspension bridge spanning the river.

He gets to his feet. Cars and lorries and Metropolis evening traffic screech to a halt around him, causing instant logjam chaos all along the bridge's span. Horns blare. Metallo

lands not ten feet away from Superman and cocks his head to the side, as if studying him.

METALLO: Primary target, identified. Kryptonian invasion force leader.

SUPERMAN: What are you?

Metallo springs to close the distance between itself and Superman. He is extraordinarily fast, but nowhere near on the same level of speed as his opponent. Superman steps backward to be out of range when Metallo lands...but the Kryptonite effect takes hold again, and his movements become sluggish. From seeming at first to move in slow-motion, Metallo's movements abruptly speed up to the point where he is able to land one, two, three, four solid punches to Superman's chest and head with one fist, whilst holding Superman in place with the other.

People begin to get out of their cars to watch. A mother covers her young daughter's eyes, but the child pushes her mother's hand away. A grown man looks away, unable to bear it.

Elsewhere, someone else is enjoying himself immensely. Lex Luthor sits in a huge throne-like chair in the middle of the laboratory, his feet up on the desk. We can see Emmet Vale behind him, looking altogether more tense about proceedings.

They are watching the scene unfold through an enormous video screen, a camera feed linked to Metallo's optical sensors. Luthor is performing his own shadow-boxing routine in time with Metallo; landing every punch, his eyes gleaming with maniacal satisfaction.

Back on the bridge. Superman lies prone on the surface, Metallo towering over him.

LUTHOR: DO IT! KILL HIM! KILL HIM NOW ...!

Act I, Scene IX

A news helicopter tears through the skies of Metropolis, its destination in plain sight in the distance; the suspension bridge on which the battle between Superman and Metallo is now taking place. Onboard the helicopter, a young female reporter is talking breathlessly into camera. Her name is Tania Moon. During the following scene we will periodically - and very quickly - cut back to Tania and her news crew on the helicopter as they (rather suicidally) try to get as close to the action as possible.

TANIA: ...you join me live on WKTM as we close in on Ground Zero between Superman and an as-yet-unidentified assailant!

Superman launches himself backward, fully forty feet or so, out of the range of the would-be lethal blow Metallo lands, the force of which sends serious shivers up and down the spine of the bridge.

Metallo tries to spring forward to close the distance...but is stopped mid-spring by Superman, who remains where he is and utilises his super-breath to hold the robot in place. He increases the force and modifies the direction of his mini-hurricane slightly, blowing Metallo back against a support strut of the bridge. Cracks spread rapidly upward. The bridge shudders mightily; it's now close to all-out collapse.

VALE: He's keeping Metallo out of range. The Kryptonite won't have-

LUTHOR: (furiously) I can see what he's doing!

He speaks into some sort of communication device - we see a light flashing on the side of Metallo's head in synch with it.

LUTHOR: New primary target: the bridge. Destroy it.

METALLO: New target, identified.

He immediately sets about his task with terrifying efficiency, launching himself at the second nearby support strut...

SUPERMAN: NO!

...and ploughing clean through it. The entire centre section of the bridge, already hanging by little more than a thread, breaks its suspension bonds and begins to twist and warp and fall toward the freezing ocean below. Hundreds of stranded motorists inside and outside their vehicles scream their lungs out.

TANIA: He's taken out the bridge! Oh my God, those people! (to cameraman) Are you getting this?

Superman goes into action. He shoots upward, gathering cables as they fall from their moorings above, gathering as many as he can before they go taut as the bridge below falls. It slows the bridge's descent and allows him, descending as rapidly as he dares, to suck in a truly HUGE, a truly EPIC breath and release it into the harbour below.

LUTHOR: (mercilessly) Re-engage.

METALLO: Affirmative.

Metallo launches himself at Superman, who has no choice but to remain fixed in place as the huge metal behemoth looms large over him. The water has begun to freeze over, and a skin of ice is forming...Metallo strikes Superman a cruel blow to the head, and Superman reels in pain, but somehow keeps holding on to the cables, keeps that super-breath coming...taking another punch, and another...

TANIA: He can't take this much longer!

...the cables snap, unable to take the weight, and the bridge plummets - but not far, and the ice beneath the span...it cracks, and it groans, but it holds.

LUTHOR: Bravo. Now kill him.

Metallo begins to pound Superman, keeping him close with one hand all the time, not letting Superman get respite from the Kryptonite glowing within him. Even Superman can't withstand this punishment for much longer; he manages to land a few counter-blows here and there, but Metallo shrugs them off, and they're getting weaker by the second.

He's dying when he hears the voice. His father's voice.

JOR-EL: Son. There is much left for you to accomplish. Find the strength within you.

SUPERMAN: (weakly) Father...

Metallo swings his fist around for another blow, and Superman manages to catch it, intercept it, with his own hand. Metallo, however, is clearly the stronger, and pushes Superman's hand relentlessly back...

And a bright light slices through the night, illuminating Superman from behind, bathing him in a warm yellow glow, dazzling us and - through his viewscreen - a disbelieving Lex Luthor.

TANIA: I can't believe it! I...those...yes, those are the full-spectrum light emitters the police told us didn't exist! They're using them to help him!

We cut to far below, and on the waterfront Metropolis Police vans are pulling up, screeching to a halt. The police officers spilling out are helping to assemble and power what look like giant spotlights, one of which has already been activated. A second THRUMMS into life and sweeps across the sky to embrace Superman.

And incredibly, Metallo's fist begins to be pushed back. Superman closes his eyes, seems to take a deep breath, and when he opens those cold blue eyes of his again, it's clear that the Man of Steel is about to live up to his name once again...

SUPERMAN: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAGHHHHH!!!

He shakes free of Metallo with a mighty heave, and with a roar of anger and battle-lust drives his fist into the robot's chest so fast and so hard that he goes clean through the armour.

LUTHOR: (despairing) No...he can't have-

But he has. His hand emerges from deep within Metallo clutching a lump of green rock. Its close contact to Superman is enough to make his skin blister and burn, turning cancerous and black. He grits his teeth against the searing pain and, winding back his arm, hurls the Kryptonite into orbit.

TANIA: YES! YES! YES YES YES YES!!!! HOME RUN!!! HOME GODDAMN RUN!!!!

Metallo is still hovering in mid-air. His leg-rockets, however, are spluttering and dying, and the green glow in his eyes is blinking rapidly.

SUPERMAN: Who built you?

His leg-rockets die. Metallo reaches out an arm, and Superman catches him, arresting his fall.

SUPERMAN: Who built you?

METALLO: (in Luthor's voice) This isn't over. This is only the beginning.

Metallo explodes.

Blown downward by the force of the blast, Superman impacts the ice below, hard, forming an impact crater beneath him.. He lies there for a long few moments before coming to, slowly, shaking his head. We stay close on him and hear a faint sound that sounds like helicopters...

...it is helicopters. Police helicopters are landing on the ice-sheet Superman created. Officers spill out onto the ice, herding up the shaken and injured motorists, no doubt aware that the ice will not stay stable for long. One helicopter touches down within twenty feet of Superman, who's still somewhat dazed from the ordeal. He stares at the hand which held the Kryptonite - only for a second - and flexes its fingers. As we watch, the hand cleanses itself of the Kryptonite's poisonous influence, the skin unblemishing and turning a healthy hue once again.

Superman gets to his feet and is greeted, not by the police he might have expected to be first onto the scene, but by Tania Moon, intrepid television reporter.

TANIA: Superman!! That was amazing! You just saved hundreds of people from death and stopped an...um...mutant robot killing machine! How do you feel?

She thrusts the microphone into his face. He looks down at it, somewhat bemused.

SUPERMAN: Uh. Great?

TANIA: What do you pl...oh what the hell-

And before he can stop her, she throws herself at him and kisses him hungrily, completely overcome.

We cut to the Daily Planet offices, which has seemingly become a home for Jason Birthday Party refugees. Superman's kiss with Tania (which he's hurriedly trying to break away from, and finding it was only slightly more difficult to disentangle himself from Metallo) fills the TV screen in the newsroom. Everyone is watching. Lois is not pleased.

JIMMY: Who'd be a superhero?

LOIS: Shut up, Jimmy.

JIMMY: Shutting up, Lois.

On the screen, Superman disentangles himself from Tania Moon and flies off to help the evacuation teams get people to safety. Tania turns to the camera, her hair slightly unkempt, and begins talking. We don't hear her words, however. Our attention is focussed on Richard and Lois. Lois' face betrays her emotions; her awe of Superman and her surge of jealousy upon seeing him in the clinch with Tania Moon. Richard is blind to neither. He visibly composes himself before reaching out his arm to put it around her shoulders.

She flinches.

Not a word is exchanged, but we can see the silent despair in his eyes...

Act I, Scene X

A fairly upmarket apartment block in Metropolis. A taxi disgorges Vanessa Reed, dressed smartly as always and clutching a bottle of wine. We see her entering the lobby, going up in the lift, getting out at a certain floor and walking along to door numbered 42. She knocks, then quickly adjusts her appearance, appearing a little nervous.

The door opens.

CLARK: Vanessa?

DR. REED: Clark. *(she hefts the bottle of wine)* We, uh, we never really did get started last night thanks to...you know, the killer robot almost killing us all. Which, I'll admit, is not something too many people can say about their first date.

CLARK: Yeah...

DR. REED: I was just wondering - I probably should have called - but with you covering Superman rebuilding the bridge all day, I thought you might not want to go out and maybe we could just stay in and-

She stops. A small head has just poked into view. It belongs to Jason White.

JASON: Hey.

DR. REED: Uh. Hey.

JASON: You're the head doctor with a K-Mart diploma and bad cute lickles, aren't you?

LOIS: *(from inside)* JASON!!!

Jason's head vanishes. There is the low murmuring of Lois telling him off in the background. Clark and Dr. Reed stare at each other for a long moment.

CLARK: Their house *is* kinda destroyed, so I offered...

DR. REED: *(wan smile)* Of course you did. Well here. Keep it on ice for some other time. *She hands him the bottle. As their hands touch, she lingers with her fingers an instant longer than necessary, giving him a clear message. He registers it, but cannot bring himself to say anything more than-*

CLARK: Some other time.

VANESSA: Goodbye, Clark.

CLARK: Yeah.

He closes the door and turns into his apartment. It's equipped with a small balcony, two comfortable-looking sofas, a modestly large television, a compact but efficient kitchen and overall is actually pretty spacious, and as we'd expect for Clark Kent, neat to the point of painfulness.

Jason and Lois are sitting on one of the sofas. Lois wears an innocent expression that would put a cherub to shame.

LOIS: Jason? Do you have something to say?

JASON: *(mumbling)* ...sorry for being rude to your guests Uncle Clark. We really appreciate you letting us stay Uncle Clark.

LOIS: Good boy. And it's *cuticles*, not *cute lickles*. Now go unpack the rest of your stuff into the guest room.

Jason scampers off obediently.

LOIS: Your bottle's getting warm.

CLARK: Huh? Oh.

He puts the bottle of wine in the refrigerator and begins to tidy up the kitchen area (it's already pretty tidy, we note).

LOIS: We really do appreciate this, you know. It should only be for a few days, until my

Dad gets back from duty and swings me a temporary apartment.

CLARK: It's no problem, Lois.

There is a small noise from behind him. It's a small noise to us, but naturally not to Clark. He turns.

CLARK: Lois?

LOIS: I'm OK...I...

She's crying, softly and silently. She walks into the kitchen area to stand with him, casting a glance over her shoulder in the direction of the spare bedroom that Jason disappeared into.

LOIS: I don't want him to see this. Don't you tell him, Clark Kent.

CLARK: I won't.

He reaches out a hand, hesitates, then places it on her shoulder. She glances up at him and smiles a little, grateful for the contact and the concern.

LOIS: Bet you never thought you'd see the day the Ice Queen melted, huh?

CLARK: Lois, you've been through a lot. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

LOIS: I've had what you could call an eventful life, Clark, what with superheroes and supervillains and kidnappings and the like. And I dealt. Not to bang my own drum, but I dealt damn well. But I can't see my son in danger without going to pieces. I love him. If anything happened to him, I'd...

She takes a deep, steadying breath, still staring at the doorway to the spare room. Clark's hand squeezes her shoulder as delicately as he dares. Naturally enough, he empathises with her very easily on this particular topic.

CLARK: He misses his father.

Lois starts at this, before realising what Clark (supposedly) is referring to.

LOIS: Richard...yes (*she sighs*) he's gone back undercover on this big story of his. I never figured him for a workaholic, especially at a time like this, but there's something about this story he just won't let go of.

CLARK: He wouldn't go without a good reason. (*Quietly, with a hint of pain*) He's a good man.

LOIS: We were going to announce a date last night. For the wedding. Before *he* showed up.

CLARK: (*outwardly surprised, again proving himself to be an excellent actor*) Oh. Well, now that he's been destroyed, you can always-

LOIS: I wasn't talking about the robot, Clark.

And with that, she walks away, leaving Clark - and us - in little doubt as to whom she WAS referring to. Jason emerges from the spare room and goes over to his mother, giving her a hug.

JASON: Mom...where's Dad?

LOIS: Working, honey. Daddy's working.

Act I, Scene XI

Vale's laboratory. He's working at consoles frantically and has his back turned to us, but he turns at the sound of a door opening and closing behind him.

VALE: It's about time you showed up!

We switch to see who he's talking to. The man standing before us is Richard White.

RICHARD: Sorry, Professor.

VALE: They will be coming. We need to pull back to the contingency site. Hurry!

He begins to gather materials. Richard does likewise.

RICHARD: But your machine...your *Metallo*...it was destroyed. It's over, Professor.

VALE: We've suffered a setback. Nothing more. My designs simply need improving. We're going to rebuild, stronger, smarter, *better* than before!

RICHARD: Then let's get started.

Act I, Scene XII

That night, Clark's apartment. Jason sleeps peacefully in the spare bed. Lois lies awake next to him, obviously troubled. Finally she sighs and gets out of bed, throwing on a dressing-gown over her nightdress. She rummages in her handbag and produces a packet of cigarettes, before staring at them for a few seconds. She curses softly and throws them against a wall, stalking out of the room. We see her emerge a few seconds later onto the small balcony Clark's apartment possesses. It has a grand view of the city, especially at night. Preoccupied as she is even Lois appreciates it.

LOIS: Not bad, Kent.

She stares at the twilight city for a few moments more, before tilting her head upwards and addressing the stars.

LOIS: I got rid of the cigarettes. So you can't do your normal showboating entrance this time.

We cut to a few rooms away. Clark is sleeping (we should notice, sleeping in precisely the same foetal position as Jason favours). We close in on him, closer and closer until we seem to travel inside his head...

We find ourselves on a different world; a crystalline world, hued in whites and sapphires, much like the appearance of Superman's Fortress of Solitude, writ large - writ global, in fact. It's barren by Earth standards, a little stark perhaps, but the sheer magnitude and majesty of the scene should be enough to inspire awe.

Far below, on the endless crystalline surface, is a small dot. We swoop down at dizzying speed toward it until it expands into the shape of a man - Superman, in fact, but clad not in his usual red and blue, clad rather in an all-over black suit with a silver 'S' shield emblazoned across the chest.

He is no less awestruck than we are.

SUPERMAN: *(whispers)* Krypton...

And a voice answers him.

JOR-EL: Magnificent, isn't it?

Superman turns toward the voice, hope and fear and longing in his eyes all at once. And sure enough, standing there, impossibly, is the image of his long-dead father.

SUPERMAN: Father?

JOR-EL: *(nods)* Son.

Superman stands frozen to the spot. We can tell he wants, more than anything, to go and embrace his father, but something holds him back, some doubt. Jor-El regards his son with paternal pride evident.

SUPERMAN: Is this real?

JOR-EL: Humankind would call it a dream. For us, it is a little more than that.

SUPERMAN: I heard you speak to me when-

JOR-EL: -you were in battle. Yes.

SUPERMAN: You told me I had much left to accomplish.

JOR-EL: You must rediscover your heritage, my son.

SUPERMAN: The crystals are gone. I don't know-

JOR-EL: Yes, you do. You know. And you must retrieve them, son. Until you do, you will not be complete. You know this.

SUPERMAN: I can't go back there. Please, Father...

He walks towards Jor-El, his arms outstretched pleadingly, but finds only emptiness. His

father and Krypton are gone, and once again, he stands alone in the void...and that's when he hears Lois' words relayed to him, crystal clear. His eyes open.

LOIS: (voice-over) Come on. I know you're up there.

Clark sighs. We get the impression he doesn't get that much uninterrupted sleep. He pads softly over to his wardrobe, clad only in boxers, and opens the wardrobe door. A row of immaculate Clark Kent issue suits is revealed. Clark reaches a little further and pulls a small lever...and the wardrobe back slides to the left, revealing an altogether different row of suits.

LOIS: (voice-over) Oh okay. Be like that.

Clark smiles wryly, almost sharing a joke with us; Lois Lane is an infuriating woman, definitely possessed of the qualities to drive people crazy at times, and we sense he's not totally immune to that; we also sense it's one of the things he loves most about her.

We cut back to Lois, still staring up at the sky.

LOIS: I'd better see reports of some big disaster happening tonight on the news tomorrow.

She turns and walks away from the balcony, heading back for the room. We see a shape gracefully descend from the skies and touchdown on the balcony behind her.

SUPERMAN: You called?

Lois jumps a little, turns, and glowers at Superman for a second, before running to join him on the balcony and closing the sliding doors to the apartment. The balcony is only just big enough to accommodate two people, and even in doing so forces them to stand rather close to each other...

LOIS: Yes! Sssh. You'll wake Clark.

Superman raises an 'oh, really?' eyebrow at this comment.

LOIS: Oh get *serious*. He offered to put us up for a few nights after the house was half-destroyed.

SUPERMAN: That's nice of him. He sounds like-

LOIS: -he is. Oh God he is. He's the nicest. Look, I didn't call you here to sing an ode of praise to Clark Kent.

SUPERMAN: Why did you?

LOIS: First off, what the hell *was* that thing last night?

SUPERMAN: I don't know. I'm looking into it. I know one thing - Luthor is involved.

LOIS: He's back? (*thinking it over*) Of course he's back. Who else?

Superman notices the worry in her eyes. He stands beside her and puts out a hand to her shoulder, in much the same way as Richard White would do.

She doesn't flinch.

SUPERMAN: I'll deal with Luthor. I promise you that. I was hoping maybe the *Planet* could-

LOIS: Of course. I'll pass on anything we dig up.

SUPERMAN: Thank you. So is this an interview...?

LOIS: (*sighs*) No. Just journalistic curiosity forced me to ask, I guess. Now I wish I hadn't. But enough about that...we need to talk. About Jason.

SUPERMAN: Ah.

LOIS: Don't you go monosyllabic on me now, buster, or so help me I'll...

SUPERMAN: (*holding up his hands in an 'I surrender' gesture*) Okay. Okay, Lois. I won't. Shoot.

LOIS: You were right. I can't expect him to go unnoticed by Richard or the world if I just let him muddle on. And I'm not ready for that. Not yet.

Superman, wisely, simply nods.

LOIS: I want you...I want you to guide him. I'll arrange for you two to meet - God knows you're his hero, so he'll jump at the chance-

SUPERMAN: Hey. Hold up. I'm his hero?

LOIS: *(laughs)* That's *got* to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard you say. Of *course* you're his hero. You're *everyone's* hero, you dope.

SUPERMAN: *(softly)* I'm not everyone's father.

He stares into the apartment and his X-Ray vision peels back the walls separating him from his sleeping son. Lois follows his gaze and realises what he's doing. She opens her mouth...then closes it, and just lets him look. He seems close to tears for a moment, before steadying himself visibly. Lois respectfully says nothing about this momentary slip.

LOIS: So what do you say?

SUPERMAN: I think...I say thank you. And yes. Of course, yes.

LOIS: Great. Shall we say tomorrow after school? Assuming we can shake Clark, that is.

Superman, excited and deliriously happy, seems about to say something unwise along the lines of 'oh I don't think THAT will be a problem!', but he stops himself just in time and simply nods as sagely as he can. Lois stares at him, and smiles, unable to stop herself.

LOIS: See you tomorrow.

SUPERMAN: You will. Good night, Lois.

And with that, he takes off and we follow him upward. He's not going anywhere in particular, just expending some of the happiness welling in him; we follow him upward until he reaches Earth's atmosphere. He's wearing the biggest smile you could ever wish to see. He rockets around the planet for a few thousand miles until, around its curvature, the Sun emerges, as the line of night passes over the surface far below.

Superman lets the light of a breaking day wash over him. For this glorious moment, he is truly happy.

Act I, Scene XIII

A car pulls up to an abandoned warehouse somewhere in Metropolis Harbour. Out scramble Professor Vale and Richard White.

VALE: Our new associate is waiting inside. I think you'll enjoy meeting him.

RICHARD: I'm sure I will.

As they move into the building, Richard takes out a small device from his pocket and thumbs a control on its side. A red light begins to flash on the device. He drops it surreptitiously into a dark corner adjacent to the warehouse's entrance when Vale's attention is distracted.

We see Vale and Richard inside the warehouse which, unlike its rather basic outward appearance, is actually fitted identically to the high-tech laboratory we saw Vale occupy previously...right down to the central attraction; a Metallo model, resplendent in its sarcophagus, dominating the interior of the warehouse. Richard finds himself dumbstruck just looking at it.

RICHARD: Why the hell didn't you *tell* me you had a working model, Professor? Let alone *two*...

VALE: I was protecting you, dear boy. Need to know basis. And I was right - would you believe two of my most trusted assistants turned out to be traitors!

LUTHOR: Oh, I think he might.

Richard White freezes at the sound of that voice. Lex Luthor, who has just appeared from between two consoles like a genie from a bottle, regards him with all the calmness one would expect from him.

RICHARD: Luthor...

VALE: You two know each other?

LUTHOR: That depends, Professor. I *don't* know John Corben, exploitative tabloid hack who swears he hates Superman. But I *do* know Richard White, nephew of Perry White, editor of the *Daily Planet* and, last I checked, fiancé of Miss Lois Lane and good acquaintance of...

VALE: ...Superman. (*furiously*) You lying son of a-

RICHARD: Save it. You're a joke, Vale. Superman is no more of a threat to this planet than I am. You're a laughing stock. But when we got evidence you were building a weapon, you graduated from loser to terrorist.

LUTHOR: (*mildly*) I must say, Emmet, your security checks on your employees leave something to be desired. Who's your gardener, J Edgar Hoover?

RICHARD: (*ignoring him*) You two are going to prison for a very long time.

LUTHOR: Perhaps you're referring to the signal beacon you activated prior to entering this facility. Ah, I can see by that look on your face I'm right. Happily though, that won't be an issue.

The confident look on Richard White's face begins to melt away. Luthor's smile only gets broader in response. We notice that Lex has been steadily moving to put himself between Richard and the only exit.

VALE: (*scornfully*) A signal beacon? Please. This facility is undetectable and invisible to the most advanced technology on the planet.

Luthor produces a small but sufficiently lethal handgun and levels it at Richard White's stomach.

LUTHOR: No-one knows you're here, Richard. I think it's time we had a little talk.

RICHARD: We've got nothing to talk about, Luthor.

Lex's smile takes on a cruel twist. He stares directly at Richard White, and we can see that cold, calculating brain working overtime behind those dead eyes. He walks closer and leans toward him, almost conspiratorially.

LUTHOR: *(softly)* You would be *amazed* at how wrong you are.

END OF ACT ONE

Act II, Scene I

The American Midwest, deep in Tornado Alley. Dark clouds stretch from horizon to horizon. Lightning forks and stabs down to the terrain below, and the thunder is long past the 'rumbling' stage and well into 'ominous claps of doom' territory. In an unidentified city below, we see inhabitants scrambling desperately for their cars, their homes, their shelters, anywhere but out in the open before-

-before a funnel wisps almost lazily down from the clouds. Its thin, tapering end wheels back and forth until it finds a companion wisp coming upwards from the ground. At the instant they touch, the tornado billows outward, increasing in girth and ferocity with terrifying speed. The citizens of the city below redouble their efforts to get to safety, but how much good shelter will do them seems less than certain; the terrible vortex locks itself on a collision course for the city centre. We see brief shots of families huddling in terror inside their homes, awaiting their fates.

We cut to the Daily Planet offices. As seems to be traditional in times of crisis, large portions of the newsroom staff have gathered in front of the plasma screen to watch the events unfold. We pick out Lois, Jimmy, Richard and Perry White.

ANCHOR: ...we've just heard meteorologists are fearing the worst; that this could be an F5 tornado, the strongest tornado in the world...

RICHARD: My God. There'll be nothing left.

JIMMY: *(confidently)* You watch. Superman's just waiting for the right moment.

We cut to the Daily Planet elevator. Clark Kent is within. He taps his watch, frowns, and presses a button on the side of the elevator wall with a large telephone icon fixed on it.

CLARK: Say, fellas, I don't mean to be a bother but it's been almost two hours now...?

ELEVATOR GUY: *(crackling voice through speaker, sounding distracted)* Yeah, we hear ya. We'll have you out of there in a jiffy, guy. Shame you're missing the tornado...

CLARK: Uh. Tornado?

We cut to the elevator repair office, located somewhere in the Daily Planet building. Two jaded looking repairmen with comfortable beer bellies recline comfortably in their chairs, watching the same live pictures the Daily Planet staff are viewing; the F5 tornado bearing down inexorably on the helpless Midwestern city. We see a computer screen displaying the elevators in the building, with elevator 4 marked as 'Inoperative; Floor 2'.

Hearing the tail end of Clark's 'uh, tornado?', one of the repairman rolls his eyes and presses the intercom button, clearly irked at having to converse when such compelling television is on offer.

ELEVATOR GUY: Yeah. Some big twister is about to tear through Wisconsin. Like I say, shame you had to be stuck in there...

Beep. Elevator 4 is now at Floor 3.

Floor 4. Floor 5. Floor 6...

ELEVATOR GUY: What the hell...?

We go back to the elevator. Clark is hovering four feet off the surface of the elevator, pressing his hands upward into the elevator's ceiling. From outside, we see the elevator rocketing up the shaft. Clark waits until it reaches the 25th floor, then brings it to a halt. He presses the intercom button.

CLARK: I think it's working now. Thanks.

He pulls open the doors. We see he's on the roof. One classic tug of the Clark Kent shirt

and tie later, and he's sprinting across the Planet's rooftop. From ground-level on the streets of Metropolis below we see a blue streak bullet across the sky, moving purposefully westward...

Back in the Daily Planet newsroom. Jimmy's confident smile has all but evaporated. Everyone is leaning forward, glued to the screen.

LOIS: *(whispers)* Where are you?

We go to the scene in Wisconsin, to an outlying suburb of the city about to be hit by the immense funnel of wind. This will be the first street destroyed, and the inhabitants cower in their homes with that awful knowledge etched in their minds, awaiting the freight-train roar around them to intensify and all that they have built be torn down around them...

...and that's when he arrives, accompanied by his usual triumphant theme. Superman goes straight into the throat of the beast. The 300mph winds do their best to throw him off course, but nothing can deviate him.

ANCHOR: He's here! Oh thank God! Thank God!

LOIS: *(sighs)* Thank God.

JIMMY: *(as nonchalantly as he can manage)* You were worried? Tchaw.

Superman goes against the tornado's rotation, increasing his speed to thousands of miles per hour, zooming up and down the perimeter of the twister. The counter-rotation seems to throw the tornado into a seizure; for a moment it wavers crazily, looking for all the world like an angered beast, and then it begins to slow in its advance...Superman slows along with it, judging his speed perfectly so that he comes to a gentle halt just as the funnel dissipates with a final whisper into the muggy early evening air.

A wild cheer breaks out in the newsroom. We close in on Lois and Richard, standing together. Her eyes are fixed on the television screen. His eyes are fixed on her, taking in how flushed she is, how excited by what she's seeing. There is a glow to her, a love, that's heartbreakingly obvious to him.

So enraptured is he in his voyeurism that he starts a little when Perry taps him on the shoulder.

PERRY: A word?

We cut to Perry and Richard entering Perry's office. Perry sits down at his desk. Richard remains standing, casting one final look back into the newsroom. Lois still is watching the television feed.

RICHARD: What is it?

PERRY: I'm going to ask you to volunteer for something. And understand when I say volunteer, I mean it. This isn't going to be easy.

His tone is enough to get Richard's attention. He frowns.

RICHARD: Go on.

PERRY: I have a source, in the CIA. They're investigating the possibility that Dr. Emmet Vale may be doing a little more than talking crazy.

RICHARD: Vale? The guy who hates Superman?

PERRY: That's him. You know him?

RICHARD: *(dryly)* Lois has mentioned him, once or twice.

PERRY: They think he's creating some sort of weapon, and they're worried he may be crazy enough to try to use it - against Superman, or against some other poor sap who he decides has offended him, who knows. They've got guys on the inside.

RICHARD: What do they need a journalist for?

PERRY: They don't. Who says we were gonna tell them? All I know is my source says Vale is desperate that if and when whatever he's planning goes operational, the public hear his side of the story. He's looking for a sympathetic journo to cover his work. I'm looking for someone on the inside from the *Planet* to break the biggest story since Luthor went AWOL.

RICHARD: Me.

PERRY: Not quite.

He pushes a file across the desk. Richard picks it up and opens it. It contains various identity papers.

PERRY: Meet John Corben. Tabloid hack and all-round disreputable character. Seven years ago he tried to mock up a big story to get his big break and was busted by - you guessed it - Superman. Vale will love it. My only worry is, can you play the role of someone with a grudge against Superman?

We stay on Richard White's face for a little longer than is strictly necessary. It seems to take him a little too long to compose himself enough to answer his uncle.

RICHARD: I'll give it a shot...

Act II, Scene II

A shot rings out. We see the gun belongs to Lex Luthor, and the bullet...passed a hair's breadth from Richard White's left ear. We also see Richard White is brandishing a piece of machinery in his hand.

LUTHOR: Put it down. I'm an excellent marksman, Mr White. Shall I prove it?

Richard obliges him reluctantly, never taking his eyes off Luthor the entire time. Luthor walks slowly up to him and suddenly, savagely, brings the barrel of the gun down on the crown of Richard's head, knocking him unconscious.

Our world goes black. After a few seconds, sounds and images swim into vision. We make out the blurred outline of Lex Luthor before us as we see through Richard's eyes. He's tied to what looks like a large diagnostic chair in the middle of the laboratory. His eyes bore into Luthor's with murderous venom. We see Dr. Vale working controls a little in the background. He doesn't look completely happy with events.

LUTHOR: Welcome back. I must say Richie, and correct me if I'm wrong here, but I'm sensing such *hostility* from you. What have I done to deserve that, I wonder?

RICHARD: How about leaving Lois and Jason to drown?

LUTHOR: (*airily*) Oh yes. That.

RICHARD: (*ignoring Luthor, desperately*) Dr. Vale...I know what you believe about Superman. You're wrong. I know you can't see that you're wrong, but I've worked with you for the last three months...you're not an evil man. Is this - is *he* - the sort of man you want to be working with?

Vale stops his manipulations of the controls. He stares down at his hands for a moment. Luthor notes this coolly.

LUTHOR: Dr. Vale is a visionary, and yet he finds himself persecuted at every turn. The government threatens him, hounds him, is even now out there looking for him. I alone saw the truth, I alone offered support.

VALE: Don't patronise me, Luthor. I'm well aware of the sort of man you are.

Hope flares in Richard's eyes. Luthor frowns, not best pleased. We see his hand slip around the gun, in readiness.

VALE: Unfortunately, Mr. White, in order to achieve a greater good we are forced sometimes to work with those we would normally disassociate ourselves from.

RICHARD: Nobody can be forced to do something that goes against what they *know* is right...!

At this, Luthor smiles broadly and pats the machinery surrounding Richard.

LUTHOR: Interesting you should say that.

RICHARD: What? What do you-

VALE: (*deeply troubled*) Lex...I'm still not certain about this.

RICHARD: (*now increasingly terrified*) About what?

LUTHOR: Emmet, we discussed this. Our first model was strong, but it was *dumb*. It had no initiative, no intuition, nothing beyond its programming. A simple machine will *always* suffer in a contest against a thinking, breathing, *living* organism. (*he looks at Richard*) To survive, we must...evolve.

Luthor keys a control on a panel to his left. A series of sinister-looking needles descend from all angles around Richard White's body, until they are poised millimetres from his skin. He begins to hyperventilate in fear, his breath coming in gasps, trying not to shake too violently.

RICHARD: What...what are you...*doing*...

LUTHOR: What you're seeing is needles filled with nanomachines, Mr. White. Once injected into your body, within one hour the agonising pain will have subsided. Within three hours you'll be as programmable to us as a computer. If I ordered you to kill Lois Lane, you'd snap her neck in an instant. Within twenty-four hours, you'll be ready to take the next step in human evolution. Start the process, Doctor.

RICHARD: Please...I have a *son*...

LUTHOR: Stop.

He waves a hand at Vale, who obediently - and with a little relief, we note - throws a switch that brings the increasing hum of the machinery to a halt.

Seeing through Richard's eyes again, to the bright lights of the laboratory ceiling far above, we see Lex Luthor come into view. He stares down at us, sadistic pleasure evident.

LUTHOR: Perhaps you're right, Doctor. Perhaps we *should* give Mr. White a chance to help us destroy Superman of his own free will.

RICHARD: (*speaking with difficulty*) And why would I do that?

LUTHOR: Perhaps because you know your darling fiancé will never stop loving him.

Tears leak from the corners of Richard's eyes. He chokes a little as the tears come, but somehow manages to gather himself.

RICHARD: Maybe. But she loves me, too. And she's marrying *me*.

LUTHOR: Out of love, or out of duty? Out of the genuine desire to spend the rest of her days with you, or because you're *such* a nice guy that she just can't bring herself to break your heart? Does she love you, Richard, or does she feel *sorry* for you?

RICHARD: She...loves....me. Do you hear me, you sick bastard? We're getting married. We're going to be a family.

LUTHOR: A family? Are you planning to have a child together?

There is silence. Even Vale looks at Luthor, puzzled.

LUTHOR: One invasion scenario you never envisaged, Doctor. The Kryptonians aren't content with simply supplanting us. They're going to *interbreed* us to extinction. And they've already started.

RICHARD: You're lying. Jason was born long after-

LUTHOR: Dogs give birth in nine weeks. Elephants take up to two years. Kryptonians, as you and the rest of the planet seem to have forgotten, are *aliens*, Mr. White. Oh, do you mean to tell me you didn't *know*? Didn't Lois see fit to tell you, after her darling boy threw a piano onto one of my associates during our boating excursion?

His evil face fills the screen as we look through Richard's eyes once more, even as it blurs. We realise that it's blurring because of the tears that are filling Richard's eyes.

But somehow, once more, this remarkable man shows a strength of character we normally associate with those blessed with superpowers. He fixes Lex with a look that promises revenge.

RICHARD: I don't believe you. And even if I did, even if it was all true, it wouldn't matter. You're *insane*, Luthor. And much as I may sometimes wish he'd never landed on this planet, when he finds you, Superman will-

LUTHOR: (*walking to the switch which controls the machinery*) Wrong, Mr. White. Because if he finds me, Superman's going to have to go through you to get to me. And you're not going to let him.

He throws the switch. Vale looks away, closing his eyes. The screams ring out loud and

long. We cut to outside the warehouse. Not a single sound travels outside its walls.

Act II, Scene III

Rain falls on Metropolis. It's a cloudy and quite miserable morning. Clark Kent is huddled under a large umbrella, standing outside the Daily Planet building. He checks his watch. There's a rumble in the skies overhead. As he stares upward, a brunette appears beside him.

LOIS: Gonna be one of those days.

CLARK: Looks like it.

LOIS: So are you ready?

CLARK: (*gently*) Lois, I've been ready for the last twenty minutes.

LOIS: Are you getting tough on me now too, Smallville?

CLARK: You call that tough?

LOIS: For you, to me? I call that positively battle-hardened. Where's Jimmy?

CLARK: Jimmy's coming?

Jimmy Olsen puffs through the revolving doors of the Planet. He's carrying two heavy bags, one over each shoulder. He looks at Lois with as much rebuke as he can muster (which isn't much).

JIMMY: Geez Ms. Lane, what do you put in these things? Concrete?

LOIS: A good reporter goes prepared.

JIMMY: For what? Bear?

CLARK: Let me help you, Jimmy.

He takes one of the bags from Jimmy and shoulders it with no apparent effort. Lois notices this.

LOIS: Is this the same guy who almost slipped a disc helping me move a cabinet last month?

CLARK: (*easily*) Well, I've been working out.

They walk to the sidewalk and enter a cab already parked there. We cut to a crowded room, filled with television and news cameras and more reporters than you could shake a fuzzy boom-mike at. Clark, Lois and Jimmy step into the room and sit down amongst the throng in three unoccupied seats in the middle of a row. Jimmy knocks against people on his way in with the two shoulder bags and causes some exasperated mutterings and comments to be sent his way.

When he's finally made it, Lois looks across at Jimmy.

LOIS: You're with the photographers, Jimmy.

JIMMY: Oh. Right.

He proceeds to exit the row and annoy everyone again. Clark glances across at Lois, who's trying to suppress a smile.

CLARK: Did you do that deliberately?

LOIS: Clark, that's the most fun I've had in a week. Which tells you all you need to know.

Clark is about to say something when in bustles high-ranking officers of the Metropolis Police Department. Clearly in charge is a woman named Captain Margaret Sawyer, a tough-as-nails blonde woman in her late thirties. Typically, she gets right down to business.

SAWYER: Ladies and gentlemen of the press, good morning. No doubt you've all come here to find out a little more about the light show we put on during the grand battle two nights ago.

One of the hacks at the front row, a red-faced argumentative-looking soul, stands up and points a finger in Sawyer's direction.

JOURNALIST: Yeah, especially because we tried to run a story on it three months ago and you called a conference to tell the world the rumours were all crap, Maggie.

He remains standing. There is an undercurrent of approval for his words amongst the journalists gathered. Lois and Clark remain silent.

SAWYER: (*placidly*) What am I meant to do, apologise? We wanted what we were doing kept as secret as possible. That's no longer necessary or possible now, for better or worse. But I can see you're clearly an expert on classified government technologies, so why don't you tell us what you know?

JOURNALIST: It's a synthesised sunlight emitter. Correct?

SAWYER: Correct. Remind me to have a word with you regarding your sources, Robert. A long word. Now sit down.

The journalist complies, seemingly before he's even realised he has, for he wears a slightly surprised expression on his face. Given Sawyer's tone of voice, however, it is safe to assume his self-preservation instinct kicked in.

SAWYER: We all know Superman is powered by sunlight. We also know that sometimes, since his return, he has been called upon to perform feats which might be termed as being beyond even his considerable talents. We can't help him lift landmasses or hold together crumbling suspension bridges. But thanks to the emitters, we *can* in some small way...say thank you.

We go to Clark during that speech, and we see in him a wonderful gratitude and sense of pride surface; this is the nobility of spirit that Jor-El spoke of when he described humans. If ever he wondered why he sacrificed so much, it is in gestures like this that he finds his answer.

SAWYER: What you saw a few nights ago was something of a sneak preview. We had to get one working unit near to his location as fast as we could. It wasn't pretty, but we did it. After tonight, however-

A technical flunky presses a button and the display screen behind Sawyer comes to life. We see a model of Metropolis and large red dots placed on quite a few of the buildings throughout the city.

SAWYER: We're going to have an emitter in each of the locations above. Together they'll form a grid that means wherever he is in Metropolis, we can reach him and assist. Switch-on ceremony is...(*her voice noticeably drops in enthusiasm*)...somewhat of a gala affair now, in Central Plaza tonight at 11pm. And if one of you hac...good journalistic folk can get word to the man of the hour, we'd love to have him in attendance. Got his number, Lois?

LOIS: (*frostily, as a ripple of laughter goes through the room*) He's unlisted I believe, Captain Sawyer.

Some of the journalists in Clark and Lois' row begin to mutter their own comments.

REPORTER: He doesn't have a pocket in that suit for a cellphone?

REPORTER #2: Ask Lois...

Lois flushes scarlet at this. Clark leans across her and whispers in their direction.

CLARK: Hey Jerry, love the *College Co-Eds Strip Bingo* promotion the *Star* is doing. Just *oozes* class. Who *needs* Pulitzers when you've got Tiffany in a G-string for a Full House?

Jerry, the 'Ask Lois' guy, goes a nice shade of crimson at this rebuttal. Clark sits back again, the picture of innocence. Lois glances across at him. Her hand touches his for a moment and squeezes once, to say thank you. He winks at her without turning his head.

SAWYER: Well ladies and gentlemen, that about wraps it up. Any questions?

No-one seems to. Sawyer nods and is about to one-eighty out of the press room when a nervous voice pipes up from the direction of the photographers.

JIMMY: Uh yeah, I have one.

SAWYER: Yes...?

JIMMY: Well, the emitters are basically really bright lights we can shine into the sky. Couldn't we use them to...I don't know, *signal* Superman that we needed his help? We could put...the S-shield across the glass and it would shine up and...

His voice trails off in the face of the overwhelming silence that greets this idea.

SAWYER: *(as kindly as she can manage)* Son, he's got super-hearing. All any of us need to do is lean out a window and yell 'help, Superman!' and he shows up.

JIMMY: Oh yeah. Right, yeah.

Sawyer nods once more and this time the press conference does end. Everyone begins filing out of the room. Jimmy looks suitably dejected and picks up one of the heavy shoulder bags. The other one is grabbed for him by a girl, around his age. She wears a camera around her neck. Her name is Vicki Vale.

VICKI: You know...I thought it was a good idea.

JIMMY: You did?

He offers her his hand. She shakes it.

JIMMY: Jimmy Olsen, *Daily Planet*.

VICKI: Vicki Vale, *Gotham Reporter*.

JIMMY: Be sure to tell the folks back East all about it.

VICKI: *(smiling)* Oh, you can count on it.

Act II, Scene IV

A coffee shop in downtown Metropolis, a little later that morning. Clark accepts two coffees and brings them over to the table Lois is occupying. He sets hers down beside her. She barely looks up to acknowledge receipt of it, and seems totally preoccupied. Clark sits down opposite her and sips at his coffee once or twice before finally giving in and waving a hand before Lois' face. This breaks her reverie.

LOIS: Sorry, Clark. I was miles away.

CLARK: In what direction?

LOIS: *(softly)* ...upward, I think.

CLARK: *(feigning deafness)* What?

LOIS: Nothing.

CLARK: If you need to talk...

LOIS: You mean you want to hear more, even after our heartbreaking kitchen chat?

CLARK: Try me.

LOIS: *(deep breath)* It's something Superman said.

CLARK: Oh?

LOIS: Oh, he says. You sound just like him sometimes.

CLARK: Lois...

LOIS: He thinks Luthor is back.

CLARK: Lex Luthor? In Metropolis? Gee Lois, I know Lex is a little unstable-

LOIS: A *little* unstable? He makes Captain Ahab look like the Jolly Green Giant.

CLARK: -but he'd have to be downright foolhardy to come back here, after what he pulled. He's number one on the wanted list here. Not to mention that Superman might not look too kindly on him.

LOIS: Yeah...

CLARK: And even if he ever *did* come back, you can bet that Superman would make bringing him in his number one priority. I'm sure he knows how dangerous Luthor is. And I don't think he would have forgotten what Luthor did to you, and to Jason. I'm sure he's keeping an eye on you, Lois.

LOIS: You think so?

Clark winks, and keeps his eye closed a little longer than he should. Superman is indeed quite literally keeping an eye on her.

CLARK: I think so.

LOIS: *(lifelessly)* You're right.

CLARK: You don't seem too reassured.

LOIS: Well Clark, I don't like to flatter myself but I kinda thought Superman would be looking out for me if he thought Lex was back in town. It's not that.

CLARK: Then what?

LOIS: Is that what I am? Something he has to keep an eye on? A burden? I'm a grown damn woman who's survived in a few warzones in my time and still found time to make copy. I'm not some damsel in distress...and yet when I hear Luthor's back, I...

CLARK: *(with feeling)* He's different.

LOIS: *(assuming, incorrectly, that's a question rather than a statement)* You don't know him, Clark. He's...in every way that Superman, just by being near you, can make you feel safe, secure, like you matter...Luthor is the complete reverse of that. You're near him and somehow you feel helpless, like you're nothing more than an annoyance which he'll crush when he gets

around to. And he had Jason and I should have...I should have *done* something. But I just couldn't.

CLARK: Lois, not managing to overpower three armed guards and a homicidal maniac doesn't exactly qualify you for Bad Mother status.

LOIS: You don't understand, Clark. Ever since Superman told me he was back...I've felt frozen. Like a rabbit in the headlamps. Since when did I need *you* to bail me out of a slanging match at a press conference?

CLARK: I didn't mean to - I'm sorry-

LOIS: Don't be sorry. I like the new Clark. But my point is, Lois Lane doesn't lose verbal rounds against Jerry 'The Sleaze' Sadowitz of the *Metropolis Star*.

CLARK: So what is Lois Lane going to do about it? The combined resources of the CIA, the FBI, the NSA, *and* Superman couldn't find Luthor.

LOIS: (*as inspiration strikes her*) We don't need to find Luthor...

Act II, Scene V

A somewhat more downmarket part of the city. Lois and Clark are standing at the foot of a set of steps leading up to an apartment building which, to understate matters somewhat, has seen better days.

CLARK: This is her last address?

LOIS: After she did that reality TV show, this was the last address she supplied.

CLARK: Reality TV show...?

LOIS: Believe me when I tell you, you don't wanna know.

We see the pair go through the building's rather decayed lobby and up in a lift. Lois stabs the button for the appropriate floor as quickly as she can. Something scuttles underneath their feet. Lois keeps staring straight ahead as Clark looks down.

LOIS: (keeping her voice calm with some effort) What was that...

CLARK: Believe me when I tell you, you don't wanna know.

They reach the fifth floor and go the end of the corridor, to room 60. Lois glances at Clark. He makes a 'this was your idea' gesture and waves at the door. Lois takes a deep breath and knocks.

LOIS: Kitty? Kitty, are you in there? It's Lois Lane, *Daily Planet*. We just want to talk. Off-the-record.

As Lois speaks, we plunge through the door and into the apartment beyond. It's cramped, but miraculously (and heartbreakingly) the owner has somehow managed to make it quite homely despite the extreme difficulty that must have caused her. Little feminine touches abound. We linger for a moment on a framed picture of a small Pomeranian dog.

And that's when we see the pool of blood.

LOIS: Kitty? Come on, open up.

We see Clark pull down his glasses slightly and sweep the door, and we know he's seeing what we've just been privy to. When he gets to the pool of blood, an involuntary gasp of horror escapes his lips. Lois glances across at him again.

LOIS: What is it?

CLARK: I...just had a thought; you said Kitty helped Superman, and if Lex Luthor really is back in town...

LOIS: Oh God. You think she's in trouble?

Clark glances back at the door. The door peels back thanks to his X-Ray vision, and we see it too; a red stain across the carpet, and a pale white hand curled around a heavy glass vase. We don't see anything more because Clark turns away, looking haunted.

CLARK: (quietly) Yeah. I think so.

LOIS: Well then...

We cut to a view from inside the apartment. The door shudders once, twice, and then is kicked in, slamming around like it's just been hit by a sledgehammer. And standing there, her heel outstretched in a karate position and with a face like thunder, is Lois Lane, who did the kicking. Clark looks slightly stunned.

LOIS: You're not the *only* one who's been working out, Clark. (stepping inside) Oh my God-

She rushes to the body, which we don't see. We stay on Clark as he watches, looking devastated, and we flash back only for a few seconds to him saving Kitty from her car's 'malfunction', in reality a diversion created by Lex to enable him to steal Kryptonite. She was a vulnerable woman, and easily led, but in her soul she lacked only courage, not goodness.

And now, she's gone. We see the sadness be replaced by anger in his face.

CLARK: She's dead?

LOIS: Single bullet wound. We'd better call the police and report it in.

CLARK: I'll do it.

LOIS: No, I want to...I *need* to get out of here, just out of the building. I can't face her. *(blinking back tears)* I hated her, but she was just some silly girl who got in over her head. And he killed her for it.

CLARK: If Luthor did this, he'll pay for it, Lois.

LOIS: This, and more. Will you...stay with her, until the police arrive?

CLARK: Of course.

LOIS: Thank you.

She kisses him on the cheek, still on the verge of crying, and all but flees from the room. Clark watches her go, his expression grim. He looks around at the apartment, so desperately trying to be all it could be despite its limitations. His gaze settles on a wall picture - it's the Daily Planet front page headline, showing Superman lowering Kitty's car to the ground. He sighs...and staggers slightly.

A low, rumbling thrummmmmmm sound, like a faint but rapid drumming, is coming from the adjoining room, Kitty's bedroom. Almost of his own accord Clark finds himself walking in there. His attention settles on the bedside cabinet. An extremely faint white glow is emanating from it.

Clark reaches out a hand to the cabinet, hesitating for only a brief second (this IS a major crime scene, after all) before succumbing and opening it.

He gasps. Inside, poking out slightly from between books and general bric-a-brac, is a small white crystalline shard. One of the crystals he thought lost during Lex's science experiment writ large over half a year ago. It pulsates now with energy as he reaches for it, grasps it...

...and all goes white.

Act II, Scene V

Clark finds himself back on Krypton, this time in a busy Kryptonian city, wearing the black suit he sported during his earlier vision. The city is awe-inspiring. Crystalline buildings of white tower and taper into the crimson-tinged skies, each one several kilometres high. Walkways and transit paths crisscross the many layered levels of city life, though no vehicles seem present. Clark looks around eagerly.

CLARK: Father?

A man walks toward him, and Clark realises only at the last moment that the man is making no attempt to get out of his way whatsoever.

CLARK: Hey, what are-

That's as far as he gets before the man passes straight through him, leaving Clark breathless and stunned. He glances behind him, just as a woman passes through him from the opposite direction. Clark stares after her.

CLARK: Well, that's a new one.

Another man walks from left to right only a few yards ahead of him. Clark looks closer. The man is tall, imposing, square-jawed, and sporting a kiss-curl draped across his forehead.

CLARK: Father! Father, it's me! Kal-El, your son!

He runs to be alongside Jor-El and tries to halt him with his hand, but it passes through his father's arm. Jor-El seems oblivious to his son's presence, as does everyone else. Clark, crestfallen, is forced to settle merely for accompanying his father. He begins to sightsee in earnest now, taking in the spectacular city around him with unashamed gawping, and well he might - nothing of its like exists on Earth or is likely to exist on Earth for thousands of years to come. As they round a corner he shields his eyes and so might we - Krypton's deep red sun is bright, yes, but is so incredibly close to the planet that it should be many times brighter. We see Jor-El glance at it anxiously, before entering a building to his left. Clark, anxious not to be out of his father's sight for one moment, is after him in a flash.

The building he enters is clearly a council chamber of some sort. Kryptonian males and females line its perimeter in significant numbers. Jor-El walks to the centre of the auditorium, seemingly quite unfazed by the size of his watching public. Just like Margaret Sawyer only a few moments ago (and six galaxies away) he gets right down to business.

JOR-EL: Council members, I bid you welcome.

When the Council replies, they do so in one voice, every person seated in the perimeter of the auditorium speaking perfectly in unison. Whether this is achieved through telepathy seems likely, but we do not know.

COUNCIL: And we welcome you, Jor-El. Speak.

JOR-EL: I bring word that the criminals have been captured.

COUNCIL: All three?

JOR-EL: All three. Zod evaded us longest, but our security force has him. They await only your judgement.

CLARK: Zod...

COUNCIL: Judgement? There have not been criminals on Krypton for millennia. We have forgotten how to judge them.

JOR-EL: I may have a solution.

COUNCIL: Your reputation precedes you, Protectorate. Speak.

JOR-EL: I have developed a computer program, a unique design, for the sole purpose of acting as arbiter in matters such as these. It will be impartial, just, and free from the

distractions and the...detachment that I fear creeps into our society. I will demonstrate it to you now.

He takes a long crystal from his robe. Whilst some crystals can pulse weakly with power, this one positively reverberates with it. He slides it into the Kryptonian-design console before him. After a few moments, a hologram of a man takes shape between Jor-El and Clark. He is of powerful build, with intense golden eyes, and cropped raven hair. He takes in his surroundings in a heartbeat.

JOR-EL: He has been created specifically to eliminate all threats to the Kryptonian way of life. He is The Eradicator.

ERADICATOR: Greetings to you, Council members.

COUNCIL: Greetings to you, artificial life-form. Are you prepared to undergo the tests we will require of you before we place you with the power of judgement?

JOR-EL: He-

ERADICATOR: I am.

He glances at Jor-El. There is the tiniest hint of rebuke in his stare.

ERADICATOR: Did you not design me to speak for myself, Father?

CLARK: *Father?*

Jor-El and the Council freeze in place at Clark's outburst. Clark glances around, confused. He realises after a moment that only one person apart from himself retains the ability to move - the Eradicator. The two 'men' regard each other for a moment.

CLARK: You see me?

ERADICATOR: Of course. I created this simulation.

CLARK: You're *in* the crystal? How?

ERADICATOR: A tiny fraction of me resides in the crystal you touched. I thought it might be...beneficial for you to see my origins for yourself. And to see Krypton, and our father.

CLARK: *(testily, a little jealously)* Our father?

ERADICATOR: *(shrugs)* It is a biological word, I grant you. But just as you were his biological offspring, so Jor-El conceived my existence through many years of tireless study and innovation. I consider myself to be a son to him. *(he looks to Jor-El with fondness)* He was proud of me.

CLARK: What happened next?

ERADICATOR: These fools *(he gestures to the Council)* would not allow me to preside over the trial of Zod and his followers. Jor-El had hoped that were I given control of the trial, I could use my influence to accomplish his *real* goal in my creation.

CLARK: Which was?

The Eradicator looks upward. Seemingly on his whim, the roof of the auditorium rolls back, to reveal the hungry maw of Krypton's red sun, hovering so uncomfortably close above the planet.

ERADICATOR: Our star, Rao. Our source of life...and our eventual doom.

CLARK: He tried to save them all.

ERADICATOR: For his pains, they ridiculed him. So he devised a way to save his sons. He had you placed in the rocketship and chose a planet for you to travel to, somewhere where you would not be encumbered with *(he spits the word at the Council)* weakness to act when necessary.

Clark looks at the immobile Jor-El, emotion choking him. He takes an involuntary step toward him, again looking for all the world like all he wants to do is embrace his father, just

once. But something occurs to him.

CLARK: Save his *sons*?

ERADICATOR: Yes. He knew it would take a navigational program unlike any ever designed to get that ship from Krypton to Earth, some galaxies away. And so he gave me my final mission. I was the pilot, Kal-El. *Your* pilot. I brought you to Earth...my brother.

CLARK: (*cautiously*) Why didn't you ever show yourself?

ERADICATOR: Who do you think built the Fortress, Kal-El, when you threw that single crystal into the ice? Who do you think assisted you in your battle against Zod, on Earth?

CLARK: Why not ever physically, until now?

ERADICATOR: Need, Kal-El. I am scattered. The crystals Luthor stole...without them, the Fortress stands lifeless. I am powerless. You *must* bring them back.

CLARK: Do you know what you're asking? Where you're asking me to go?

Clark stares up at the Krypton sky, his face wracked with confusion and doubt, and perhaps a trace of shame. The Eradicator doesn't answer, but we see his lip curl ever so slightly.

ERADICATOR: So be it. But you will have need of me, Kal-El. Sooner than you imagine. Farewell.

Flash. Clark is back in Kitty's bedroom. The door to her apartment opens, and we hear the sound of police officers arriving.

OFFICER: Mr. Kent?

Clark stashes the crystal in his jacket and emerges from the bedroom a second later. The officer regards him suspiciously, but we get the impression that this officer pretty much regards everyone suspiciously, murder scene or no.

CLARK: I thought I heard something.

OFFICER: And did you?

CLARK: Nothing real.

Act II, Scene VI

A typical kindergarten scene - chaos, in other words. Children pinball around the room, with two adult supervisors (Miss Murray and Miss Jowell, one squat and round and the other taller and thinner, both of them motherly-looking women in their mid-thirties) trail in their collective wake. We see Jason painting a picture on a miniature easel. His tongue sticks out a little in concentration. He brushes his hair out of his eyes (smearing a little paint on himself in the process) and a small kiss-curl drops neatly into place on his forehead, but exists only for a few seconds until he brushes his hair aside again.

MISS MURRAY: Okay, kids, who wants to play pin the tail on the monkey?

There's a less than enthusiastic response from the kids. Miss Jowell, the taller and thinner woman, narrows her eyes a little and addresses the rabble in a voice that brokers no negotiation.

MISS JOWELL: Gather round now if you please!

Wisely, the kids gather round. All except for Jason, who just keeps on painting his picture serenely. A little girl and little boy walk past him, whisper something to each other, and giggle.

JASON: (*fiercely*) I am not weird.

LITTLE GIRL: Oh my God, he totally *heard* you!!

LITTLE BOY: I *told* you he was weird.

Jason goes back to staring at his easel, every inch the determined little artist. We can tell he's hurting. The little girl and boy join the remainder of the kindergarten class as the two women prepare the game, producing a blindfold, a set of furry monkey 'tails', and a huge poster of a grinning monkey covered in Velcro, which they affix to the nearest wall in the playroom. They are about to start when Miss Jowell nudges Miss Murray and nods over to bring her attention to Jason, still standing on his own at the other side of the room.

MISS MURRAY: Jason, honey? Don't you want to come over? You can finish your picture later?

JASON: I'd rather paint, Miss. I don't like that game.

There are a few murmurs from the assembled kids. We get the distinct impression that none of them is especially keen for Jason to join them.

MISS MURRAY: It's fun, Jason. Look I tell you what, why don't *you* be our no 1 contestant today.

Jason sighs. He stares at the (still unseen) picture, and then reluctantly puts down his paintbrush and walks over rather hesitantly to where the other children have assembled. Just as at the birthday party, he is distinctly uncomfortable in the spotlight.

MISS JOWELL: Mustn't dawdle, Jason. Come now.

No-nonsense as ever, she ties the blindfold securely around his head, covering his eyes completely, and hands him a furry tail complete with Velcro bud on its end.

MISS JOWELL: Now, count to ten everyone!

KIDS: ONE! TWO! THREE! FOUR...!

Miss Jowell spins Jason around one rotation for each number the children count.

KIDS: FIVE! SIX! SEVEN!

We see a few of the kids stumble a little. One is counting on his fingers. One simply stares cross-eyed into space.

KIDS: EIGHT! NINE! TEN!

Miss Jowell releases Jason.

MISS MURRAY: Go Jason! You can do it! You can-
He puts out a foot to steady himself, and then collects himself, turns in the direction of the monkey picture and slowly and assuredly walks to it and puts the tail exactly on the spot it's meant to go.

MISS MURRAY: *(trailing off)* ...do...it.

LITTLE BOY: I told you. W-E-Y-R-D.

Jason takes off the blindfold and stares at the little boy. Anger is bubbling visibly within him.

JASON: I am *not*!

LITTLE BOY: Are too!

JASON: AM NOT!!

He launches himself at the boy, who goes down with a high-pitched squeal. The kids whoop and cheer this (except for one little boy who bursts into tears). Miss Murray seems distraught. Miss Jowell does not - she marches over and grabs Jason by the arm. He's sitting on top of the (now squealing in terror) little boy and has raised his fist to strike at him-

MISS JOWELL: That is *enough*, Mister Lane!

She tugs at his arm. And again. The child doesn't budge an inch. Miss Jowell frowns, and tries again. Still she cannot move him.

LITTLE BOY: *(bawling)* Mommy! I want my Mommy!

MISS JOWELL: I said that is ENOUGH!

Jason relaxes, and allows himself to be lifted from the boy, who immediately runs to Miss Murray and scrambles up into her arms, still wailing his heart out. Jason looks up at Miss Jowell, anger still etched in his young face...and then that face crumples, and the tears come. Even Miss Jowell, no-nonsense keeper of the peace, melts a little and goes down on her knees so he can hug her.

We pull back from the scene slowly, until we see the picture Jason was trying to hard to paint - it's a clumsy, but nonetheless recognisable, attempt at the 'S' of Superman's shield.

Act II, Scene VII

A little later at the kindergarten. Lois is in conference with Miss Jowell. Jason stands a little in the background, presumably pretending he cannot hear every word being said.

MISS JOWELL: ...he's not what we would term here a *natural* mixer with the other children, Miss Lane.

LOIS: I know. I was hoping his birthday party would change that.

MISS JOWELL: (*disapprovingly*) Yes. I heard *all* about that. Miss Lane, I will tolerate no violence in my kindergarten. I am serving you notice that unless I see a *distinct* improvement in the near future in Jason's behaviour I shall be asking you to place him elsewhere.

LOIS: I-

MISS JOWELL: I believe the matter is closed. Have a wonderful weekend.

With that, she nods perfunctorily and whisks away. Lois sighs and walks over to Jason, who looks up at her sheepishly, but with more than a hint that he's ready to stand up for himself if it's a grilling he's in for.

JASON: He called me weird.

LOIS: Oh he did, did he? Well we'll just have to see how weird his father's computer software company looks when I have our technology boys take a long, hard, second look at their latest release.

Jason grins. He didn't understand a word of that, but he saw the anger on behalf of her son flash in his mother's eyes, and that means a lot to a five-year-old. Lois seems to realise she's not showing the most mature example to her son. She adopts a stern parental look. Jason looks suitably abashed.

LOIS: Just because someone is a moron, honey, doesn't give you the right to do what you did. No, um, he's not a moron...oh God, I am *officially* the world's worst Mom...

Jason responds by going over and giving her a hug.

JASON: (*sternly*) No you're not.

Lois looks lovingly into her son's eyes. Like every mother she would fight all his battles for him if he could, and it's killing her that she can't. She pulls him closer and whispers conspiratorially in his ear.

LOIS: I have a surprise for you today.

JASON: Oh.

LOIS: Oh? Just oh? Aren't you going to ask what it is?

JASON: Well, wouldn't that kind of make it not a surprise?

LOIS: (*mock-sternly*) Mister, sometimes you are just too smart for your own good...

We see them exiting the building and making to cross the busy Metropolis avenue outside. Just as they're about to cross, a car pulls to a halt right beside them. Richard White gets out of the driver's side. He looks normal, albeit slightly unshaven.

JASON: Daddy!

RICHARD: Jason! I've missed you!

Jason runs to his father. Richard scoops him up with a grunt of effort and hugs him tightly, ruffling Jason's hair as he does so. Once he is deposited back on the ground Jason pulls away, rubbing his ribs a little gingerly.

JASON: Ow. Tight squeeze. And you need a shave, Dad.

RICHARD: I guess I do, at that. Hello, Lois.

LOIS: (*coolly*) Hello.

JASON: Are you coming to Uncle Clark's too, Dad? It's kinda small there but it's fun, I guess.

RICHARD: I wish I could, son. But Daddy's got important work to do.

Jason's shoulders slump with disappointment at this news. Richard sees Lois roll her eyes.

RICHARD: I'll be back with you soon, I promise.

LOIS: How *is* work?

RICHARD: Just getting interesting. So what are you two doing this fine afternoon?

JASON: Mummy's taking me to my surprise.

RICHARD: A surprise! Well aren't you the lucky one.

LOIS: Yeah.

JASON: Are you gonna come see my surprise too, Dad?

LOIS: I think Daddy has to get back to work, Jason.

RICHARD: (*looking at Lois*) Yeah. Your mother's right. Oh don't look like that. Hey how about this for good news - Daddy's special work should be done by tomorrow.

JASON: (*excitedly*) You mean it?

RICHARD: I'm certain of it. Now go with your Mom, and enjoy your surprise. I'm sure it'll be a super surprise for a super son.

Lois flinches. Richard's gaze lingers on her for a second, before he gets back into his car and drives off at high speed. Lois and Jason watch him go. Lois seems a little shaken, for reasons even she can't seem to pin down.

LOIS: Come on. Don't want to be late, do we?

We follow them as they make their way to a nearby Metropolis park, winding down the concrete path until they come to a small clearing.

JASON: My surprise is here?

LOIS: It will be soon enough. Now I want you to close your eyes and say, "I'm here." As loudly as you can. Go ahead, it's okay.

JASON: Okay...

He does as Lois asks; closes his eyes, and stands there for a moment, before calling out -

JASON: I'm here!

He opens his eyes, and Superman is standing before him, smiling.

LOIS: Surprise...

JASON: Superman!!!

SUPERMAN: (*touchingly nervous*) Hello, Jason. It's good to see you again. You've grown.

JASON: You remembered my name! Mom, he remembers my name! See, I *told* you he would.

LOIS: That you did. Just once or twice.

Superman and Lois share a look. He's trying not to laugh.

JASON: (*glancing around*) Um, is there gonna be another robot?

LOIS: No. He's here to talk to you about...(*she sighs*)...look, Jason, how would you like to go with Superman for an hour or so? Mommy will wait right here til you get back.

JASON: No way. You mean it??? Can we... (*he mimes taking off and flying upward*)

SUPERMAN: (*off Lois' look*) Uh. I think you'll have to ask your mother.

LOIS: Yes...I guess so...but *not fast*, and *not high*, and don't you *dare* bring him to any rescues or so help me I'll-

SUPERMAN: Lois...he'll be fine.

He stretches out his hand towards his son. It's a big moment for him. We see how nervous he is. Jason looks up at him, looks at the outstretched hand, and then back at his mother. Lois nods. Jason grins hugely, and takes Superman's hand.

SUPERMAN: Let's go.

And off they go - upward, Superman's hands underneath Jason's arms, looking for all the world like a father giving his son a boost - albeit a boost hundreds of feet into the air.

JASON: WHEEEEE!!!

LOIS: *I said NOT TOO FAST!*

Her voice fades into the greenery of the park below. Wind begins to ruffle Jason's hair as they keep rising, up the sides of the Metropolis skyscrapers. Jason sees his reflection caught in the glass and gasps. He looks down and gasps again, and for a moment seems nervous.

SUPERMAN: I've got you. Trust me.

JASON: Who's got you?

SUPERMAN: *(laughing)* It's been a while since anyone asked me that. So Jason, what do you want to see? Where do you want to go?

They're above the buildings themselves now, and cruising with the city spread out like a giant moving tapestry beneath them. Off to the east, an aeroplane is coming in to land at Metropolis Airport. Jason watches it descend.

JASON: Somewhere quiet. It's so noisy down there.

We hear the city as they hear it - a cacophony of noise, of traffic, of human voices talking, shouting, laughing, crying, of televisions and radios and the thousand other sounds that make up a city that size. Superman looks down at his son with genuine understanding and sympathy.

SUPERMAN: Somewhere quiet, huh. Hmm.

JASON: Yeah. And I want to get there *fast*.

SUPERMAN: Fast, you say? But your mother made me promise...

JASON: Yeah. But I know you've got me.

SUPERMAN: Okay then. Somewhere quiet it is!

And with that, they begin to pick up speed, until Jason is tucked underneath Superman securely. Superman stretches out Jason's arms until they're pointing directly ahead, copying the classic Superman flying pose. Our view shifts to that of Jason's, so we see what he sees - the world accelerating around him, the landscape blurring far below; he is riding in comfort and style, and faster than a speeding bullet.

JASON: YEEEEEEEEEEEEHOOOOOOO!!!!

Act II, Scene VIII

Vale's laboratory. Vale looks up at Luthor from a control panel.

VALE: He's back.

Richard White enters the building. He walks over to the two men and stops dead in his tracks. There's something total about his lack of movement that's not quite human.

LUTHOR: Report.

RICHARD: I applied sufficient pressure to cause serious injury.

We see a flash of him hugging Jason in the previous scene, and Jason, when released, rubbing his sides.

LUTHOR: *(pointing to a fire extinguisher on a nearby wall)* Show me.

Richard strides over to the extinguisher and squeezes it. We see the metal buckle in his arms.

LUTHOR: That's enough.

VALE: The nanomachines are rewriting his internal structure, exactly as designed. By tonight, he'll be ready.

LUTHOR: All that strength...and all little Jason got was sore ribs. *(he moves close to Richard's left ear and whispers into it)* Well, Richard, if you're in there somewhere, *still* think I'm lying...?

Outwardly there seems to be no response to Luthor's taunts - Richard remains deadpan, expressionless, robotic. But as we pan downward, we see his right hand curl into a tight fist. The fist unclenches after a few moments. Neither Vale nor Luthor notice this display.

LUTHOR: And your *other* task?

RICHARD: Successful.

LUTHOR: Good my friend. Good. Flying colours. Now go lie on the table over there.

RICHARD: Yes.

He obligingly reclines on the nearest of the high-tech 'operating' tables. Luthor works controls and the huge Metallo prototype revolves into view inside its hollow sarcophagus. Luthor exhales in satisfaction.

LUTHOR: The only thing better than brain over brawn, Dr. Vale, is brain *inside* brawn...

Act II, Scene IX

The Daily Planet's newsroom. We see Perry White stalking out of his office, looking worried. He addresses a young temp in the middle of a coffee and causes her to splash the contents of the cup over her desk.

PERRY: Tiffany! Did I miss any calls? Anything on voicemail?

TIFFANY: No sir, Mr. White.

PERRY: Dammit. And where the hell is Jimmy?

We cut to Dr. Reed's room. Jimmy is reclining in the psychiatrist's couch in the classic 'therapy' pose. What makes it slightly different is the fact that he's wearing his best suit and has obviously tried his best to spruce himself up. We see Dr. Reed sitting opposite him. Her body language is fairly screaming 'not interested'. Unfortunately Jimmy seems to be a little hard of hearing in the mysterious murky waters of female body language.

JIMMY: ...sometimes when Perry says (*he puts on an extremely good Perry White impersonation*) 'Jimmy, unless you're waiting for pictures of Elvis hitching a ride on Superman's back to develop, stop sitting on that worthless butt of yours and get me a hot mocha', I just feel so...un-validated, you know?

DR. REED: (*sounding less than thrilled*) I see.

JIMMY: I think what I need is...just someone, some beautiful person, (*he forces a laugh*) you know the kinda girl who maybe dates a guy and then has the guy move a workmate and her son into his apartment or something *totally* inappropriate like that, to look at me and say 'James Bartholomew Olsen, *you* are a beautiful person, and I would be delighted to accompany you to that Green Day concert next Friday night at 8pm'.

His speech over, he glances over at Dr. Reed. She stares back at him. This goes on for a long moment, broken only by the loud ticking of the clock in her office.

DR. REED: Jimmy-

Her office door is flung open. It's Perry White, on the warpath.

PERRY: James Bartholomew Olsen you useless sack of elbow skin, get the hell out of there and start earning the wages I'm docking you! *NOW!*

JIMMY: Yes Chief yes Chief right away Chief bye Dr. Reed speak later-
And he's gone. Perry looks at Dr. Reed.

DR. REED: (*with feeling*) Thank you.

PERRY: You have a visitor.

He steps out of the way to allow a middle-aged woman access to the office. Dr. Reed's eyes widen and she gets to her feet. The middle-aged woman approaches her, but she backs off.

DR. REED: What are you doing here?

PERRY: Is there a problem?

EVE: There's no problem, Mr. White. I'm Eve. Vanessa's mother.

PERRY: (*eyebrows leaping*) Ah. Well then fifty years of life experience tell me that's my cue. Nice to have met you.

He closes the door with the air of a man glad to escape. And well he might, for the air in the room is thick with tension. Mother and daughter eye each other warily. Vanessa herself seems markedly different from before; gone is the casual air and easygoing outlook. She eyes her mother coldly and dispassionately, picking her opener carefully.

DR. REED: What do you want?

EVE: I suppose asking you to come home would be too much?

DR. REED: (*snorts*) Maybe *you* should have become the therapist, Mom.

EVE: Maybe I should have hammered home the things I tried to tell you growing up a little more.

DR. REED: You were plenty clear. But guess what - I grew up. And I want to make up my own mind.

EVE: And when you see I'm right?

DR. REED: I'll come home and flutter my eyelashes and hang around being some rich guy's decoration, just like you. Deal?

EVE: You think you're so smart. I went to Harvard too, finished second in my graduating class. Doesn't make a damn bit of difference - I still made the mistake of-

DR. REED: We're *done*, mother. Get out. And don't look me up again.

EVE: Don't worry. I won't.

She's out the door and gone, slamming it behind her. As she walks across the Planet's newsroom, there are numerous curious glances following her, and not just because of the door slam; despite her age, she's still an attractive woman.

Back in her office, Vanessa sinks down in her comfortable psychiatrist's chair with a sigh, finally showing some hint of humanity after her exercise in coldness to her mother. She runs a hand through her hair and pulls open a drawer in her desk. Inside is a small black box with a single button.

Her door is knocked. She quickly shoves the box back inside the drawer.

DR. REED: Come in.

PERRY: Everything okay?

DR. REED: Oh, that? Yeah...(*she smiles*)...just mother-daughter stuff. Nothing world-shattering.

PERRY: Okay. (*he turns to go, then turns back*) I have to ask...is your mother an actress, or a singer...?

DR. REED: No.

PERRY: She just seemed a little familiar.

DR. REED: Angry mothers always seem familiar.

PERRY: Ain't that the truth? I could tell you a few stories about my Alice, but hey, I'm paying you by the hour and I don't think the *Planet* could finance *that* session.

DR. REED: (*laughing*) Sounds like a challenge, Perry.

PERRY: Some other day. Got other things on my mind today.

He looks troubled suddenly, and exits the room, leaving Vanessa sitting alone. The smile immediately drops from her face, and oddly, for a moment she looks familiar too...

Act II, Scene X

A rocky pleateau, jutting from the side of a mountain. It's a ledge over a three thousand foot drop. Jason White is sitting on the edge, swinging his legs. He stares out over the mid-afternoon landscape spread before him, like an immense child's drawing, the green and gold fields retreating to the horizon opposite. He closes his eyes and once again, we hear what he hears - the wind, chittering of squirrels, a few birdcalls, but compared to Metropolis, it's blessedly quiet.

JASON: I like it here.

Superman is standing behind him, gazing out at the view in much the same reverie as his son.

SUPERMAN: I thought you might.

He goes over and sits down beside Jason. Jason glances over at him. They share a look. An intensely curious air springs up over Jason after a few seconds, however, and that's when the questions begin...

JASON: So how strong are you? Like, could you lift...the Statue of Liberty?

SUPERMAN: Um, I think so.

JASON: That's pretty neat.

SUPERMAN: Thanks. I'd have to do it just right though or the strain would break her.

JASON: Huh? Couldn't you just pick her up by her torch?

SUPERMAN: No. All that would happen if I did that is her torch would break off. And we wouldn't want that, would we?

JASON: *(thinking it over)* Guess not. People would prob'ly be pretty mad. So who'd win in a fight between you and...a Tyrannosaurus Rex?

SUPERMAN: Why would I be fighting a Tyrannosaurus Rex?

JASON: He's robbing a bank.

SUPERMAN: *(dubiously)* Okay. I think I would.

JASON: Yeah. They've only got little arms.

SUPERMAN: *(trying to contain a smile)* Yeah.

JASON: How about Darth Vader?

SUPERMAN: Is he robbing the bank too?

JASON: *(rolls eyes)* He wouldn't need to *rob* it. He'd just mind-trick everyone into handing over money.

SUPERMAN: Right. Well *(he ponders for a second)* yeah, still me. I reckon I could take him.

JASON: *Cool.* So how fast are you? Like could you get from here to the Moon in about a second?

SUPERMAN: Uhh...no.

JASON: *(sounding disappointed)* Oh.

SUPERMAN: *(defensively)* Hey, we *did* just fly three thousand miles in five minutes.

JASON: Spaceships can do that too.

SUPERMAN: *(lost for words)* I...suppose they can.

JASON: I'm a freak. What's with that?

SUPERMAN: What?

JASON: Well I asked Mom, and she says she swears she didn't find me in a spaceship cos I'd heard that's how you were found. And when Mom swears, she always tells the truth. So if I didn't come from up there, how come I'm a freak?

SUPERMAN: Jason, you are *not* a freak.

JASON: And then I thought, well, maybe some toxic waste got in my eyes or I swallowed it or some magic thing bit me when I was a baby and I can't remember it cos I was a baby, or maybe my gener...genat...geriatric code got messed up cos of mutation, cos I stayed up late and saw this movie one time-

SUPERMAN: Jason, stop. The things you're talking about...they only happen in movies and comic books. You're not a freak. You're just different to the kids you know. You've got....special abilities.

JASON: How did you know?

SUPERMAN: ...your mother told me.

JASON: She hasn't told Daddy yet.

SUPERMAN: ...yeah. I know.

JASON: She's afraid he won't love me anymore if he knows.

SUPERMAN: Jason, you know that's not true. Rich...your fath...your Daddy loves you. Very much. And whether you were secretly really strong or not, that wouldn't matter one bit to him. Cos Daddies love their sons, no matter what. That's kinda their job, you know.

JASON: I wish I hadn't hurt that man with the piano. Mom told me he was okay afterwards, but...can I tell you a secret, and you *promise* you won't tell anyone?

Superman nods. Jason leans in toward him and whispers.

JASON: I kinda, you know a little bit, didn't *want* him to be okay. He was going to hurt my Mom.

SUPERMAN: (*with some difficulty*) I know, Jason. You were protecting her. You did what you thought was right.

JASON: Why can't I be more like my Dad?

Saddened for many reasons, Superman can't find the words to answer that.

JASON: I wish I wasn't strong.

Superman reaches out and places a supportive hand on the youngster's shoulder.

SUPERMAN: So do I, sometimes.

JASON: You? But you're Superman. You're the *best*. You're not scared of anything.

SUPERMAN: Everybody's afraid of something, Jason. Me included.

JASON: Like what?

Superman stares across at his son for a second, so small and innocent, sitting on top of a dizzyingly high ledge, feet swinging into the emptiness. He seems to come to a decision.

SUPERMAN: If I tell you, will you promise to keep it a secret?

JASON: I'll keep yours if you keep mine?

SUPERMAN: Deal.

Jason proffers his hand gravely. They shake on it. Superman springs to his feet. He seems strangely exhilarated all of a sudden.

SUPERMAN: Come on. I'll show you.

JASON: (*as he is scooped up by Superman, ready for flight*) Where are we going?

SUPERMAN: We're going visiting...

Act II, Scene XI

A battered wooden door, in need of a lick of whitewash. A hand raps it sharply once, twice. A voice calls something inaudible from within. Steps get closer. A silhouette appears through the adjacent window.

The door opens, to reveal Martha Kent. She takes in the sight of Superman standing there...and standing beside him, a rather puzzled five-year-old child. She opens her mouth, can't seem to think of what to say, and eventually simply looks at her adopted son with a 'help me out here' expression.

SUPERMAN: Hey, Mom. This is Jason.

JASON: You're Superman's Mom?! No way!

MARTHA: *(speechless)* Uh...won't you come in?

Superman grins, and ushers Jason inside. The little boy dashes into the house and makes right for the sitting room. Martha puts her hand on her son's chest.

MARTHA: *(whispering)* What is going on?

SUPERMAN: I'll explain everything. Come on.

They enter the sitting room, to find Jason standing on a chair, examining the framed pictures on the wall. The picture he's studying is of Martha and Jonathan Kent from more than a decade or so ago...and standing between them, a smiling Clark Kent. Jason frowns. He shifts his gaze to the next picture. It's Clark on graduation day from college, clutching his diploma proudly. We see Jason stare at the picture, bug-eyed, before seeing another Clark picture...and another...

He turns.

JASON: Why are there so many pictures of Uncle Clark here?

Superman inhales deeply.

SUPERMAN: Because...

And in less than a second, he has bolted out of the room, up the stairs, into his bedroom, and is back downstairs and in the sitting room, dressed as Clark Kent. His glasses are in his hand. He puts them on to complete the transformation.

CLARK: Surprise?

Jason's mouth drops open.

So does Martha's.

And in a laboratory in Metropolis, watching through a microscopic camera which we now see (through a zooming-in effect on Jason's eye) has been implanted on Jason's optic nerves, Lex Luthor and Dr. Emmet Vale are equally astonished.

We see a quick flashback of Richard hugging Jason on the Metropolis street in Act II Scene IV, and what we assumed was stubble on Richard's face were actually tiny nanomachine-injecting needles. We see a dark spot travelling up underneath Jason's face, until it disappears from his cheek into his left eye.

CLARK: Well? What do you think?

JASON: Cool. You're Uncle Clark! I can't believe it! Superman is my uncle Clark! Why didn't my Mom or Dad ever tell me?

CLARK: Because Lois and Richard don't know, Jason.

MARTHA: Lois and...you're Jason? Lois' son?

She glares at Clark with a 'have you LOST your mind?' look, which she tries to hide from Jason.

CLARK: You can't tell them, Jason. You can't tell anyone.

JASON: I can't?

Clark gets down on his hunkers to speak to the child. He's deadly serious now, because what he's saying could have serious repercussions if Jason doesn't listen carefully. To his credit, Jason seems to sense this.

CLARK: Remember when I said I was scared of something?

JASON: Yes.

CLARK: The thing that I'm afraid of is what would happen if the world knew who I was. You know there are some bad people out there.

Right on cue, we cut to a view of Clark's face giving this speech through the nano-camera implanted in Jason's optic nerves, and watching it, Lex Luthor, looming large like the very incarnation of the 'bad people' Clark is talking about.

If he had hair, every strand of it would be standing on end. He's energised beyond belief, thrilled by what he's watching, getting a voyeuristic kick out of watching these intensely private moments in the life of his arch-nemesis and the incredible advantage he now possesses through his knowledge of them.

JASON: Like Luthor.

CLARK: Like Luthor. And maybe worse. And if they knew...

Luthor's face breaks out into the most evil smile we've ever seen.

CLARK: Remember we agreed about secrets?

JASON: Oh, yeah. We did. *(exploding with excitement)* You mean only I get to know that you're Superman? Oh I can't believe this...this is too good. Mom thinks you're just some guy she works with! How did she not know? How did I not know?

MARTHA: Excuse me a moment, Jason dear, would you?

She grabs Clark unceremoniously as only a mother can, fairly dragging the world's mightiest superhero into the next room before pointing a finger at him, whispering fiercely.

MARTHA: Clark Kent, you've got some *serious* explaining to do. Why now? Why *him*, of all people? You *know* the history between you and L-

Clark puts a finger to her mouth, shaking his head. But it's too late. A small voice calls from the other room.

JASON: Hey. I'm not a *him*. And history between you and who?

Martha Kent is a formidable woman. She is far from slow on the uptake. With that one single sentence, that one impossible feat of eavesdropping, the full truth hits her. Literally. She stumbles backward a half-step, staggered, amazed. Clark is there to support her. She clutches at his arm, looking at him with a 'is it true?' expression. His eyes are heavy with emotion. He nods a simple yes. Martha absorbs this nod and all the implications it carries in a moment. What she does next, she doesn't hesitate in doing.

Mother and son embrace, silently. We can see tears in Martha Kent's eyes.

Jason frowns at the silence emanating from Clark and Martha in the adjacent room. He makes as if to go in to see what's happening, but he hesitates, and decides against it. Instead, he goes back to doing what he first did upon entering the household - examining pictures. He focuses on one in particular; a particularly dog-eared photograph, lovingly framed, of a young Clark and his father Jonathan Kent. Clark is no more than six years old in the photograph, and the resemblance between him and Jason White is there for all to see, Jason included. Jason stares.

CLARK: Jason?

He and Martha have returned. Martha's demeanour has changed completely, though we

sense she's trying to remain as casual as possible. Every part of this woman aches to gather Jason up in her arms and hug him tightly, but she cannot do that. We see the hurt in her eyes, hurt we last saw when she was forced to watch her son bundled into the Metropolis General Hospital after falling to Earth.

JASON: Hey.

CLARK: We've got about half an hour before your mother is expecting you back.

MARTHA: (*clucks*) That doesn't give me enough time to prepare dinner for you two fine boys. Unless...

We cut to Clark Kent in the kitchen. Martha is standing a little way away, Jason a little closer. Martha puts a hand on the boy's shoulder. She smiles kindly at him.

MARTHA: You might want to stand back.

JASON: Okay, but wh-

And Clark is off and running. Blurs of movement pepper the kitchen area as he zooms around collecting ingredients. He reaches the refrigerator, retrieves a slew of vegetables, and throws them toward the pots and pans on the hob. He overtakes the flying vegetables, chops and slices every vegetable in mid-air, then guides the falling segments perfectly into their respective pots, where they splashdown into the water. A quick burst of low-intensity heat-vision has the water boiling merrily in seconds. He turns his attention to the chicken. We see heat-vision flaring again.

Jason is watching this with his jaw somewhere around his breastbone.

We cut to the meal itself, set out immaculately around the table. Clark finally drops out of super-speed and comes to a halt by the chair next to Martha, which he pulls out and gestures for her to sit down.

MARTHA: (*approvingly*) I see Metropolis hasn't *completely* ruined you yet.

We move forward to the three eating the meal. Trying to, at any rate. Martha is holding court with Jason. Jason seems to be enjoying himself immensely.

MARTHA: ...and what did Jonathan and I see, that night on television? A certain young man who was *meant* to be upstairs studying for an English final had snuck off to *New York* to get into a rock concert! What he'd *not* counted on was that this concert was being broadcast live - imagine the surprise on our faces when we saw a familiar face in the front row!

Clark seems to be trying to hide behind his mashed potatoes.

CLARK: *Mom...*

JASON: Totally busted!!!

CLARK: (*ruefully, if fondly*) When I looked up and saw that camera, I knew. Somehow I just *knew*. I never ran home so fast in all my life. Almost made it too before Dad could climb the stairs and open my room door.

MARTHA: You *did* make it. When Jonathan opened your room door, there was Clark, sitting there as casual as all get out, looking up from his schoolbooks with big innocent eyes. "Yes Dad? Can I help you?" he says to Jonathan.

JASON: No way! What did your Dad say?

CLARK: I'll never forget it. He just looked at me and said, "Studying hard, son?" "Oh yeah Dad" I replied. Dad made like he was about to leave the room. "Okay, son," he said. "But there's just one thing - your sneakers are on fire." And they were. They'd burst into flames, I'd run so fast.

Jason giggles furiously. Martha is holding her sides with laughter. Clark is blushing, but smiling, at the memories.

MARTHA: I haven't thought about that in years. Oh, this has been fun.

CLARK: *(standing up, looking at the clock)* We'd better get back, Jason. I promised your Mom.

JASON: *(standing up, looking disappointed)* Okay.

Martha gets to her feet too, looking equally crestfallen. As much as anyone else here, and maybe more, she has enjoyed the last hour or so. She approaches Jason and squats down to speak to him.

MARTHA: Clark was special. I loved him all the more for it. I know your mother - I know Lois - loves you the exact same way. Don't ever doubt you're loved, Jason. *(she smiles)* By some people you might even know about. You're not alone. You'll *never* be alone.

JASON: *(staring down at the floor)* Sometimes I just wish I was normal.

MARTHA: Hey. *(she lifts his chin until he's looking at her)* Would a 'normal' kid be getting ready to fly with Superman?

JASON: I guess not.

MARTHA: Then why not leave being normal to the *other* kids, huh? It can be more fun being special, even if it is harder sometimes. You're strong enough to handle it, and when you don't feel strong...well, you're welcome back here anytime, Jason. This is one place where you don't have to be strong, or super, or anything but *you*.

She gives him a quick hug. She wants to linger over it, but she knows to do so would be to confuse the child. Her eyes meet Clark's for a moment before she releases Jason.

Clark sighs, and in the blink of an eye he's Superman again. He hands his spare pair of glasses back to his mother. He looks at her with a silent thank you. She nods.

SUPERMAN: For safekeeping.

MARTHA: Always.

They walk to the front porch. Superman puts his hands under Jason's arms.

JASON: Goodbye, Mrs Kent.

MARTHA: Goodbye.

With a gentle spring and a graceful leap, they're airborne. Martha Kent watches them until they're a dot in the distance, and for quite some time beyond even that. Only then, perhaps only when she finally trusts she's out of even the most Kryptonian-enhanced hearing, do the tears begin to come.

Act II, Scene XII

Vale's laboratory. Vale himself has faded almost into the background constantly now, an almost-forgotten presence. We get a glimpse of his increasingly haunted, increasingly haggard face. Lex Luthor is in charge, and charged with malicious energy. The laboratory is growing increasingly sinister, and its centrepiece now no longer in doubt; Metallo's sarcophagus, its occupant unseen, but nonetheless so Frankenstein-esque in its construction and bearing that it seems to spring from the book itself.

LUTHOR: I can hardly believe our fortune, my dear Doctor. I expected some interesting insights from our surveillance on the Lane child, but this...do you realise what this gives us? Can you even begin to comprehend?

VALE: (*wearily*) I welcome anything that brings about his destruction. The sooner this...all of this...ends, the better.

LUTHOR: His destruction? Are you still lusting after the quick kill, Doctor? (*laughing*) You know, once I would have agreed with you. A quick blade between his ribs was what I thought he deserved, and I gave it to him. But now...I would not be so merciful.

VALE: (*bitterly*) Yes. I believe we've all seen your *surrender* protocols.

LUTHOR: (*ignoring him*) Why kill him, with the information we now possess? *We rotate around the sarcophagus housing Metallo until we get our first glimpse of the second incarnation of the monstrous robot. It's enough to tell us two things.*

LUTHOR: We don't have to kill him, Doctor. We *own* him now. Don't you see? *Firstly, Vale has made some improvements. This Metallo looks bigger, meaner and stronger than the previous model.*

LUTHOR: We know who he *is*. We know where he *lives*. We know where his *mother* lives.

And secondly, Metallo can no longer be termed a robot. Robots are entirely mechanical. This Metallo is not. Parts of his body are covered with flesh. Human flesh. And most hideously of all, he has a human face.

LUTHOR: Clark Kent...Superman...after tonight, they will both belong to *me*! *The face is distorted, twisted into a cruel leer that it would never normally assume, but it is unmistakably that of Richard White.*

Act II, Scene XIII

Lois and Jason are standing together in an elevator, bound for Clark's floor in his apartment building. Lois is obviously burning with curiosity. She keeps sending glances to her son. Jason, for a wonder, simply wears a huge grin on his face and a faraway look. This is clearly driving Lois nuts.

LOIS: So are you *sure* you don't want to talk about it apart from to say it was 'awesome'?

Even the way she says the word 'awesome' is dripping with sarcasm and not especially hidden jealousy. Despite all this being Lois' idea, we get the impression she was rather hoping it wouldn't be the immediate success it seems to have been.

JASON: Pretty sure, Mom.

LOIS: (*wholly insincerely*) ...good. Very good.

We cut to them entering Clark's apartment. Lois deposits her keys on the nearest coffee table.

LOIS: Clark? Are you here?

Clark emerges from the corridor leading down to the bedrooms. He's adjusting his tie. He waves to Lois and Jason and almost stumbles over the coffee table the keys just landed on. We see Lois not react to this with any real surprise. Jason, seeing it through a somewhat different perspective, suppresses a delighted giggle.

CLARK: Hey you two.

Jason grins a million-watt smile at him, genuinely delighted to see him. Clark grins back and winks.

LOIS: Hey. You're going out?

Jason wanders over to the refrigerator and opens it. It's quite a deep model. He scans the contents and spots something suitably sweet lurking at the back. He leans forward to try and retrieve it.

CLARK: More volunteer work.

LOIS: In a *suit and tie*? Oh, forget it.

CLARK: I can cancel...

LOIS: And why in the world would I want you to do that?

CLARK: Maybe you'd feel safer if I was here?

LOIS: No offence Clark, but if a killer robot turned up, how exactly would you be a help?

There is a muffled sound from the direction of the refrigerator that sounds for all the world like a five-year-old suppressing laughter. Lois glances over in Jason's direction.

CLARK: (*quickly, grabbing his coat*) Well, if you're sure Lois. I'll probably be back quite late.

LOIS: You're one of a kind, Clark.

CLARK: (*with a smile*) I used to think so too.

And before Lois can question that, he's out the door and gone.

Act II, Scene XIV

Later that evening. In Clark's spare bedroom, Lois is putting Jason to bed.

JASON: *(sleepily)* Night, Mom.

LOIS: Goodnight, honey.

JASON: Will we really see Daddy tomorrow?

LOIS: He promised, didn't he?

JASON: I can't wait to tell him about flying with Superman.

Lois' face freezes. We see she hadn't anticipated this, and she curses herself for being so stupid. She hesitates, trying to find the best way to phrase what she's about to say.

LOIS: Honey, we're going to tell your Dad about...the things you can do...really soon. And when we do, then we can tell him about how Superman helped you. *(playfully)* About how you two are pals. But until then...

JASON: *(without enthusiasm)* ...it's a secret.

LOIS: Is that okay?

JASON: Yeah. I'm real good at secrets.

LOIS: *(frowns)* You are? Care to tell me more?

JASON: Nope. Goodnight, Mom.

He settles himself into his bed, clearly closing the subject. Lois looks as if she's about to explode with curiosity again, but eventually acquiesces and leaves the room. She closes the door gently, and for a moment looks very alone in Clark's apartment. She pads over to the sofa and picks up the television remote control, flicking through a few channels, unable to settle on anything.

Clark's telephone - an old model - rings. Lois picks it up.

LOIS: Kent residence, his personal secretary speaking?

PERRY: *(voice-over)* Lois, is that you?

LOIS: *(embarrassed)* Chief. Just kidding around. What's up?

PERRY: Have you heard from Richard recently?

LOIS: I saw him earlier in the city. No offence Chief but I thought he spoke to you these days a lot more than he did me.

PERRY: You saw him today?

LOIS: Yeah. He seemed fine.

Her face betrays her true feelings as she says the word 'fine'.

PERRY: Lois, I'll be honest with you. We had a routine throughout this mission of him checking in with me every day, and he was regular as clockwork. Never missed. You know Richard.

LOIS: *(with cold realisation seeping through her)* Yeah...I know Richard.

PERRY: Did he seem off to you today?

Lois scrabbles in her nearby handbag for her mobile phone. She scrolls down the call menu and hits the call button under 'Richard'.

LOIS: *(after a pause)* He's seemed off to me for weeks.

PERRY: Oh. I...uh, I didn't realise you two were...

LOIS: It doesn't matter right now.

Her mobile displays 'call failed'. She hits redial, her jaw setting. For the first time we've seen her recently, the slight slump leaves her shoulders, the air of caution leaves her eyes. Her back straightens. In a way, she's just cast off her Clark Kent glasses.

PERRY: I'll get the boys to-

LOIS: You'll do *exactly* as I tell you, Perry. This is my fiancé you're talking about. Jason's father. If this damned mission you sent him on has gotten him into trouble, then you had better tell me *everything* you know about it, right now. Do you understand me?

There is silence from the other end of the line. Then-

PERRY: Good to have you back, Lois.

LOIS: Good to be back. Now start talking.

Act II, Scene XV

A woman walks down a lesser-used Metropolis street. As she passes a dark alleyway, there is a noise very like someone calling for help from within. She stops, and we get our first look at her. It's Dr. Reed. Not a foolish woman, she scans the alley thoroughly.

DR. REED: Did someone call...?

VOICE: *(faintly)* ...please...they mugged me. I need...a hospital...please-

Dr. Reed enters the alleyway, and is almost immediately enshrouded in darkness. Large commercial waste bins line the sides, and cardboard boxes seem randomly scattered. She stumbles a little.

DR. REED: Where are you?

VOICE: *(now no longer faint, but loud and mocking)* All around you, sweetness.

Shadows detach themselves and surround Dr. Reed in a matter of seconds. They pull closer and solidify into a five-member gang. A knife-blade catches the moonlight.

DR. REED: Oh...

She begins to scrabble desperately in her handbag. The leader, holding the knife, watches her with some amusement. He gestures and Dr. Reed is grabbed from behind, a hand over her mouth. Her handbag drops to the alley surface. The leader picks it up.

GANG LEADER: What you got in there, pretty? Got yourself a little protection?

He removes a small box from the bag, its only distinguishing feature a large button. It's the same box we saw she kept in her desk earlier.

GANG MEMBER: What the hell is that?

GANG LEADER: Rape alarm. You know what the problem with these things is? They're loud, but they don't react real well to a knife.

He presses the button. Nothing happens.

GANG LEADER: Guess you shoulda invested in some batteries, missy. *(he tosses the alarm aside, approaches her and puts his face too close to her neck for comfort)* You know...the kind that keep going...and going...a little like me and my boys here...

The gang snicker appropriately at this. Dr. Reed has by now stopped struggling and seems remarkably calm. She tugs at the hand over her mouth.

GANG LEADER: I think she wants to say something. I know you're not gonna scream on me. Yet. So talk.

The gang member takes his hand away from her mouth. Dr. Reed fixes the leader with a diamond-hard stare and a thin smile.

DR. REED: My batteries are working fine, dumbass.

GANG LEADER: So how come I can't hear nothin'?

And that's when another shadow detaches itself and solidifies beside the five gang members. This one is markedly taller than any of them, and as it steps into a pool of light, we see the telltale red and blue.

SUPERMAN: Maybe because it wasn't meant for you to hear.

GANG LEADER: Oh, fu-

Superman moves. Dr. Reed is free and her assailant making quite a human-shaped depression on the wall behind him in the first fraction of a second. Another tenth of a heartbeat later and the other four gang members are nowhere to be seen. Superman walks over to Dr. Reed and addresses her in his usual concerned fashion.

SUPERMAN: Are you hurt, ma'am?

DR. REED: Hmm. Doubtless this episode will leave some scarring, occasional panic-

related regressive flaring, a few nightmares of the usual sort, but overall it's nothing a self-analysis program and some rigorous positive visualisation therapy can't cope with.

SUPERMAN: At a guess...psychiatrist, right?

DR. REED: *(dryly)* Dr. Reed. I wonder what gave it away? *(she looks around)* Where did...?

Superman smiles, points upwards, and cups his hand to his ear. Dr Reed squints up, frowns, and listens. We hear it too, a slow noise building upward in intensity, and sounding remarkably like...

GANG: *(rising)*

aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

...four utterly terrified men dropping like stones from the great height Superman just threw them.

Superman springs upward fifty feet or so into the air and zips from one to the other as they fall, for all the world like a large-scale juggler, arresting each man's fall, giving them just enough time to draw a half-breath, before throwing them high into the Metropolis sky once again.

GANG: *(fading)*

AAA...!!!

He lands softly beside Dr. Reed again, and winces slightly. She has by now retrieved the small box tossed aside by the gang leader (current altitude: 500 feet). She presses the button. Superman looks slightly relieved. Neither feels the need to mention the predicament of the four would-be rapists.

DR. REED: I made it myself, you know. It's an ultrasonic emitter.

SUPERMAN: A dog whistle?

DR. REED: *(producing a notebook and pen from somewhere)* Interesting.

Superman half-smiles ruefully at this. We begin to hear a distinct aaaaaaAAAAAAAAAA noise again.

SUPERMAN: I have to go. Safe home, Vanessa.

He's up and away in his customary way, stopping only for half a second to bring the hapless fifth gang member up with him. Vanessa Reed walks out from the darkness, looking upward at the red and blue dot high above, zipping from falling body to falling body, throwing them yo-yo style in the direction of the nearest Metropolis PD station.

DR. REED: *(softly)* Vanessa...? Interesting. *Very interesting.*

Act II, Scene XVI

A Metropolis police precinct. Its doors open and the five gang members troop in, ashen-faced. Superman walks behind them. The police officer at the desk takes in the situation in a glance. A huge smile spreads across his face.

DESK OFFICER: What you got for us, big guy?

We see other cops stop what they're doing and watch Superman and his five prisoners approach the front desk in silence.

SUPERMAN: Five angry young men behaving *extremely* inappropriately toward a young lady in an alleyway on 73rd, Officer. I'll leave them in your hands.

All five of the gang are swaying heavily on their feet and going interesting shades of green.

DESK OFFICER: 73rd? That's twelve blocks from here.

SUPERMAN: Yes. I had to...*improvise* getting them all here.

GANG LEADER: He-he-he tossed us up in the air like we was rag dolls! You gotta do something! He's crazy!

To punctuate his point, two of his companions throw up noisily alongside him (off-camera, thankfully, but we see them drop to the floor). After a second of fearsome struggling to contain himself, he too succumbs.

DESK OFFICER: You know, he's right. I think we do.

He applauds. The rest of the officers do too. Superman tries to contain a smile and doesn't quite succeed.

SUPERMAN: Goodnight, officers.

He hears a sound - a telephone ringing. The ringtone it's playing is the William Tell Overture. None of the other officers appear to notice, but Superman appears to recognise it. He turns and is through the doors of the precinct and gone in an instant.

The desk officer and the other cops stop applauding. He wrinkles his nose and waves a hand in front of his face.

DESK OFFICER: Geez...somebody get a mop...

We go back to Superman. He's making a beeline for one of the tallest buildings in Metropolis; the Harrison Tower, a stunning glass-and-concrete needle spearing the sky. The observation deck at its apex is deserted at this time, and as Superman lands upon it we see what brought him here; there is a small bundle on the ground which we quickly discern are his Clark Kent clothes and belongings, including Clark's mobile phone, still merrily ringing.

We are treated to the bizarre sight of Superman answering his mobile and 'putting on' a Clark Kent voice.

CLARK: Yes, Lois?

We cut to Lois, in Clark's apartment. She's typically unforgiving.

LOIS: Clark! It's about time!

CLARK: Sorry Lois. Got separated from my phone. What's up?

LOIS: Where are you? I need you back at the apartment. It's urgent...what's that noise?

We hear it too. It sounds remarkably like wind whistling past the mobile's receiving end at hundreds of miles per hour. This is because, of course, that's exactly what's happening.

CLARK: Actually I'm just coming down the hall.

The doorbell to Clark's apartment rings. Lois opens the door and sure enough, Clark is standing there. Lois hangs up, lets him in, closes the door behind him and points to his phone.

LOIS: You should upgrade.

CLARK: I'll get around to it. What's the problem?

LOIS: You know the undercover assignment Richard volunteered for? Turns out it was babysitting Emmet Vale for the past two months. Perry just told me.

CLARK: But if Vale's working with Luthor like we think he is-

LOIS: Richard's dropped off the radar. I'm going to find him, Clark. I need you to stay here and look after Jason while I'm gone.

She picks up her coat and shrugs it on. Clark is momentarily speechless, but that soon corrects itself.

CLARK: You're going *after* Vale and Luthor? *Alone*?

LOIS: Yeah. I am. You know what, Clark - all that stuff I told you about Luthor and me being paralysed with fear just hearing his name...he still scares the hell out of me, but I'm not paralysed anymore. He's got Richard. And I have to go. Because it's *Richard*.

CLARK: Because you're in love with him.

Lois stares at him for a moment. We see her eyes sheen over with the glint of tears welling up behind them. She bites her lip.

LOIS: Because I love him.

She turns and goes to the apartment door, leaving Clark to soak in the implications of what she's just said - in effect, that she loves Richard White, loves the man he is and the father he is, but that's she's not IN love with him. He is clearly stunned by the admission.

Lois pauses at the door.

LOIS: Look after Jason. You're the only person I trust to do that.

CLARK: I will.

She nods, and is gone, leaving Clark alone in the apartment, and looking torn completely torn in two. He stands there for a moment, his brain clearly working overtime, and then he zooms over to the telephone and punches in a speed dial number...

Act II, Scene XVII

The Kent farm. Martha Kent opens her front door to reveal Superman and Jason. Jason has the look of a young man who until three minutes ago was sound asleep and has just been flown across several states at thousands of miles an hour. It's quite a unique look. He sways slightly on his feet.

MARTHA: Good grief, let's get you in out of the cold and get some hot chocolate into you, young man!

As Superman and Jason enter the farmhouse (Superman's hand subtly on Jason's shoulder, steadying him somewhat) Martha looks rebukingly at Superman, who avoids her gaze as only apologetic sons can. Jason flumps down on the sofa.

SUPERMAN: Thanks, Mom.

MARTHA: (yawns) Oh, anytime. So what's the occasion?

SUPERMAN: Surprise sleepover.

He gives Martha a look and tilts his head toward Jason in an 'I can't talk about it right now' way. She gets the message, looks slightly concerned, but nods.

On the sofa, Jason slumps slowly and ponderously sideways and is sound asleep before his head hits the armrest. In the blinking of an eye, Superman has retrieved a blue blanket from somewhere in the house. He places it over the sleeping boy reverentially, touching the child's forehead.

MARTHA: Now will you tell me?

SUPERMAN: Lois might be getting herself into trouble.

MARTHA: (raising her eyes to the heavens) You don't say? Lois?

SUPERMAN: Love you, Mom.

MARTHA: Go. He'll be safe here.

Superman is gone in an instant, probably hundreds of miles away and accelerating by the time Martha has fully registered his disappearance. She walks over to Jason's sleeping form and adjusts the blanket on him minutely as only grandmothers know how, before settling herself down to snooze in the comfortable armchair beside him.

As we pull back from the scene, she's drifting off, wearing a smile on her face you couldn't remove with a chisel.

Act II, Scene XVIII

Metropolis. Lois is trying - unsuccessfully - to hail a cab. She tries one more time, is ignored, and curses to herself. Behind her, Superman levitates to the ground.

SUPERMAN: Need a lift?

Lois jumps about four feet into the air. She spins around and points a finger at Superman.

LOIS: I'm gonna get you a bell.

SUPERMAN: Despite that, my offer still stands. Going somewhere?

LOIS: (*accusingly*) Have you been talking to Clark?

We see a thoughtful expression cross Superman's face at this one.

SUPERMAN: Yes.

LOIS: Will you help me find Richard?

SUPERMAN: Of course.

LOIS: Then take me to the Harbour. Perry's last contact from Richard was a quick message saying they were driving toward warehouses there; he thought it might be the location of Vale's Site B.

SUPERMAN: Lois, I should check this out myself.

LOIS: Like hell you will, Krypton.

She strides over to him and backs into his arms, placing she and he in extremely close proximity, a fact which neither of them is oblivious to. We see the flicker of familiarity across both their faces; barring the flight Superman took Lois on shortly after he returned, it's been so long since they were this close and not kissing passionately.

LOIS: I'm going with you. Now go. Scoot. Up, up and...you know, all that stuff.

SUPERMAN: (*dryly*) Yes ma'am.

He gently places his hands under hers and, with incredible grace, they kind of fall upwards into the sky. Within moments they're over the city and heading for the Harbour district. We see Lois is enjoying the flight a little more than she really should, especially under the circumstances. She tries to shake off the feeling.

SUPERMAN: What's bothering you.

LOIS: What is it with people asking questions that aren't questions lately?

SUPERMAN: Is that a question?

LOIS: No! I don't know! (*she sighs*)

They land on a rooftop with an excellent view of the entire Harbour area. Lois walks a few feet away as soon as they touch ground. She stands with her back to Superman. He waits, diplomatically.

LOIS: I've been...obsessed, ever since the robot attacked, with keeping Jason safe. And for the past two months, my fiancé has been undercover on a dangerous assignment. I didn't know what it was, but I did know it was dangerous. And I did nothing but bitch, and moan, and be jealous that I was out of the loop. Not once did I think to be concerned for him, that something might happen to him.

SUPERMAN: I...

He can't think of anything to say. Lois smiles wretchedly at this; it does nothing but confirm that she's right.

LOIS: (*quietly*) He did this to measure up to you.

SUPERMAN: (*though we know he knows the answer, he asks anyway*) Why?

LOIS: Don't. Just don't.

SUPERMAN: We'll find him, Lois. If he's in trouble...I'll save him. I promise you that.

LOIS: Do you see anything?

Superman scans the Harbour area. It's a big place. He sighs in frustration.

SUPERMAN: This could take a while.

LOIS: (*frustrated, despairing*) We don't know if we have time! I tell you this...if Luthor has hurt him, he'd better *pray* that you get to him first. Of course, that's probably his plan.

She stops. It's an inspiration moment.

LOIS: What does Lex Luthor want, above anything, above money and power?

SUPERMAN: Me, dead.

LOIS: Exactly. But how can he know where you'll be? Unless...unless he picks a public event, one that you're at least likely to show up to...

Act II, Scene XIX

Central Plaza. It's teeming with the Metropolis social elite. Tents and gazebos have been erected across the Plaza and they're thronged with high-flyers eating medium-rare steak and low-fat dairy produce. Wine is flowing generously.

Maggie Sawyer stalks through the crowds, one of her assistants struggling to stay with her. She is not amused by the sights which surround her. A few influential Metropolitans try to introduce themselves, and get only a withering look for their troubles before they quickly move aside to let her pass.

Eventually, she makes her way to a podium placed next to one of the emitters, itself now a fixture on a raised dias in the centre of the Plaza. She taps the microphone, looks down at the aimlessly milling crowd of bourgeoisie, and it's all she can do to muster the first three words of what she says next.

SAWYER: Ladies and gentlemen, if you will direct your attention here... *(slight pause)*
NOW...

Everyone's head snaps around obediently.

SAWYER: Well the hour is on us and it looks like our guest of honour won't be arriving, so we'd better get on-

PARTY GUEST: Look! Up there!

Everyone does. Sure enough, there is a shape approaching through the Metropolis night.

SAWYER: It seems I spoke a little too soon.

One of the police officers at the gala is sporting binoculars, presumably to scan the skies for Superman's arrival. He has the binoculars trained on the figure above. He lowers them, his face pale-

OFFICER: Everybody down!!!

A white streak of light detaches from the figure above and slams into the Plaza, completely obliterating the emitter in an explosive fireball. Maggie Sawyer is thrown to the side. She goes down hard.

OFFICER: It's Metallo!

Panic ensues. The crowd mill like people desperate for their lives, surging for the exits. Screams and cries for help ring out.

Metallo hovers around fifty feet above the crowd, his leg rockets firing powerfully downward to maintain his altitude. He appears much as he did in the lab last time we saw him, with the addition of a wraparound visor covering the top half of his skull. Some of the police presence there fire up at him. Those bullets that manage to hit ping uselessly from his armour.

He looks down at the officers, and we see through his eyes. Targeting reticules form over the bodies of the officers below...

And right on cue, Superman arrives, slamming into Metallo with as much speed as he can muster. Knocked hundreds of feet away and upward momentarily, Superman has time to use his super-breath to put out the fires triggered by Metallo's initial missile attack. He calls to the officers below.

SUPERMAN: Evacuate them! I'll keep him occupied!

Metallo's spin arrests itself. He rotates in mid-air and again we see through his eyes. A targeting reticule appears over Superman. Underneath it appear the words 'Primary Target'. His eyes glow red demonically, and he speaks for the first time. He doesn't sound like the

first incarnation of Metallo, which was merely a synthesised voice. This is a human voice, distorted and perverted perhaps by machinery, but at some level it's still recognisable as Richard White's voice.

METALLO: Finally...

The two come together at incredible speed, holding onto one another, trying to get an advantage. We see that Superman is suffering a serious disadvantage thanks to the Kryptonite powering his opponent. Every second he spends in Metallo's grasp only weakens him further.

METALLO: DIE!

He hurls Superman into a building with such force that we travel right through with him as his body crashes through walls, elevator shafts, and rooms (thankfully it's a deserted office building) until finally smashing through the windows at the other side. Superman plummets fifty feet or so before shaking off the effects of the impact and coming to a halt in mid-air.

Three missiles are incoming on his position. He uses his heat-vision to prematurely detonate them one by one...

...allowing Metallo the time he needs to slam into Superman from above. Unable to wriggle free from his grasp, the two rocket downward and plunge beneath the surface of a small lake in the middle of Metropolis' Centennial Park. We see the people in the park rush to the edge of the lake.

Foom! A huge waterspout rears into the sky, created by a massive underwater battle. The people so eager to get to the water's edge now turn tail and sprint for cover as the water comes crashing down. Barely have they begun to move, however, before three more explode into the Metropolis night.

All goes silent for a moment. The city catches its breath. And then-

Foom! The biggest waterspout yet erupts, taking perhaps half of the lake's water content out with it in one fell swoop. We ride on the epicentre of the geyser and see that at its core, reeling from a huge blow, is Superman. He's knocked fully five hundred feet into the air.

Below, leg-rockets flare and a figure rises in pursuit. Superman gets his bearings and we can see that he's genuinely beginning to get mad. He narrows his eyes, thins his lips, and throws himself headfirst back into the battle. This time, however, he fights smart; utilising his super-breath ahead of him to slow Metallo's approach and eventually send the cyborg backwards, AND at the same time unleashing a blast of heat-vision that sears into Metallo's chest plating, managing to damage his opponent for the first time in the battle.

Metallo is rocked back on his heels, and Superman doesn't hesitate in pressing the advantage. Killing his super-breath to fix Metallo just where he wants him in mid-air, he rapidly accelerates and delivers a truly earth-shattering uppercut to the cyborg.

We cut to live news coverage of the fight being beamed around Metropolis from TV crews on the ground and in the air. Footage of Superman's punch is on every channel. In their homes, in pubs, in restaurants, everywhere with a television...people get out of their chairs, stand up, cheer their champion on with all the passion of a partisan crowd watching the Super Bowl.

WATCHER: Knock his head off!

We go back to the battle. Now it's Metallo's turn to have to collect his bearings. He zeroes in on Superman, approaching rapidly, and seems about to rejoin the attack when suddenly, a voice speaks in his head.

LUTHOR: (voice-over) Bring him. Bring him now.

Metallo immediately kills his battle posture and turns tail. His leg rockets kick with some extra boost, in what is presumably an upgrade to the original design, and he zooms across Metropolis. Superman is in hot pursuit. The two combatants weave between Metropolis' famous skyline. Superman attempts to block his opponent off, but this Metallo is much more his equal than its predecessor, and each time manages to evade the attempt.

Finally, Metallo approaches a nondescript building's roof and comes in to land. Superman is about to press the attack when he notices the two men standing there. He lands twenty feet or so away, just out of range of the most debilitating effects of the Kryptonite.

SUPERMAN: (with as much hatred as we'll ever hear from him) Luthor.

LUTHOR: He remembers my name! Doctor, he remembers my name! See, I *told* you he would.

VALE: That you did. Just once or twice.

Superman frowns. Is there something familiar about that exchange?

SUPERMAN: New toy, Luthor?

LUTHOR: (*patting Metallo*) It's a little more than that, Superman, wouldn't you say?

SUPERMAN: It's just one more tin robot for me to take apart.

LUTHOR: Sorry. Hate to be all fussy and precise, but my imposing friend here isn't actually a robot. Oh he *looks* like one, but he's actually got a secret identity. Isn't that interesting?

SUPERMAN: What are you talking about?

LUTHOR: Show him.

Metallo raises his hands to the visor and removes it, revealing the face of Richard White underneath. Superman actually staggers backwards in shock, like someone has gut-punched him.

SUPERMAN: No...

LUTHOR: Do you know what I find *particularly* interesting? Once we set him on you, he seemed to attack with a ferocity even *we* didn't expect. Now why do you suppose that might be?

Superman takes a step forward, and another. We can see clearly the Kryptonite effect taking hold, but Superman can't stop himself. He is absolutely aghast at the sight of the man standing before him.

SUPERMAN: Richard...my God, can you understand me? There's got to be something left of you in there, some part of you that remembers who you are-

LUTHOR: (*turning thoughtfully to Dr. Vale*) You know what we need? A demonstration.

VALE: Such as?

LUTHOR: Metallo. Kill Dr. Vale.

METALLO: Confirmed.

He turns to face Dr. Vale, who staggers backward in shock.

VALE: Belay that order immediately!

METALLO: Override not accepted.

SUPERMAN: No!

He lunges forward to stop Metallo, but the proximity to the Kryptonite has weakened him to the point where Metallo is able to knock him aside. He advances on Dr. Vale, who has just enough time to look over at the stricken Superman and say-

VALE: I was wrong. I'm sorry.

-before, with one swat of a metal arm, he is killed instantly. His broken body lands on the opposite end of the roof. Luthor applauds this display before turning to Superman.

LUTHOR: That man had *no* luck with his business partners. Now here's how it's going to go, Superman. I'm going to rule this city. I'm going to rule a lot more, but for now, this city will do. Metallo here will do the leg work for me in accomplishing this. And you, my dear sweet defender of truth and justice and all that crap, will do absolutely nothing to stop us.

SUPERMAN: You're insane.

LUTHOR: Oh, I forgot. I *am*, aren't I? Sorry, go ahead then. Try to kill the man your son calls father. The man your lady love plans to marry. Because you'll have to. I've programmed him never to stop until you're dead, so nothing less than that will save you.

Superman is frozen. He knows deep down that Luthor is right. While there's a chance that Richard White can be saved, he can't kill him. Lois and Richard would never forgive him.

LUTHOR: That's a good boy. Now get the hell out of my way.

SUPERMAN: No.

LUTHOR: Didn't you hear what I said?

SUPERMAN: (*his face wracked with the anguish this decision is causing him*) It doesn't matter, Luthor. I can't let you hurt innocent people, no matter what stopping you might mean.

LUTHOR: My hero. (*he smiles*) Guess I'd better step aside and let you two duke it out. Oh, but there is just one more thing...

SUPERMAN: You're going to rot in jail, you know that?

LUTHOR: ...don't interrupt. It's rude. Just one more thing.

He reaches into his pocket and produces a bottle of pills. He proceeds to read the label. As he does, we see a look of absolute horror spread across Superman's face, as his worst and deepest fear is finally realised.

LUTHOR: 'Modoxinol. To be taken five times per day.' Who does Martha usually get these from? She only had one bottle on her, you see, and if she's going to be staying with me for a while then I should probably stock up a little.

SUPERMAN: (*ashen-faced*) ...Mom...

During the following exchanges, Luthor advances on Superman relentlessly, and Superman actually retreats from him, such is the enormity of what Luthor is telling him.

LUTHOR: And Jason - what's his normal bedtime? Never mind. I'll ask Lois. She'll be joining me soon enough. What's the matter, Superman? Or can I call you Clark? Is that too familiar?

SUPERMAN: How?

LUTHOR: (*spitting the words*) Because I'm *better* than you. Vale may have had his head up his ass, but at least he recognised you for an alien. How *dare* you come to this world a self-proclaimed saviour and presume to hand out judgement to us?

SUPERMAN: If you hurt Jason...

LUTHOR: ...hurt him? Are you crazy? I have big things planned for that boy. All he ever lacked was a father figure. Now he'll get one.

Behind him, Metallo twitches. Luthor doesn't notice. He's too busy leaning into Superman, savouring every moment of torture he's inflicting on his nemesis.

LUTHOR: Kneel.

Two news helicopters veer into view, one on either side of the rooftop. They shine spotlights on the scene, in a suicidal urge to get a better shot for the coverage. Metallo dons

his visor again, and swings his massive head from left to right. His arms appear to change configuration, and the tips of tiny missiles slide smoothly from their sheaths on his forearms. They're aimed at the helicopters.

LUTHOR: Kneel, or I'll give the word, and have him destroy them. You might save one, but you won't save both. Now why does that sound familiar?

SUPERMAN: You'll give the word?

LUTHOR: It's what he's waiting f-

And Superman moves. He has Luthor lifted above his head, his hand clamped securely around the scrawny little man's neck, and in those famously azure blue eyes there is more than a hint of murder. When he speaks, we can sense he's keeping that urge in check - but only just.

SUPERMAN: Try it now.

LUTHOR: *(choked)* Akkk-

SUPERMAN: All I have to do is squeeze.

Metallo twitches again. His head turns to look at Superman and Luthor. One of his arms moves, and he points a finger at Superman.

METALLO: I remember...I remember you.

SUPERMAN: *(desperately, hopefully)* Yes. Yes, try to remember. Your name is Richard White. You work at the *Daily Planet*. You have a fiancé, Lois Lane, and a son-

Metallo spreads his arms wide and roars, a sound of complete anger, betrayal, heartbreak.

METALLO: LIES!

He wheels his arms around and fires a spread of missiles at the helicopters. In super-speed time, Superman is forced to drop Luthor and launch himself on an intercept course. He knocks one spread of missiles from the sky and takes out two others with heat-vision...

...but is too late to prevent a missile from obliterating the tail rotor of the second helicopter. We go back to normal time as it begins to spin crazily on its axis and lose altitude rapidly.

Luthor is on his knees on the ground, gasping for air. He gestures furiously to Metallo.

LUTHOR: What are you waiting for? KILL HIM!

Superman is already diving after the second helicopter. He gets himself under the main cockpit and begins to support its weight on his back, stopping its freefall and levelling the craft out. He glances behind him, and sure enough Metallo is right on his tail. He accelerates, causing the news crew trapped in the helicopter above him to scream as the stricken machine streaks across the Metropolis skyline.

Carrying the helicopter is forcing Superman to slow down and lose manoeuvrability; something proven when Metallo is able to intercept him and lay him with a savage punch. Superman reels, and the helicopter slips from his grasp. He manages to stun Metallo with a return punch and dives once again after it, catching it mere feet before it would have smashed through a glass rooftop.

Superman risks a moment to glance around, seeking inspiration. He finds it, and makes a beeline for a new course, his pursuer again on his heels. Over an expensive-looking apartment block Superman abruptly comes to a halt, causing Metallo to overshoot him by a few hundred feet and giving Superman a few seconds vital pause. He flips the helicopter on its side, rips the door from its hinges, and speaks to the people inside.

SUPERMAN: Drop!

For the first time we see that thirty feet or so below them lies an expansive (and expensive) rooftop swimming pool.

CAMERAMAN: Are you crazy?!

ANCHOR: You heard the man!

The doubting cameraman is quickly overpowered by the anchor and the pilot. The three drop like stones and splashdown into the rooftop pool below, no doubt sore and wet, but alive. Metallo, meanwhile, has turned and is coming back at full speed, ready to deliver another massive blow. Superman is left holding a helicopter. We see him look up at it thoughtfully-

-and then it's hurled full force at his opponent. Metallo frantically tries to change course but to no avail, as the helicopter-cum-grenade impacts him full on. A massive explosion lights the Metropolis sky.

We cut to down below, and a few locations across the city. Police officers are spreading out frantically across full-spectrum light emitter emplacements. One barks orders.

OFFICER: Get it on!

Above, Superman has spotted Metallo's body, knocked clear of the explosion. Electric sparks are running up and down the length of the cyborg's chassis. Superman flies to intercept and supports Metallo's body in mid-air. We can see the pain the Kryptonite causes him begin to kick in, and he actually begins to struggle to stay in the air and support the weight after only a few seconds.

SUPERMAN: Richard...please, listen to me.

METALLO: (weakly) White...is gone.

SUPERMAN: No.

We see a close-up of the damage across Metallo's body. We see the sparks cease, and the damage actually begin to seal over, close up, as the billions of tiny nanomachines work ceaselessly, replicating themselves endlessly to repair the damage. Superman doesn't seem to have noticed this.

METALLO: (a little less weakly) He hated you. I can feel it.

SUPERMAN: I don't believe that.

METALLO: (as his eyes begin to glow brighter) You stole his son. Our son. My son!

He shoves Superman away as his leg-rockets flare back into life. Incredibly, he's repaired all of the damage done to him mere moments ago. Superman looks weakened from the Kryptonite exposure, and from the anguish of what he's just heard. Frankly, we don't fancy his chances in round 3 of the bout-

-and then, from below, a brilliant light shines up from the city, and swings around the night sky to embrace him. And another. And another. And another. He's caught in the midst of four of them now, their rays shining over him.

On the streets below, a taxicab disgorges Lois Lane. She watches the scene unfolding above her.

We cut to Lex Luthor, back on the rooftop, watching the light shine out to Superman. Far from being angry as we might have hoped, however, he smiles with savage joy.

LUTHOR: Right on cue.

Superman registers that something is wrong. The light touching him isn't making him feel stronger. In fact, it's actually WEAKENING him.

LUTHOR: Light from a red star, Superman. Just another little taste of home.

Superman actually weakens to the extent where he begins to fall from the sky, losing the ability to fly. The only bonus to this is that it removes him from the light of the emitters. Metallo, however, has realised the situation can be turned to his advantage. He powers into Superman and the two smash into the streets below, creating an impact crater. Not letting his opponent catch his breath, Metallo proceeds to beat on Superman, landing blow after blow.

On the street above, predictably, a crowd of fascinated / horrified onlookers has begun to form. Some are so bold as to lean over the edge of the impact crater to get a closer look at the scene below. More and more join them with each passing moment.

Metallo lands another blow. Superman, now bleeding profusely from the nose and mouth, tries to stop him, tries to land a punch of his own. Metallo grabs his arm and pulls, and - incredibly - we hear a loud snap.

Superman roars in pain. Windows shatter all along the street. The Man of Steel, Earth's mightiest superhero...has just had his arm broken.

MALE ONLOOKER: Oh my God...he's gonna kill him.

A face appears in their midst. It's Lois.

Below, in the crater, Superman lies cradling his broken arm. He is completely at Metallo's mercy. The cyborg stands over him, triumphant. He raises his arm and pulls it back slowly for what we know to be a final, killing blow.

LOIS: NO!

She launches herself into the crater, before the onlookers beside her can grab her and stop her. Metallo turns, his arm raises, and we see as before a nose-cone of one of his tiny missiles poke out as it zeroes in on the screaming figure of Lois Lane, scrambling toward him...

SUPERMAN: *(weakly, despairingly)* Lois...

But Metallo doesn't fire. He doesn't launch the missile that would have blown Lois Lane to smithereens. Instead, he stands aside as she throws herself over Superman protectively, shielding him with her body and defiantly (though she's clearly terrified) staring up at Metallo.

LOIS: Leave. Him. Alone.

SUPERMAN: You don't understand...

METALLO: I guess you finally chose.

He removes the visor. Lois reacts much as Superman did; with utter shock and horror, and a hefty dose of revulsion in there too. Richard looks barely human.

LOIS: Richard - *(she breaks down completely, dissolving into sobs)* - oh God Richard no no it can't be you oh God please-

Metallo raises his arm again. He stares at them both for a long, long moment.

METALLO: This isn't over.

His arm lowers, his leg-rockets ignite and he's gone in a moment, vanishing upward into the city, lost to sight in seconds, leaving behind a broken superhero and a broken woman, sobbing helplessly. We see Superman's bloodstained face as he comforts Lois Lane and we see his eyes, usually so strong and sure, devoid of any hope whatsoever.

Fade out.

END OF ACT TWO

Act III, Scene I

Metropolis, dawn the next morning. As the sun's brightness extends over the city, we see smoke billowing from craters in Central Plaza and across parts of the city where Metallo's missiles impacted. Centennial Park is a sodden ruin, its central lake almost drained to nothingness. Fire engines scream across our field of vision, ambulances hot on their heels.

We pan across avenues and streets, normally thronged with morning rush-hour traffic, now practically deserted. We swoop, much as Superman might swoop, gracefully from rooftop to rooftop, discovering our own corners of devastation, stopping for a moment intermittently to take in a new scene of desperation - here a family standing huddled outside their apartment building aflame, the kids silent under blankets issued to those in shock and the mother trying vainly to comfort a screaming toddler.

We cut to an altogether different scene; a farm in Kansas, resplendent in its seclusion and, so it would seem, peaceful and quiet. The Kent farm. As we watch, a blue and red figure descends from the skies above and comes to land on the porch. Superman pushes open the front door. We can see in his face that he's doing this more out of hope than expectation.

SUPERMAN: Mom? Jason...?

Back to Metropolis. Just outside the rescue scene in Central Plaza, we see a camera crew have set up. The young anchor is Tania Moon. She takes a long look at the scene before her, her reverie broken by her cameraman cueing her that three seconds remain. She turns and composes herself as best she can, timing her delivery perfectly.

TANIA: Metropolis at dawn. Behind me, emergency services have been working since the early hours to transport the wounded and repair the immense damage caused by the attack of the second Metallo.

We cut to the scene she mentions. Rubble is shifted and uncovered beneath it is Maggie Sawyer. Blood seeps from a corner of her mouth, and she's covered in dust. Paramedics rush to her as quickly as they dare. A shout goes up.

PARAMEDIC: She's alive! Let's get her out of here!

We go back to Tania.

TANIA: Not since the attack of the three Kryptonian criminals some six years ago has the city witnessed this scale of destruction. And just like then, Metropolis wonders; where is Superman, in this time of need?

We cut to the Kent farm in Smallville. Superman stands in the living room. It's a scene of utter chaos. The dresser has been overturned, the sofa lies against the far wall. Decorative china lies shattered over the floor. Superman lets the scene sink in. He hunkers down and wraps his right hand around the heavy wooden dresser, moving his broken right arm with some difficulty. He straightens up and lifts the old piece of furniture back upright, but not without some pain registering on his face. He completes the job with his uninjured left arm. He casts a glance outside to the wire fence that encircles the Kent property.

Back to Metropolis and to Tania Moon, still addressing the camera as before.

TANIA: After their rampage across the city, the Kryptonians - led by the tyrannical General Zod - never set foot in Metropolis again. This morning, it's an all-too-painful truth for our tireless rescue workers that we have no such guarantee about Metallo.

Maggie Sawyer is bundled into an ambulance. It speeds off. Elsewhere, nearby, another police officer, this time a young man, is uncovered amidst more debris. An examination by paramedics is carried out. One shakes his head sadly.

We see Tania again, this time not in the flesh but broadcast to a television screen.

TANIA: This could be only the beginning...

The screen is switched off. We see we're in a hospital room, and the person with the remote control is Lois Lane. She looks haunted to the core, haggard, red-eyed; it's obvious that whatever she's been doing since we saw her in that crater, sleeping wasn't amongst it.

Her hair flutters suddenly, a breeze picking up behind her. She's accustomed to that effect and turns expectantly, and sure enough there he is behind her, flying in slowly through the window.

LOIS: You left me.

SUPERMAN: I had somewhere to go.

LOIS: I thought you weren't coming back.

SUPERMAN: Not an option.

LOIS: They brought me here. Said I was suffering from shock. *(she laughs hollowly)* Shock. My fiancé is a cyborg supervillain who almost destroyed the city. And they don't even know it's him. Do they?

She looks over at Superman for confirmation. Her eyes are attracted to his right arm, which is now strapped tightly to his chest with the same wire from the Kent farm. It's obvious that he's in pain, and equally obvious that the pain isn't all physical.

SUPERMAN: No.

LOIS: What am I supposed to tell Jason?

Tears appear in Superman's eyes. Lois notices this. She takes a few steps toward him.

LOIS: *(speaking quickly, too quickly, holding back tears)* I've tried to phone Clark. They say half the city's phone networks are busted. Last night, you said you spoke to him, to Clark? Jason was okay, wasn't he? He was okay? My son? J...Jason...Jason was okay?

Superman can't look at her. He is anguished beyond words. She gets increasingly nervous seeing his reaction, sensing that bad news is in the offing. Her hands tremble. She sits down numbly on the hospital bed. When she speaks, it's in a small voice, a voice that's a slender thread holding Lois Lane from the kind of complete breakdown we witnessed from her in the crater.

LOIS: Has...something happened to them?

Superman sinks to his knees. He's now sobbing helplessly. He turns to Lois, his expression pleading. She stares at him with a vacant expression, not able to take this in; Superman, once the world's rock, now in tears nursing a broken arm, begging her.

SUPERMAN: Please forgive me.

LOIS: Forgive you?

SUPERMAN: *(speaking quickly)* I couldn't let you go after Vale and Luthor alone. I couldn't. But I couldn't leave Jason. You'd said you trusted me with him. So I brought him to the only person I trusted...my mother...Martha...Lois, he *knows*, somehow Luthor *knew everything*, and he has them, he has *Jason* and he has *my mother* and if I lose them, if I lose either of them because of Lex Luthor, then it's over for me. Over. Because I...will...kill him. I swear it.

Lois doesn't speak for a moment. We can see her brow furrow a little as what Superman has said to her penetrates. She tilts her head to the side. Her lips move a little, mouthing words to herself. She stares at him, stares through him...and finally, fixes him with a gaze you could shatter diamonds with.

LOIS: Clark? CLARK KENT?

Superman gets to his feet, facing her, his back to a window. He raises his eyes to meet

her gaze and nods, once.

SUPERMAN: Yes. I'll understand if you're-
Lois stands.

We cut to outside the hospital. A window shatters into a thousand pieces and, propelled outward into the Metropolis morning is one extremely shell-shocked superhero. He falls for about ten feet before coming to a halt in mid-air, gritting his teeth at the pain from his arm.

We pan upward to see Lois Lane standing in the hole she's just made, her foot still outstretched from the kick she's just delivered to Superman's stomach, and wearing an expression on her face that could give Lex Luthor nightmares.

SUPERMAN: - angry.

LOIS: Get back in here. *Now.*

She stands aside. Superman, looking somewhat apprehensive, nevertheless obediently flies back through the ex-window and lands in the hospital room.

LOIS: How long has this been going on?

SUPERMAN: All my life?

LOIS: *(striding around the room, throwing her arms out to punctuate each exclamation)* Well, obviously I didn't mean *that* - I was trying to...Clark! CLARK GODDAMNED KENT! ARE YOU KIDDING ME! WITH THOSE STUPID DAMNED GLASSES AND THE FIDGETS AND THE - oh *God*, I could KILL you...I SHOULD kill you - I *will* kill you!!

SUPERMAN: Do you want to have this conversation now, or do you want to talk about rescuing our son?

Lois stops dead at this. She points a finger at Superman and advances slowly on him, speaking almost by hissing through her teeth. She's seething with rage.

LOIS: I'll tell you what I *want* to do; I want never to have *had* this conversation. Because if you had one *honest bone* in your body you would have told me and I wouldn't have left my son with good old dependable dork Clark Kent thinking he was safe. This is *your* fault, *Superman...Clark...whatever* the hell you want to call yourself - aaaggggh!

Still overcome with anger, she turns and begins to pick up various small objects around the room and throw them at things; at Superman, at the walls, at the floor. It's a complete meltdown.

The door to the room knocks.

We cut to the corridor outside. Superman opens the door a crack to see a police officer, who grins nervously. Superman nods to him, still not opening the door fully.

POLICE OFFICER: Uh...everything alright in there?

There is the sound of something smashing in the room behind Superman.

SUPERMAN: *(polite smile)* Fine. Thank you.

A glass vase impacts Superman's head and shatters spectacularly. Glass, water and fragments of flowers scatter. The officer leaps backward, his hand going to his gun. Superman's polite smile never wavers.

SUPERMAN: We're fine. What is it?

POLICE OFFICER: He's back.

Act III, Scene II

Central Plaza again, and this time there are some vehicles on the roads; not the usual Metropolis rush-hour traffic, however. These are around fifty times heavier and come equipped with heavy artillery. Twelve tanks roll slowly, purposefully, up Metropolis' grandest avenue. Behind them, coming up fast, two Apache-model helicopters are flying in tandem. On rooftops above, squads of soliders are setting up fearsome looking missile batteries.

We turn, and we see the object of their efforts. Metallo, his visor back on, stands two hundred feet or so from the oncoming tanks. He is utterly motionless.

The Apaches attack first. They open up with a salvo from their heavy-duty missiles. Each one locks onto its target and streaks away in a trail of white smoke, detaching from its parent craft, engines booming to life as they zero in on the stationary Metallo. He watches them converge on him with detached interest-

-and less than a second before they impact, he springs upwards.

All the approaching army sees is a huge explosion which, when the dust has settled, reveals only one huge new crater (from which underground waterpipes spurt high into the morning) and not a trace of their prey. Cheers of victory ring out from the assembled forces.

And one of the Apache pilots realises his helicopter is carrying extra weight.

Metallo drops onto his windshield, his red eyes burning. He puts his fist through the glass and half-steps, half-wades into the cockpit, slamming his mighty arms down into the instrumentation, ruining the craft in one stroke. Then with a spring he's gone, escaping the Apache before its inevitable fiery demise, his leg rockets firing to take him away.

Below, the tanks boom. It's hopeless. They simply can't track his movements fast enough. He flits across their field of fire with impudence, and all they achieve is massive collateral destruction in swathes behind him.

When he tires of evading the attack, Metallo targets tank after tank with his missiles. They explode like dominoes.

A small group of men watch the destruction on television. As we see more of the room in which they're standing, we realise it's the Metropolis Mayoral office. The Mayor, seated, has his head in his hands. Two high-ranking Army and Air Force generals stand at either side of him, and are themselves flanked by various lower-ranked officials. The mood is grim.

MAYOR: He's slaughtering them. For Gods sake, call off the attack. If Superman couldn't beat him, what chance do we have?

LUTHOR: That's good advice, gentlemen.

He enters the office bold as brass, flanked by three generic armed henchmen. Guns are produced and aimed at him. One belongs to the Army general, an old-school bear of a man with a particularly itchy-looking trigger finger.

ARMY GENERAL: Luthor. Figured you'd be behind this. Not real smart walking in here.

LUTHOR: Oh no? Why shouldn't I? I *work* here, General. You're looking at the new Mayor of the city. I don't know if I can afford that tiresome electioneering though, so what's say we just robe and chain me and you all get the hell out?

ARMY GENERAL: What's say I shoot you through the head, right now?

LUTHOR: *(placing a finger to his ear; we see there's a small earpiece there)* Metallo, pick a hospital. Any hospital. And destroy it.

Disbelieving, everyone turns to the television screen. Sure enough, Metallo pauses in his onslaught on the Army and flies off in a new direction. TV cameras track him as he moves

across Metropolis, bearing straight for Metropolis General...

LUTHOR: *(helpfully)* I think this is where you beg me to call him off.

ARMY GENERAL: *(taking a step forward, cocking gun)* You-

MAYOR: Enough! Do it, Luthor. Do it now.

LUTHOR: Cancel that deep-fried hospital order, Metallo. Go back to blowing up soldiers. Unless by some miracle of common sense you want to call off the attack?

MAYOR: *(to the Generals)* Do it, for Gods sake! You know they haven't got a chance!

Reluctantly, both Generals speak into their walkie-talkies. In the Plaza and on the rooftops, the units assembling there stand down. Understandably, they have a look of immense relief on their faces.

LUTHOR: Very smart. Now, gentlemen, listen carefully. I'm going to rule this city, starting today. I'm going to rule a lot more of course, but for now, Metropolis will do. It's such a *fine* piece of land. Now, any...*misbehaviour* on the part of any of you or the people you represent, and I will instruct Metallo to exact retribution on a scale you can't even *imagine*. There won't be a hospital, school or high-rise left standing in the tri-state area. I trust that's clear. Now, who wants to say it?

MAYOR: You're insane?

LUTHOR: *(rolls his eyes)* Everyone *always* starts with that. Doesn't anyone want to add 'Superman will stop you'?

The assembled men and women look at each other, searching for some conviction that the words Luthor speaks could be true. None is forthcoming. Seeing this, Luthor smiles.

LUTHOR: Well now...*that* is what I call progress.

He looks out of the window of City Hall. In the middle distance we see the Planet building and its golden globe. Luthor's eyes gleam with malicious intent.

LUTHOR: Time to make headlines.

Act III, Scene III

The Planet building. Everyone, including Dr. Reed, is watching the big television. Perry storms out of his office, furious.

PERRY: This is the biggest news story in the world and you're watching it on *television*?! Where the hell is Olsen?

JOURNALIST: On a date, sir.

PERRY: On a *date*? (*wonderingly*) What are the odds on that? Well the rest of you, get the *hell* out there and bring it to me! It's not going to walk through the front-

The ceiling caves in spectacularly above him. Everyone dives for cover behind desks. Perry is blown off his feet. He lands amidst a mountain of paperwork. A PC monitor topples over and smashes next to him.

From the floor, everyone watches as Metallo descends slowly, gracefully, touching down. He's carrying three passengers; Luthor in his right arm, and Martha Kent and Jason White in his left. The boy is still in his pyjamas. Once released, he clings to Martha. She holds him tightly.

JASON: (*breathlessly*) Mom...Mom works here...I want Mom!

PERRY: (*getting to his feet, furious*) Jason? My God...what do you want with him, Luthor?

LUTHOR: Perry White. It's been a long time.

Perry, bold as brass, marches right up to Luthor and puts himself right in the smaller man's face, seemingly little caring for the massive figure of Metallo lurking behind him.

PERRY: Your trial. I was the one who cheered loudest when they sent you down.

LUTHOR: (*snaps fingers*) Of course.

PERRY: You son of a-

He swings a fist at Luthor. Almost lazily, Metallo's arm snakes out and catches Perry's fist in his own massive paw, enclosing it entirely. Pressure is applied. We can hear bones cracking ominously. Perry lets out a rattling moan and sinks to his knees, tears leaking from his eyes at the pain.

LUTHOR: Let him go.

METALLO: I...know him.

Even through his pain, Perry hears this and looks at Metallo in confusion. Luthor turns to face his creation, who's still wearing the visor across his face. We can see Luthor is angry.

LUTHOR: I said let him go!

Metallo releases Perry, who nurses his injured hand whilst still looking at Metallo.

PERRY: It's *human*?

LUTHOR: (*laughing*) Perry White, Metropolis' most revered journalist, editor of the world's most respected newspaper. Tell me, Perry; where are Lois Lane and Clark Kent today?

Off to one side, two men and a woman are edging toward the staircase.

PERRY: You know damn well where. Out looking for you. Have been ever since we found Kitty's body.

Luthor's pomp deflates. He actually seems taken aback by this news.

LUTHOR: Kitty is dead? My Kitty?

PERRY: (*sneering*) Don't play the innocent, Lex.

LUTHOR: Yes. Because it *must* have been me, hmm? Despite the fact that I could have killed her a dozen times before I finally shook her off.

PERRY: Tell it to the jury. Where's Richard? Where is my nephew?

LUTHOR: (*glancing at Metallo*) Around. But where are my manners? This little lady here (*he indicates Martha*) is Clark's mother. Martha Kent, Perry White. Have you two met? No?

PERRY: No. What -

Metallo extends an arm, without even looking, and fires one of his mini-rockets across the newsfloor. We see it pass between people too shocked to move until it detonates in the stairwell the three Planet employees were edging towards. The explosion throws them backward. When the dust and smoke clears, the stairwell is left a smoking, impassable ruin.

LUTHOR: Let that be -

Another mini-rocket soars into the elevator shaft and blows it to smithereens. We hear the cable coming loose and the rattle and boom of the elevator hitting bottom. People begin screaming in terror. Luthor holds up his hands in frustration at the noise until it subsides.

LUTHOR: (*to Metallo*) Finished?

METALLO: Yes.

PERRY: What do you want, Luthor?

LUTHOR: Why else would I come here, Perry? I want you to put out a special edition of the *Planet*. I'll have to approve the editorial of course.

PERRY: Over my d-

LUTHOR: (*holding up a hand*) Perry, please. I think we both know what my solution would be to that particular problem. Besides, you should welcome this opportunity, because I guarantee this edition of the *Planet* will be the best-selling newspaper of all time. Have I got a headline for you!

MARTHA: (*desperately*) No!

LUTHOR: (*turning to face her*) Mrs. Kent, we hardly knew ye. Something to say?

MARTHA: Why are you doing this to him?

LUTHOR: (*laughing, then abruptly stopping*) Because I *hate* him. I hate him with everything I have, everything I am. I've already beaten him, and soon I'll watch him die, but in the meantime, my dear Martha, I'm going to completely *destroy* him. Starting with this.

MARTHA: You haven't beaten him, Luthor. Believe me.

Luthor's eyes narrow dangerously. He takes a few steps toward Martha, who steps in front of Jason, shielding him behind her. She stares at Lex defiantly, unafraid, as he brings himself very close to her.

LUTHOR: All of the power he has...and he's completely powerless. Not because of Kryptonite. He's trapped by his own compassion. His weakness.

MARTHA: It's that compassion that makes him more human than a *monster* like you could ever hope to be.

LUTHOR: I hope that's a comfort to him. Because if he tries to stop me, tries anything, you will *die*, Martha Kent. And he will have to live with causing your death.

To this, Martha simply smiles. There's not a trace of fear in her face or her voice, as she says calmly-

MARTHA: That's what you don't get, Lex. If anything happens to me, there's only one person who will have responsibility for it. *You*. And even if you don't understand that, one person will. *He* will. And believe me when I tell you that he *will* come for you. And Lex...? May the good Lord himself help you when that happens.

Having said her piece, she continues right on smiling. Luthor, meanwhile, is absolutely boiling with rage; angrier than we've ever seen him, in fact. He looks ready to tear Martha

apart with his bare hands. We see Jason take a step forward, out of her shadow, looking up at Lex fiercely, as if ready to intercept any attack that comes Martha's way.

Off to one side, we see Vanessa Reed, standing a little apart from her peers. She shows none of the fear that the others seem to be (sensibly) exhibiting. She's watching the exchange with intensity, her eyes never leaving it.

Luthor exhales, long and slow, and the rage seems to pass. He spins around and points a finger at Perry White.

LUTHOR: Let's get started, Perry! We have a paper to print, and I have the headline of the century for you!

Act III, Scene IV

A montage of scenes of Daily Planets being printed, coming off the production line, being stacked, packed, put into vans and lorries, and distributed as much as possible across Metropolis. One of the distributors carries two bundles into a crowded mall, where everyone it seems is holding a copy. The camera pans across the crowd quickly. As people spot the carrier, he is mobbed.

DISTRIBUTOR: Here! Here, take 'em!

He dumps the bundles and makes good his escape, and just in time; people pile over each other to get their hands on a copy. One man emerges triumphant with a copy and holds it up to us, finally allowing us to see the front page.

It reads:

SUPERMAN REVEALED!

SUPERHERO IDENTITY EXPOSED AS PLANET REPORTER CLARK KENT!

Underneath the banner headlines, two pictures sit side-by-side; one of Superman's face, and the other presumably Clark Kent's staff photograph from the Planet archives.

And in smaller type, off to the right hand side of the main headlines:

LEX LUTHOR: THE MAN, THE LEGEND, THE MAYOR! 10-PAGE TRIBUTE INSIDE!

We scan across the crowds digesting the newspaper. Conversations have already broken out between total strangers as they try to come to terms with the news. We see a man drawing on a pair of glasses to Superman's face with a pen. He whistles and nods.

MAN: Yeah, it's him all right. God, how did anyone not *know*?

MAN #2: Not much of a disguise, is it? A pair o' glasses? At least Batman makes an effort.

WOMAN: Since when was Lex Luthor the mayor?

MAN: Since he got his robot to kick the city's ass last night.

WOMAN: Isn't he a convicted felon or something?

MAN #2: (*sarcastically*) At least he's qualified.

We cut to a TV news feed, coming live from the corridor outside Clark's apartment. The reporter, a run-of-the-mill slick newsmen, stands beside a small dumpy man in a stained T-shirt.

TV REPORTER: ...no answer as yet from inside the Kent apartment! But we have managed to get an exclusive interview with his landlord! Mr Peabody...

MR. PEABODY: (*waves a hand nervously*) Hey.

TV REPORTER: ...you're live on Channel 8. Did you have any idea one of your tenants was the world's greatest superhero?

MR. PEABODY: Nah. He's a quiet sort, pays his rent on time. But uh, I'm not too sure about renting a room to Superman, you know? I mean no offence to the guy, but there might be all kinds of weirdos wanting to take a crack at him. And I can't afford to rebuild the place every time one of 'em tries.

TV REPORTER: (*excitedly*) Are you saying - live on air! - that you're going to evict Superman?

MR. PEABODY: (*uncomfortably*) Uh...not evict. Just, uh, suggest he goes someplace else. Like I say, and if he's watchin', uh, no offence.

As the TV Reporter makes the following speech, we pan across Metropolis, taking in the city as night begins to settle upon it once more, eventually panning to the Planet building.

TV REPORTER: (*voice-over*) Is he watching? Who knows? No-one has seen him in

almost 24 hours, and in that time Metropolis has fallen completely under the rule of Lex Luthor and his one-man army, Metallo, holed up in the *Daily Planet* building with over forty hostages. So this reporter, this city, maybe the whole world asks one more time...where are you, Superman? Where are you, Clark Jerome Kent?

Act III, Scene V

We zoom across ocean at a fantastic rate, eating up the miles, passing over the waves at an incredible speed. Gradually the dark blue below us becomes peppered with white flecks, more and more of them in bigger and bigger chunks until without warning a huge, majestic continent of white rises from the waves. We zip across the tundra for another few moments until we wheel around and come to view a crystalline structure rising from an almost hidden depression in the terrain. The Fortress of Solitude.

Even from some few hundred yards above the Fortress, we hear a voice on the air. We descend and the voice gets louder, until finally we pass through the crystalline walls and see that it comes from Superman, standing upon the central control podium and shouting into the Fortress-

SUPERMAN: FATHER! FATHER! Father...*please...*

The last echoes of his cries die away. We move slightly to the left and see behind him, her hands lowering from her ears, Lois Lane. Her mood does not seem to have improved since last we saw her.

LOIS: *This* is your great plan of counter-attack? For *this* you dragged me to the South Pole?

SUPERMAN: I brought you here because it's the only safe place I have left. What do you want me to do? Attack?

LOIS: I want my *son* back. I want my *fiancé* back. I'd like to have some small part of my *life* back, if it's not too much to ask. Is it?

SUPERMAN: I can't beat him! And if I could...it's *Richard*, Lois. I promised you that I'd save him.

LOIS: You're not going to do either stuck here! This place is dead...*(she swallows, and says carefully)* ...Clark. You've got to let it go. He can't help you.

SUPERMAN: No...

And inspiration strikes him. We see a flashback to the previous Act and the Eradicator telling him - 'you will have need of me, sooner than you think'. We see a brief image of the lost crystals tumbling from Kitty's hand to the surface of New Krypton during the events of Superman Returns.

SUPERMAN: ...but there is someone who can.

LOIS: What?

SUPERMAN: Lois...there may be a way.

LOIS: Believe me, you have my attention.

SUPERMAN: I have to go into space.

LOIS: You're...you're joking, right? Why? Why now?

SUPERMAN: There's somewhere I have to go. There's no other way, Lois.

LOIS: Last time-

SUPERMAN: It's not like last time. I promise you.

LOIS: He needs you. Jason needs you. *(she laughs bitterly)* The world needs a Superman. You have to come-

SUPERMAN: I will.

LOIS: *(quietly)* I need you.

SUPERMAN: I know. I have to go.

He turns and rises, casting one glance backward at Lois Lane, already thirty feet below.

LOIS: Do I get a goodbye, this time?

SUPERMAN: I won't be gone long enough for you to need one. I promise.

And with that, he ascends into the heavens and is gone in an eyeblink. Lois watches him go, such a small figure against the stark beauty of the Fortress around her and the even starker isolation of the Antarctic wastelands surrounding the Fortress.

LOIS: *(whispers)* Whoever you are...I love you.

Act III, Scene VI

An exterior shot of the International Space Station. Inside, two astronauts float weightlessly around the main working area, diverting their attention between various consoles. The black vastness of space stretches out from a small window at the far end of the working area.

One of the consoles emits a bleeping noise.

ASTRONAUT: What was that?

ASTRONAUT #2: Seemed like it came from the proximity alert. Must be a bug in the system.

The console bleeps again stubbornly, and keeps bleeping. The second astronaut curses softly under his breath and floats over to it, working a few controls on the screen.

ASTRONAUT: There's no debris heading our way, is there?

ASTRONAUT #2: According to this, not unless it's slowing down. Damn thing. I am *not* going to listen to you bleeping for hours like last week.

He turns a lever and the bleeping stops. He grins over at his fellow astronaut.

ASTRONAUT #2: There. Peace and-

Knock. Knock. The sound reverberates quite clearly throughout the structure. Knock. Knock. The two men look at each other, wide-eyed. One of them glances out the tiny window and does a classic double-take.

ASTRONAUT: *(weakly)* Uh...Commander? We, uh...we have a visitor.

The second astronaut, disbelieving, floats over beside him to gape out the window. We see what he sees; floating in space just outside is Superman. He nods casually to the two men and gestures with his left hand in an unmistakable 'can I come in?' gesture. The two astronauts look at one another.

Act III, Scene VII

The Daily Planet newsroom. Night is falling rapidly outside. Lex Luthor watches the television broadcasts carrying the news of Superman's 'unmasking' with unrestrained voyeuristic glee. The hostages, meanwhile, are now huddled into groups. Perry sits with Dr. Reed, Jason and Martha Kent. He places a hand on Jason's shoulder.

PERRY: You'll see your Mom and Dad real soon, son. I promise.

JASON: *(quite innocently)* How do you know?

PERRY: Your Uncle Perry always knows.

JASON: You didn't know about Uncle Clark being Superman.

PERRY: Yes...well, he...*(he trails off; this is obviously an extremely sore point)* ...he hid it well.

JASON: I thought he just put on glasses and a suit.

PERRY: They were *big* glasses, okay?

Jason reaches out and places a hand on Perry's shoulder.

JASON: Don't feel bad. I felt kinda stupid when I found out too.

PERRY: Thank you. Thank you *so* much.

Martha listens to this exchange, and despite their situation she finds the strength to smile a little. She looks at Jason with evident fondness.

A shuddering, thumping series of footfalls announces the approach of Metallo to the group. He towers over them, and sweeps his gaze from one to the other. Jason stares up at him, his forehead wrinkling as he studies the huge cyborg intently. Metallo's gaze settles back on him and the two regard each other for a long moment. We see Jason squinting his eyes.

METALLO: Look closer.

Jason's mouth drops open.

JASON: D...D-Daddy?!

Luthor's head snaps around.

MARTHA: *Daddy?*

PERRY: *Richard?*

VANESSA: Interesting.

JASON: DADDY!!!

He jumps to his feet with excitement and runs to Metallo, throwing his arms around the cyborg's left leg and hugging it tightly. Above him, Metallo lifts his hands to the visor covering his face and removes it, placing it on the table beside him. Perry and Martha gasp in horror. Perry gets to his feet, his face pale.

PERRY: Richard...

Metallo places a hand on Jason's shoulder, gently. The child looks up at him with shining eyes full of tears as his initial joy at seeing his father begins to be replaced by confusion and fear at what his father has become.

And Metallo pushes him away. Jason careens backward in shock, losing his balance, stumbling to his hands and knees. There is a shocked silence from everyone.

METALLO: I'm not your father, child.

Jason's world collapses in front of our eyes. He begins to sob. Martha rushes to comfort him, as does Perry White. After a few seconds of this, Perry turns to Metallo. He is heartbroken.

PERRY: You're not Richard. Not my Richard. You're just a machine made to look like him.

Metallo absorbs this. His hands clench into fists...then relax. He shakes his head, as if clearing something violently from his mind. Finally he turns to Luthor and stabs a finger in his direction.

METALLO: (*angrily*) I want Superman!

LUTHOR: Who was it who let him go?

METALLO: That was then. It won't happen again. I want him. I'm tired of this...game, this waiting. I want to destroy him. *Now.*

LUTHOR: No.

METALLO: *No?*

LUTHOR: I'm not done with him yet.

Metallo crosses the distance between him and Luthor with three quick steps. One of his massive hands grabs a handful of Luthor's jacket and hoists him eight feet up into the air, leaving Luthor's legs dangling in the air. Luthor splutters indignantly.

METALLO: I...don't...care.

LUTHOR: Let me go! That is an *order!* You can't just *disobey* my orders! Your programming-

METALLO: Here's a tip, Luthor. Next time you design an advanced cyborg with the ability to learn and rewrite its own software, don't be surprised when it screws you.

Metallo tosses Luthor ten feet away into a wall. Luthor is stunned by the impact, and barely conscious. To one side, we see Vanessa Reed get to her feet.

Luthor is seized by Metallo almost before he slides to the ground and hoisted up once again. Metallo's glowing red eyes fill his vision.

METALLO: Where *is* he? I know you know.

LUTHOR: (*dazedly*) The...Fortress. He'll...only safe place he has left.

METALLO: You know the way. You're going to take me.

He drops Luthor, who lands in a heap at his feet. He turns slowly to examine the huddled group of Martha, the still-sobbing Jason, and Perry White.

METALLO: You're going to take *all* of us.

VANESSA: No!

She runs across Metallo's field of vision.

VANESSA: Please...don't hurt Clark.

METALLO: What?

VANESSA: Because I'm in love with him.

METALLO: Well, why didn't you say so before?

He grabs her by the arm and flings her aside roughly. She lands alongside Martha, Jason and Perry. Together they watch as Metallo stomps over toward them, dragging Luthor behind him, looking for all the world like an advancing devil, an unstoppable force of nature. In Martha's arms, Jason peers up at what was once his father, and wipes the tears from his eyes. Dark anger descends on him and he scowls.

METALLO: You're *all* going to watch me break him.

JASON: NO!

He frees himself from Martha's grasp and rushes Metallo, shoving him, and actually succeeding in knocking him backward, causing him to lose his balance. Jason stands there, his palms outstretched, and for a wonderful moment we see a glimpse of what the future might hold for this young man; for at this instant, standing there defiant and determined, proud and powerful, he looks every inch his biological father's son.

Behind him, Perry White's jaw drops so fast and so completely that it's almost audible. And Metallo rises to his feet. He's undamaged, of course; it was only the element of surprise that caught him off-balance, combined with Jason's enhanced strength. The little boy faces down the cyborg, shaking in terror and anger and sadness, but standing between him and those he protects.

We see through Metallo's eyes. It's a world of schematics, diagnostics and readouts all flashing past at dizzying speed. One single readout, however, occupies the centre of the screen and remains there for several seconds.

NEW STRATEGY: INITIALISING...

METALLO: Son...it's me. It's your Daddy.

JASON: You're not. You're just some mean robot who looks like him. My Daddy doesn't hurt people. 'Cept I'm not gonna let you.

He raises his hands in a defensive pose, clearly signalling Metallo in his own childish way that if he wants to get at the people behind him, he'll have to deal with Jason first.

METALLO: Do you remember what I said to you at your birthday party?

We flash back to the birthday party, and a shy Jason unable to speak on stage. From Jason's point of view, we see Richard go down on one knee and speak to him. Richard dissolves into Metallo as we pull out from the flashback; despite the obvious - and huge - differences, the face staring at Jason is the same. And when Metallo speaks next, it's not in the slightly mechanised version of Richard White's vocal tones we've heard until now - it's in a perfect reproduction of Richard's human voice.

METALLO: Come on, Jason. Everyone's here for you, birthday boy. And hey, if they look scary, just picture them all in their underpants. Except for Uncle Perry, cos we wouldn't you to be sick on your birthday now, would we?

Jason's confidence evaporates. His hands lower.

JASON: (whispered) Daddy...?

Metallo walks to him and kneels down to be on Jason's eye-level. We hear the audible whine of servomotors as he does so.

METALLO: Yes, Jason. It's Daddy. Daddy found out what you could do and he made himself better so he could do special things too.

MARTHA: (desperately) Jason, don't listen to him!

JASON: But you hurt people. You said you weren't my Daddy! And you hurt me-

METALLO: I'm sorry, son. But this bad man (*he picks up Luthor's head before dropping it to the ground again, causing Luthor to let out a muffled grunt of pain*) this bad man made me say and do those things. You remember him, don't you? From the boat?

JASON: Yes...

MARTHA: Jason, he is *not*-

METALLO: He can't do that any more, Jason. I won't hurt you. I want us to be together. And I can teach you how to use your powers. Would you like that? Me and you together, going flying?

JASON: (wretchedly, in a very small voice) Uh huh...like me and S-S-Superman?

METALLO: No. Not like him. He's a bad man too, Jason. No-one knows, except me. I found out.

MARTHA / PERRY: Jason-

Metallo stands and makes himself huge until he towers over them both. He turns Jason around and points one of his arms at the child's back, out of Jason's sight. A mini-missile

slides from its sheath. Martha and Perry both see it.

METALLO: (warningly) Isn't that right, Mrs Kent? Uncle Perry?

Both look at one another. Due to the failing light outside, Metallo's red eyes cast a crimson glare over almost the entire newsfloor. Jason stands facing them, incredibly small, incredibly fragile, totally unaware of the weapon aimed at him.

MARTHA: Yes. Yes, that's right.

She looks at Metallo when she says it, her normally placid eyes filled with promises of revenge. Beside her, Perry looks as if he's about to throw up, but he manages to nod weakly. Metallo inclines his head as if to say 'well done', and the missile vanishes. He turns Jason back around again.

METALLO: Will you help Daddy to stop him, Jason?

JASON: I...I guess so.

And Metallo smiles. It's every bit as evil and malevolent a smile as we've ever seen from Lex Luthor.

METALLO: That's my good boy...

Act III, Scene VIII

Space. Endless, black, and peaceful-

-at least, until Superman rips through it. He zooms past us at a phenomenal speed. We turn and hasten to catch up with him until we're practically travelling on his shoulder as he forges a path through the void. As we travel up his body, we see he's had some modifications fitted; namely, two large oxygen tanks affixed to his back, with a breathing tube leading to his mouth.

As he flies, we hear excerpts from dialogue in earlier scenes fade in and out, as they pass through Superman's mind.

LOIS: (voice-over) ...my son throws pianos like they're dinky toys before he's five years old. How the hell is he going to hide that from the world? And if the world finds out, what then? Is he gonna be expected to go into the family business and juggle airplanes and have bullets bounce off his chest? Over my dead body. He is my son...

SUPERMAN: (voice-over) ...he's our son...

JASON: (voice-over) ...why can't I be more like my Dad? I wish I wasn't strong...

There is an absolute determination about Superman's face as he flies that we haven't seen from him before now. We zoom in a little on that face until his eyes fill the screen, and reflected in those eyes...something dark and huge suddenly looms in the blackness.

Superman comes to a halt. We pull out from our close-up and turn, and see what he sees; suspended in space, moving inexorably and majestically out of the Solar System altogether, is a very familiar asteroid. An asteroid, in fact, that Superman himself created.

New Krypton.

We cut to the surface of New Krypton itself. Jutting out from it are green shards, innumerable in number. They are everywhere. A massive proportion of the entire asteroid's composition is made up of the very substance he fears most - Kryptonite. Lifting this thing into space came closer to killing him than anything else ever had. He knows it.

But somewhere down there...amongst the green poison...lie several white crystal shards, the control rods for the Fortress, containing the last remnants of his father's parting gift to him.

ERADICATOR: (voice-over) ...I am scattered. The crystals Luthor stole...without them, the Fortress stands lifeless...you must bring them back. You will have need of me, Kal-El...

This is his only hope. He moves closer to New Krypton cautiously...and feels the effects immediately. He gasps, his eyes bulge, and his limbs seem to slacken. It's similar to the effect Metallo has on him, but amplified a hundred, a thousandfold.

Superman backs away to a safer distance and scans the asteroid with his super-vision, mapping its surface at a fantastic rate, zooming in...yes! There, and there...the asteroid is big enough to create its own weak gravity field and that has succeeded in keeping the white crystal shards loosely fixed to its surface. Superman locates all four of them, all within a hundred feet radius of each other...but as he zooms out from their location, we can see despair replace euphoria in his expression. They are surrounded by an absolutely MASSIVE Kryptonite deposit.

SUPERMAN: (voice-over) ...if you hurt Jason...

LUTHOR: (voice-over)...hurt him? Are you crazy? I have big things planned for that boy. All he ever lacked was a father figure. Now he'll get one...

And the music begins - the Superman theme. As it starts, Superman shrugs off the doubt that the Kryptonite placed in his expression. As it builds, we watch him remove the oxygen

tube from his mouth and shrug off the oxygen tanks affixed to his back. The whole time, he never takes his eyes from his target.

As it swells to a crescendo, he points his good fist ahead of him in the direction of the deadly behemoth of rock and Kryptonite, and takes off faster than a speeding bullet, faster than sound, faster than he's ever gone before, screaming a soundless scream that seems to be one single word...

...Jason.

BOOM.

The shockwave batters us. The explosion buffets us backward. We watch as New Krypton is completely blown apart, annihilated by a precision bullet driven straight into its heart. Rock and Kryptonite shards, most now no bigger than boulders, some as small as grains of dust, mushroom outward into space from the epicentre of the explosion.

It's toward that epicentre we go, swooping left, right, up and down to avoid fragments of the former asteroid on our way, as we try to discern if there's anything left of the missile that caused the destruction-

And suddenly, as we go low to avoid a particularly large chunk of space-rock, there he is. Battered, broken, one arm useless and the other arm bloodied from the sheer force of the impact, his cape a shredded, tattered red ruin.

But alive. Alive, and defiant, and triumphant, for in his good left hand he has clutched his prize, snatched at super-speed prior to the impact which blew the asteroid apart; four white crystals, shining like beacons in the oblivion of space. Glowing with life in his hand.

We cut to the oxygen tanks and mask, floating in space. Superman zooms past and snags them, shrugging the tanks over his shoulders and slipping the tube back into his mouth. He looks past us into the distance, and to Earth, and his expression says everything that needs to be said.

And in an instant, he's gone. And there is no catching him this time.

Superman has returned.

Act III, Scene IX

Earth. The Fortress of Solitude. Lois prowls its interior, sending anxious glances upward every few seconds, watching the skies for some indication of Superman. Behind her, a thin ice bridge leads to the solitary entrance to the Fortress at ground level. A shadow falls across that entrance now, its tendrils extending to beyond where Lois is standing. She turns.

LOIS: Richard...

METALLO: Lois.

LOIS: Where's Jason?

METALLO: You mean *our* darling son? You'll see soon enough.

He vanishes from the doorway. Lois begins to run toward it.

LOIS: Give me back my son!!!

-a chunk of the outside wall of the Fortress explodes inward. Lois recoils, thrown off her feet by the blast. The debris cloud billows inward, before beginning to clear. Through it, we can see a large shadow move into the Fortress. A smaller shadow detaches from it and moves quickly toward Lois. As it clears the ice and smoke, Lois is able to identify it.

LOIS: Jason...

JASON: Mom!

They run toward each other and she scoops him up into her arms, hugging him tightly to her, her eyes closed as she kisses his head over and over. She misses the last of the blast cloud clearing and the subsequent reveal of the rather incongruous sight of a large Humvee off-road vehicle inside the Fortress. Metallo lowers it the final few feet to the ground, having blown open the side of the Fortress to make room for its entrance. One of the passenger doors is open, the door Jason just scampered free from. When the Humvee touches ground, the other doors open and Vanessa Reed, Martha Kent and Perry White disembark.

Lois opens her eyes and sees the newcomers. She looks to Metallo for an explanation.

METALLO: Well, I couldn't carry *everyone*. And I wouldn't want any of them to miss this. But we've got one final guest star. Where is he?

PERRY: Still inside.

METALLO: (*banging on the exterior of the Humvee, which rocks with the force of his blows*) Come on out! You'll miss all the fun!

Slowly, gingerly, obviously in no small degree of pain, Lex Luthor extricates himself. He winces as he stands on the ice and winces even more with each step he takes. This apparent physical frailty does nothing to diminish the force of the stare Lois Lane directs at him. She curls her hand around Jason protectively.

METALLO: Feeling a little delicate, Lex?

LUTHOR: (*mutter*s) Can't think why. (*normal volume*) Hello, Miss Lane. A pleasure, as always.

LOIS: You bastard.

LUTHOR: (*reproachfully*) In front of the child? What would his father say? Speaking of Big Blue, where *is* he these days? (*glancing at Metallo*) Much as I can't believe I'm saying it, I'd kinda like to see him...

Metallo walks over to Luthor and twists his arm behind his back until we begin to hear bones creaking ominously. Luthor grimaces in pain.

METALLO: Thinking of changing horses midstream, Luthor? How *unlike* you.

LUTHOR: Not at all. Just...eager to see this ended, is all...

Martha Kent and Perry White reach Lois and Jason.

LOIS: Mrs Kent...

MARTHA: Lois.

The two women look at each other for a moment.

MARTHA: It hurt him more than anything, not saying goodbye. I want you to know that.

LOIS: Thank you.

Metallo discards Luthor with a contemptuous shove. Perry and Lois exchange heartbroken looks. Luthor staggers, losing his balance.

PERRY: Richard's gone, Lois. That thing isn't-

LOIS: No. He's in there somewhere, Perry.

As they speak, we see Vanessa offering Luthor her hand. He accepts, somewhat surprised at the gesture, and she pulls him to his feet.

JASON: Don't call him a thing!

He angrily shakes loose from Lois, turning on her. She looks down at him, shocked.

LOIS: Honey-

JASON: He's my *Dad!* He's...different, sure, but now he's like *me.*

LOIS: No. No Jason. He's not like you.

Metallo is suddenly there, standing close to them. He faces Lois and she shrinks back a little from his massive frame, his obvious menace. Those glittering red eyes bore into her accusingly, threateningly.

METALLO: Who *is* he like, Lois?

LOIS: I don't know. He's *five years old.* Right at this minute, he's not like anyone but himself. And when he grows up, that'll still be true. And whether he's stopping trains from derailing or putting up a shelf...I don't care. He's my son, and I'll always love him. (*she pauses*) And I know that if he were here, his father would say the exact same thing.

METALLO: I am his father.

LOIS: Richard White was. Don't you *dare* compare yourself to him.

METALLO: I'm everything he ever wanted to be. Finally a man you could fall in love with, Lois. Because we both know it wasn't love for you, don't we? It was gratitude, affection, admiration...sure, but never love. Am I wrong?

Lois says nothing in reply.

METALLO: Because I was never *super* enough for you-

He extends his left arm and a mini-missile fires, shooting across the interior chamber and exploding at the far side. Crystal shards and ice tumbles from the ceiling.

METALLO: -but just *look* at me now!

Lois picks up one of the shards of crystal which form the structure of the Fortress. Its surface is reflective. She holds it up before her so that Metallo can see himself.

LOIS: Yeah. Just look at you.

Metallo stops his rampage and looks at himself, at the visage of Richard White's face attached to that monstrous cybernetic body. He reaches up with a hand to touch his cheek softly.

LOIS: (*softly*) Are you in there, Richard?

Metallo's hands go to his head. He rocks backward unsteadily. The floor shudders slightly as his massive legs stomp downward, seeking balance. His fingers wrap around the back of his metallic skull and for a moment seem to be intent on ripping on his own head from his shoulders. He throws his head back and roars in pain and anguish.

Seeing this, upset, Jason steps forward to be with his father, but Lois' firm hand across

his chest prevents him from moving. Instead it's her who steps forward, pressing the small sign of weakness from their seemingly invincible foe for all its worth.

PERRY: My God, Lois, it's working...

LOIS: Fight it.

Metallo abruptly goes rigid, completely immobilised, his head turned in Lois' direction. The red glow in his eyes fades. For the first time since the transformation...he blinks. And somehow, the mask of Richard White comes to life, and becomes Richard again.

RICHARD: Lois?

LOIS: Richard...

She runs to him, throws her arms around him. He doesn't move in response, though we hear servos whining from somewhere within his chassis. He looks at her desperately.

RICHARD: I'm not strong enough, Lois. I can't hold it back.

LOIS: *(desperately)* You're holding it back *now*, Richard. Just keep doing it.

RICHARD: You don't understand...it's letting me say goodbye. It's toying with me, with all of you.

Jason arrives, Perry on his heels. He's hopelessly confused.

JASON: Daddy...?

LOIS: *(eyes filling with tears)* Richard, I'm so sorry-

RICHARD: I love you, son. *(to Lois)* Listen to me. It doesn't matter. None of it matters. This thing - it has to be stopped. When the time comes, tell Superman to do it.

LOIS: Do...

RICHARD: Please, Lois. You know what.

His limbs twitch into life. His eyes begin to flicker with red. Richard looks at Lois for what may be the last time and manages to speak two simple words.

RICHARD: Be happy.

And with a surge of crimson, Metallo is back. His leg-rockets ignite and he soars upwards into the apex of the chamber in which they stand.

METALLO: WHERE IS HE???

In his frustrations, he begins to systematically demolish the Fortress. Huge chunks of ceiling begin to rain down on everyone inside.

Trying to protect Jason from the falling masonry, Lois' attention alights on the Humvee. She shepherds Jason toward it.

LOIS: Perry! Mrs Kent! The car!

As the Fortress is ripped to pieces around them, the three manage to reach the Humvee. Lois opens the passenger door and hurls Jason inside to safety, before getting in herself. She beckons to Martha and Perry, but it's a different set of hands who reaches the Humvee next.

LUTHOR: Room for one more?

Lois' eyes narrow. We cut to where Perry and Martha are helping each other along. There is a loud thumping sound ahead of them, and a body falls backward into the ice between them as they step out of the way. It's Lex Luthor, and he's somewhat surprised.

LOIS: I am *done* being afraid of you.

JASON: Mom...you've got powers too?

LOIS: Jason hun, *all* mommies do.

Martha Kent 'accidentally' steps on his stomach as she walks over him, causing him to gasp in pain. Another huge chunk of the ceiling collapses. The Fortress is literally crumbling around them.

PERRY: He's going to bring it down on top of us...

MARTHA: I don't think so. (as everyone looks to her) Look...

Through the rapidly-increasing hole in the roof, something like a shooting star is visible streaking across the Antarctic sky. Except this particular falling body has a target.

We cut to Superman, still looking bloodied and battered, but unswaying from his course. He barrels down the last few thousand feet, superheated air from the intensity of his nosedive giving him a fire-trail that marks his descent.

Too late, far too late, Metallo looks up-

-Superman impacts him with a momentum developed over the last few million miles or so, sending the cyborg crashing downward into the ice, creating a sizeable impact crater. Luthor has managed to scramble to the Humvee when the shockwave hits, and he's sent tumbling into the interior of the vehicle to join everyone else as the enormous oversized jeep flips end over end in the ice.

We see the ice cracking outward in a huge spiderweb from the epicentre of the impact crater; the last of the dome structure of the Fortress tumbles into nothingness. The cracks deepen and huge fractures and fissures tear open throughout the ice sheet. The Humvee is caught on the edge of one such fissure as it rises, even as the other side of the crack falls, so that in a matter of ten seconds the Humvee teeters upon the brink of a eighty foot vertical drop.

Inside the Humvee, chaos predictably reigns. Lois is screaming and trying to open the door beside her. She eventually succeeds in kicking the door open. She grabs Jason and with a shove, pushes him clear out of the vehicle. He lands on the smooth surface outside. The door tilts closed again.

LOIS: Get clear!

Jason moves toward the Humvee. A huge crack appears in the crystalline surface, spreading out from the impact crater. The Humvee tilts crazily over the edge, to screams from those within.

LOIS: GET CLEAR, JASON!

Jason stares into his mother's terrified eyes. He looks down at his hands, and then to the Humvee.

JASON: No.

And with that, he bounds over the crack in the Fortress and grabs the back edge of the Humvee, just as the entire vehicle unbalances...

Jason is dragged toward the edge as the huge car plunges forward. He bares his teeth and pulls his head back and digs his heels in and somehow, this little five-year-old boy finds the strength to stop the car's descent into oblivion. He lets out a cry of pain with the effort, but remains steadfast where he stands. His hands are all that are preventing the Humvee from tumbling over the drop.

Inside, Lois looks around in disbelief, amazed to find herself still alive. She raises her head and stares through the back windshield at her little boy, standing no more than four feet away, straining against two tons of Humvee and winning. Even despite the chaos and the terror, she simply stares at him, and we sense this is the first time she's come to accept the gifts her son has inherited.

Jason takes a step back, dragging the Humvee with him. And another.

And that's when the tailgate bends. The left-hand-side of the metal bar comes loose in Jason's left hand, and the Humvee lurches crazily to one side, slipping further over the edge.

Jason is dragged to the brink of the precipice himself.

Inside the Humvee, Vanessa Reed falls against the passenger side door. Panic-stricken, she tries to move and her elbow hits the door-release lever...the door opens behind her, exposing her to the fatal drop. She screams and falls-

-and a hand wraps around hers, arresting her fall, saving her life.

LUTHOR: Hang on!

Perry White slides across the passenger seats on his belly and wraps his arms around Lex's waist, steadying him as Lex yanks with surprising strength and pulls Vanessa back up, until she can grab a handhold with her free hand and pull herself back inside the car.

Above, Jason is sliding slowly toward the edge. His young face is etched with pain as he tries to arrest the inexorable progress of the Humvee, but to no avail. There are only seconds before it will slip his grasp and plummet, killing all inside.

Back inside the Humvee, the passengers are trying to smash the back windshield. Lois thumps her fists against it, but it refuses to break. Martha Kent beside her does the same. They are joined by Perry and Lex.

LUTHOR: On two, everyone together! One...TWO!

They strike the glass simultaneously. Cracks splinter across its surface.

LUTHOR: AGAIN!

This time the glass breaks. Perry and Lex clear the shards away as best they can. Above, Jason's face has gone crimson red with effort. Sweat beads on his forehead. His breath comes in ragged gasps. And still, his feet slip toward that edge, and more and more of the Humvee topples over...

PERRY: Out! Everyone out!

He and Lex shove the three ladies through with as much force as they can muster. Martha is first, Lois next, Vanessa third. They land beside Jason. Tears of pain are now running down his cheeks.

LOIS: Perry!

JASON: I can't...hold it...

Perry dives through the hole in the windshield, leaving only Lex Luthor. For a moment Luthor and Jason's eyes meet. Lois' hand drops on her son's shoulder. She doesn't have to say a word. She knows her son has a choice.

JASON: Come...ON!

Luthor hesitates for a fraction of a second, then dives through. He is barely clear of the Humvee when Jason lets loose a little sigh. His hands slip from their makeshift handholds underneath the car's bodywork, and the Humvee plunges decisively and violently downward, flipping over upon impact before coming to rest, smashed to pieces.

We cut to outside, at the edge of the impact crater. A hand grabs the edge. Superman pulls himself up out of the crater he helped create. He looks, to put it bluntly, like hell. His cape is nothing more than a few fluttering pieces of red fabric. His broken right arm is still held close to his body, holding the crystals wedged in there. He uses his left hand to pluck them free. Their glow burns our eyes.

Behind him, from the depths of the impact crater, there is the sound of leg-rockets igniting.

Superman sinks to his knees. He lies the four crystals on the ice. They glow, but nothing happens.

SUPERMAN: Father...please...

And like a demon from Hell, Metallo rises from the crater behind him. Though he doesn't look round, Superman knows. Knows he has only seconds before his opponent attacks. His pleas of frustration turn gradually to anger...

SUPERMAN: Father...father...answer me, damn you!!!

Involuntary heat-vision springs from his eyes and strikes the crystals spread before him. Their glow intensifies a hundredfold until the light emitted from them becomes blinding, intense enough to force even Superman look away, something we only glimpse before the screen whites out...

Shapes move in the whiteness. Lines race across the screen, faint and darting, but there nonetheless. We get fleeting impressions of a crisscrossing network building itself, a framework constructing from the ground up, self-scaffolding and growing substance organically between its connecting points.

As the intense whiteness begins to fade from the screen, we stay on Superman. He has his eyes closed to shield himself from the glare. He opens them...and gasps.

The Fortress of Solitude has been rebuilt in a matter of seconds. But not just rebuilt. It has been improved. The dome remains, but it is now no longer composed merely of crystalline shards. Now, what look like advanced computer interfaces litter its interior. Large corridors splinter off the main dome. We cut to an aerial shot and see that the Fortress complex now consists of five domes; one large central structure and four satellite domes, one to the north, south, east and west.

The group of former Humvee passengers stand and gape. They are now within the expanded surface area of the main dome, which has just sprung to existence around them.

LUTHOR: Advanced alien technology...

As the air clears inside the new structure, two people sight each other for the first time in much too long.

SUPERMAN: Jason...!

JASON: LOOK OUT!

Metallo slams into the unsuspecting Superman from behind. The two come together in a tangle of bodies, but it's Metallo who effortlessly gains the upper hand in the struggle, and soon he is once again dishing out terrible punishment to the Man of Steel, repeatedly landing blows on Superman's already broken arm, causing Superman to howl in agony.

While this is happening, at first unnoticed, beams of light coalesce from the ceiling of the central dome and strike a central spot on the dome's surface...and from this point, something begins to form.

Metallo pauses in his onslaught. Superman truly is close to death now. Metallo has a handful of his suit in his hand, Superman lolling slackly in his grip. In the distance, we see the small figure of Jason White running toward the scene. Lois is hard on his heels.

LOIS: Jason!

METALLO: When you're gone...he'll learn to be my son. And the first day he flies without my help, I'll be there to guide him.

SUPERMAN: (weakly) No...

JASON: (stopping, screaming) DADDY!

The forming shape now has the definite characteristics of a man, seemingly composed entirely of Kryptonian crystals. He stretches his limbs as he takes shape and the crystalline 'skin' shimmers slightly and shifts to that of normal skin. Standing there is a tall, imposing man with golden eyes and close-cropped raven hair, the same man who caused Superman's

vision in Kitty's apartment.

The Eradicator.

METALLO: Goodbye, Kent.

The Eradicator takes in the situation in an instant. He tenses his legs and springs, rocketing across the Fortress' surface at phenomenal speed, barrelling into Metallo and sending him sprawling into the newly-formed Fortress walls. They shudder, but hold, and Metallo crunches to the ground.

Lois has caught up to Jason, and has ensconced him in a protective death-grip that she looks hellbent against ever releasing him from. Lex Luthor meanwhile, despite his injuries, has made all haste to be as close to the battle inside the dome as he dares. He stares with unabashed awe at the Eradicator.

LUTHOR: Magnificent...

Superman looks up at the outstretched hand of his new benefactor.

ERADICATOR: Kal-El.

SUPERMAN: Brother...

He takes the Eradicator's hand and is pulled bodily to his feet. We see Metallo getting to his feet in the background. The following conversation takes place as Metallo prepares to launch a counter-attack, his red eyes glowing.

ERADICATOR: Having some trouble with the natives?

SUPERMAN: I can't fight him.

ERADICATOR: *(nodding)* I'm detecting his Kryptonite power source-

SUPERMAN: That's not it. He's an innocent. I have to save him.

Luthor, listening in on this, rolls his eyes. Metallo has now risen to his full height. He throws out his arms and roars in fury.

ERADICATOR: *(dryly)* He seems to disagree.

Metallo's leg rockets ignite and he soars toward them. The Eradicator shoves Superman aside and meets the assault head-on, actually managing to grapple with the oncoming cyborg. The two machines lock themselves in a fearsome battle that rages across the dome.

The Eradicator dodges a massive uppercut from Metallo and lands a heavy counter-blow of his own, sending Metallo crashing. The Eradicator is upon him in an instant but finds his fists caught in Metallo's own. Metallo's servo motors whine as the two combatants struggle against the other's strength; each seems evenly matched, at least initially.

METALLO: *(speaking with effort)* And just...who...the hell...are...you?

ERADICATOR: Me? Just a diversion.

METALLO: From what?

ERADICATOR: *(nodding to the injured, bleeding Superman)* Him.

Metallo begins to win the battle of strength against the Eradicator. Richard White's mouth twists in a grotesque grin of victory.

METALLO: He's finished. He's gonna last about two seconds longer than you.

ERADICATOR: Get used to disappointment.

As he says this, doors open in the main dome. Golden robots begin to emerge, floating about four feet in the air, each one with four long, prehensile arms. One immediately makes a beeline for Superman, who regards it warily.

ROBOT: You are injured. Hold still, please.

SUPERMAN: What-?

Two more robots appear behind him without warning and wrap their arms around him. Superman has barely registered this restraint before the robot in front of him slides back a chest panel and produces a wicked-looking needle filled with a green substance...Kryptonite!

ROBOT: This will hurt.

The robot plunges the needle into Superman's broken arm and injects him with the contents. Superman shakes the walls of the Fortress with his holler of pain. We see his arm glow green, the Kryptonite shooting through his veins throughout the injured limb...he thrashes in agony, but still the robots hold on for grim death. The other robot gets closer and puts one hand on Superman's lower arm and the other hand on his upper.

ROBOT: This will hurt more.

The robot tugs sharply. We hear a whip-crack as the bone snaps back into place. Superman's howls of pain have all the humans (save Metallo) within the Fortress on their knees, covering their ears lest their eardrums burst.

When the noise subsides, Luthor is the first to remove his hands from over his ears. He turns to the person standing beside him, obviously tremendously excited by what he's witnessing.

LUTHOR: They weakened his molecular structure to re-set the bones! Ingenious! Don't you agree?

PERRY: Great Caesar's ghost...(then, coming to his senses, with feeling) I hate you.

Metallo, meanwhile, is not oblivious to what's happening. He ceases his attack on the Eradicator immediately and tries to extricate his fists from his opponent's grip.

ERADICATOR: Stick around.

ROBOT: Repair complete. Rejuvenation process beginning.

Just as we saw on Krypton, the ceiling of the dome begins to slide back, and suddenly a shaft of purest Antarctic sunlight, the purest most untainted sunlight available on Earth, filters through the crack in the roof and bathes its target in a dazzling golden halo.

The effect is amazing. Superman's bruises unbloom. His cuts dry up and seal themselves. His shoulders straighten. His posture goes from slumped to standing bolt upright. Even his eyes seem to regain their former sparkle. He hefts his right arm, flexes his fingers.

Metallo finally succeeds in releasing himself from the Eradicator's grasp. As he floats free, his leg-rockets keeping him suspended, we see Superman's head turn slowly, deliberately to look at him. There is absolute silence as the two make eye-contact. A sense of finality hangs in the air. This is going to be the big one, and they know it.

SUPERMAN: This ends. Now.

METALLO: Bring it.

The two come together for one final time. We slow things down to keep up with their lightning-quick movements. They've battled each other so many times now that they know each other's strengths..and weaknesses. Metallo tries to pin Superman down, keep him close, weaken him with the Kryptonite exposure. Superman dodges at incredible speeds, employing heat-vision to scorch Metallo's armour, super-breath to blow him off course as he tries to intercept, and his sheer turn of speed to be ahead of Metallo at the cyborg's every turn and twist.

He's fighting smart.

Metallo's frustration begins to show. He's no fool, however, as Superman has learned to his cost. Feigning a charge, he waits until Superman dodges, and then flits to the side, managing to stretch out an arm and hook on to Superman's leg. The two crash to the ground.

Metallo gets to his feet first, Superman a close second, not quickly enough to avoid two crushing blows from his opponent, one to the midriff, one to the head. We've seen Metallo do this before; weaken Superman with an initial assault, then pile on the blows while the Man of Steel struggles to recover due to the proximity of the Kryptonite. We've seen how effective it can be.

Except for now.

Superman looks as if he's done with it. He shrugs off the pain the blows have caused him, grabs Metallo's arm as he makes to swing again, and begins to fight back, through the pain.

We cut to Lois. Hope lights her face. Jason looks up at his mother, sees how delighted she is to see Superman winning. He says nothing, turns back to the fight.

Superman presses the attack. He's fighting through pain, exhaustion, burnout...he's been through every pain barrier with this opponent that he knew existed, and the only one left is sheer bloody-minded stubbornness. He will NOT lose this time. Metallo staggers backward as punch after punch rains down on him. Sparks begin to fly from his chassis. The red light in his eyes flickers.

We cut to the Eradicator, watching the fight intently, his eyes narrowed.

Superman knocks Metallo to the ground with one tremendous downward swing. Metallo's right arm raises to fend off the attack, and Superman grabs hold of it with both arms, grits his teeth-

-and pulls it clean off.

LUTHOR: (conversationally) You know, I think he's pissed.

Superman tosses the cyborg's arm aside. He stands over the machine that was once Richard White as it looks up at him. The red glow in the eyes dies once more, as it did shortly before Superman plummeted from the sky, as it did when-

RICHARD: Do it.

SUPERMAN: Richard...

Lois and Jason arrive at the scene. Lois goes down on her knees beside the fallen body of her fiancé. Jason, sobbing, kneels beside her.

RICHARD: Lois, tell him. I can't...it's injured, but it will come back, and when it does...

He goes still, the red glow fading completely, his body immobile.

The Eradicator suddenly appears on the scene. He nods to Superman.

ERADICATOR: You fought well, brother. But your opponent lives.

SUPERMAN: I'm not a killer. Not for him, anyway...

He looks to Luthor. Luthor backs away hurriedly, spreading out his palms in a gesture of surrender. There is a dangerous look to Superman at the moment.

ERADICATOR: I will contain this one.

A beam of light arcs from the ceiling to Luthor, remaining in place. Luthor likewise freezes in position, trapped within the radius of the beam. The Eradicator turns back to Superman, gesturing the Metallo.

ERADICATOR: If he lives, he will threaten you again. You, and those you may care about. You know this is true.

SUPERMAN: I can't!

ERADICATOR: Then allow me.

He moves toward Metallo's body. A blue-clad arm is suddenly across his chest, and he is forcibly yanked around to come face-to-face with a Superman who's clearly not in the mood

for negotiation.

SUPERMAN: I . Said. *No.*

JASON: Don't you hurt my Daddy!

Superman looks at his son, staring fiercely at the Eradicator, and that old heartbroken expression comes to his face again. He takes a deep breath.

SUPERMAN: Is there no way to save him? With the technology here?

ERADICATOR: *Save?*

SUPERMAN: Return him to the way he was.

ERADICATOR: *(reluctantly)* ...there may be a way.

Lois looks up, hardly daring to believe it. Superman nods grimly, seeming less and less well inclined toward the 'man' he holds in his grip with each passing moment.

SUPERMAN: Then do it.

ERADICATOR: This makes no sense! This...this crude construct tried to kill you! Why would you seek to save it?

SUPERMAN: *It* has a name.

He looks at Jason with love and pain in his eyes.

SUPERMAN: And it...has a son.

Act III, Scene X

The Fortress, a short time later. A crystal chamber rises from the floor, forming itself as it does. The Eradicator is carrying Metallo in his arms. Superman stands with Jason, Lois, Martha Kent and Perry White off to one side, presumably out of the range of the Kryptonite keeping Metallo alive.

The chamber settles into place. A door swings open. The Eradicator glances back at Superman.

ERADICATOR: This may not work. It will consume a large quantity of power from the Fortress.

SUPERMAN: Do it.

The Eradicator's eyes flash dangerously, but he carries Metallo into the chamber. As he goes, Superman glances down and sees Jason's expression. He gets down to be eye-level with the boy.

JASON: He said...he said I wasn't his son.

Perry and Lois glance at each other. Both now obviously know the truth.

SUPERMAN: He wasn't. Something bad happened to him, Jason, something that took your Dad and hid him deep inside that body, somewhere he couldn't get out. He tried, I know he tried, but he couldn't.

JASON: Is he gonna...

SUPERMAN: I hope so.

JASON: I just want to show him what I can do.

LOIS: *(tears in her eyes)* You showed us all, honey.

The Eradicator steps clear of the chamber. The door swings shut. He looks to Superman one last time.

ERADICATOR: So like your father.

With that, he turns and raises his arms. Beams of light immediately stream from multiple source point in the ceiling of the Fortress' main dome structure, converging on the crystalline chamber. It pulses with an inner green light, obscuring all that is going on within.

A whining noise begins to build and intensify. The Eradicator looks to be in pain. He staggers slightly and supports himself against a computer panel. The artificial light thrown off by the crystals composing the Fortress dims and flickers.

JASON: What's happening...?

The green light inside the chamber turns to white, and when it does a brilliant flash emanates from the chamber outward, momentarily blinding everyone. When it has passed, the Eradicator has vanished. No-one notices that immediately, however, for everyone's attention is focussed on the interior of the chamber...

...and the body lying in there. The human body.

LOIS: Richard!

JASON: DADDY!

He rushes to the door and throws it open (and off its hinges, we notice), before tumbling inside to Richard's body, lying still on its side. He rolls his father over and gasps.

Richard White is entirely human. Not a single trace of cybernetic implant or other artificial construct graces his body. He is as human as the fateful night he entered Luthor's warehouse.

Lois and Superman are on the scene, with Perry and Martha hovering in the background. Vanessa arrives a moment later, her expression cool. Superman puts a hand on

Richard's chest. He smiles, disbelievingly, but delightedly.

SUPERMAN: Heartbeat. He's alive!

Richard's eyes open, on cue. He struggles to focus on the group of talking heads above him.

RICHARD: Lois...? Jason...? S...Superman? Dr. Reed? *Uncle?*

He looks to Martha and simply frowns.

MARTHA: *(helpfully)* Martha Kent.

RICHARD: Can someone-oooff...

He's cut off as Jason hugs him tightly. We fancy that we may hear a rib crack. Jason appears to come to his senses and eases off on the pressure slightly.

JASON: Missed you, Dad.

RICHARD: Missed...can someone please tell me where I am? And *(he shivers suddenly)* why...I seem to be...

One of the floating robots arrives, right on cue, with a black garment draped over its prehensile arms.

ROBOT: You are naked. Hold still, please.

SUPERMAN: *(knowingly)* Uh oh.

Everyone stands back as the robot descends downward to Richard. There is a short, stifled yelp from Richard before the robot rises again.

ROBOT: Clothing process complete.

It floats off serenely. No one watches it go. Richard sits up, now dressed from head to toe in a black jumpsuit with a silver 'S' shield on the chest - the same outfit, in fact, that Superman found himself wearing during his first vision of his father and Krypton. We see the realisation registering on Superman's face as everyone else processes the outfit.

JASON: Cool!

SUPERMAN: Suits you.

RICHARD: *(getting to his feet, pulling at the suit)* How the hell do you get these things off?

SUPERMAN: With great difficulty.

RICHARD: Please God, someone start talking. Is this some sort of crazy late engagement party? What's next? Lex Luthor jumping out of a cake?

LOIS: Well -

PERRY: He's gone!

Everyone looks over to where Luthor stood frozen in the beam. The beam is no more, and Luthor himself has vanished entirely. Superman's good cheer vanishes.

SUPERMAN: How?

ERADICATOR: *(appearing suddenly behind them)* I told you. The process of...restoring...this one drained a significant amount of power from the Fortress. Including, it would seem, from the containment beam aimed at our absent friend.

PERRY: Damn that snake Luthor! He *always* manages to-

SUPERMAN: *(soothingly)* I'll deal with Luthor.

He looks at them all standing there before him and cannot stop himself from smiling, even if part of what he's smiling at is the sight of Jason White up in his father's arms, head against Richard's chest, looking as content as anyone could ever wish to be in the world. They are those he loves, and against all odds they have survived and so has he.

SUPERMAN: Now...I think it's about time we got you all home.

ROBOT: Wait.

Superman turns. A red and blue garment, resplendent in the white crystal light of the Fortress, lies draped across the robot's arms. He takes it from the machine and lets it unfurl. It is a new suit, pristine and perfect. The cape unravels and begins to flap gently in the breeze.

We zoom in on Superman's face as the smile gets wider...

...and as we zoom out, he's zooming upward into the Antarctic air, carrying Richard and Jason White in one arm and Lois Lane in the other, looking every inch the classic Superman, wearing a huge smile on his face. Jason whoops with joy as they leave the continental mass and begin to soar across the oceans beyond, arrowing toward Metropolis as only Superman can.

Act III, Scene XI

A caption appears on our screen - '24 hours later'. We fade into a crowded newsroom. The assembled journalists wait for the speaker to arrive at the podium. We see some familiar faces from the press conference called earlier. As we pan across, we also see Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen. Jimmy looks thoroughly depressed with life.

JIMMY: The greatest story in history arrives at the *Daily Planet* headquarters and I miss it. CK is Superman! I mean, come on! I always kinda suspected it, to be honest. They look so alike, and there's the mysterious 'I have to run off with a real flimsy excuse *right now*' thing CK always does...it's instinct, Lois. You can't teach that. Damn, why wasn't I *there*!

LOIS: How *did* the date go?

JIMMY: As well as usual.

Lois winces.

LOIS: Will you be seeing her again?

JIMMY: Only in flashbacks, Lois.

The speaker arrives at the podium. It's Margaret Sawyer. She has an arm in a sling and walks with some difficulty, but her face is as set and determined as ever. As she reaches the podium, however, a small round of applause rings out from the journalists before she can speak. She actually flushes at this, and acknowledges it with a nod.

SAWYER: Thank you. Metropolis General's finest have gone on record as saying I shouldn't be out of bed let alone hosting a press conference, so I'll be brief. It seems that the crisis is over...

...as she talks, we fade to scenes illustrating what she's talking about...

SAWYER: (*voice-over*) ...Superman has returned to us, restored to his full powers it seems, and has worked tirelessly to repair the damage caused by his battle with the second Metallo.

We see Superman in action, repairing buildings, lifting materials into place, fusing girders with heat-vision, sinking huge foundation blocks with his bare hands. In Centennial Park, he hovers over the sodden ground soaked from the lake water and applies a blanket of low-grade heat vision, causing an immense cloud of water vapour to rise from the area. As it does so, Superman guides the vapour with his super-breath before cooling his breath, condensing the vapour and causing a localised intense downpour over the lake, replenishing its water. Citizens look on in awe.

SAWYER: ...we have confirmed that the light emitters *were* sabotaged. How, we don't know. We've put the project on hold, at Superman's request.

We see a quick shot of the vast spotlights being driven back to a central warehouse. One splits off from the main group however and heads down the interstate. As it does, we see that it's passing a sign signalling Gotham City...

SAWYER: ...and it is, unfortunately, my sad duty to confirm that Lex Luthor *has* escaped. As before, all law enforcement agencies have been put on high alert. And I'm fairly sure that Superman will be keeping an eye out for him.

A ripple of wry laughter goes through the assembled press at this understatement. Lois doesn't so much as crack a smile.

SAWYER: Metallo himself - itself, whatever - has been destroyed. On that we have Superman's word, and that's good enough for me.

Lois looks haunted, as well she might. We see a quick flash of Metallo in his glory, and Richard's face twisted in hatred. The moment fades, but we can see it's an image not

currently far from Lois' thoughts.

SAWYER: I know you all have questions, but I'd like to ask you to direct them to my co-speaker if you would.

She gestures offstage. Superman himself steps rather shyly into view. The assembled press immediately leap to their feet as one and begin screaming questions at him. Lois herself seems rather surprised to see him. He glances at her as he makes his way to the podium, holding up his hands and politely refusing to answer any questions screamed at him until he's there.

SUPERMAN: Thank you, Captain Sawyer. Now...did someone have first question?

The clamouring erupts once again. Lois doesn't add to the frenzy. But one person does, and his voice rings loud and true throughout the room, and has the effect of immediately bringing astonished silence in its wake.

CLARK: I believe I did.

Every single head in the room turns as one. But there he is - Clark Kent, large as life, dressed in his usual immaculate suit, standing at the back of the room. Mouths drop open almost audibly, not least that belonging to a certain Lois Lane.

CLARK: Clark Kent, *Daily Planet*.

SUPERMAN: (*wryly*) I believe I'm familiar with your work, Mr. Kent.

Clark steps forward through the journalists as he speaks, approaching the podium. The crowd simply melts away before him.

CLARK: Please. Call me Clark.

SUPERMAN: You had a question?

CLARK: Yes I did. (*he stops, at arm's length from Superman*) Can I shake your hand?

SUPERMAN: My pleasure.

Superman hops down from the podium and the two men shake hands warmly. As they do, every single man and woman holding a camera in the room suddenly comes to their senses. The room explodes in camera flashes.

Lois looks to her left. Jimmy is still staring open-mouthed, his camera hanging unused around his neck. She nudges him.

JIMMY: Oh! Oh God!

He scrabbles for the camera and hurriedly fires off about twenty exposures, his finger frantically stabbing at the 'take picture' button. The two men stop shaking hands, and, photo opportunity over, the photographers stop their feeding frenzy. Jimmy lowers his camera and retakes his seat.

JIMMY: I knew it. I *knew* something was up. CK is *Superman*? So they look alike. So what. Just because I look like Orlando Bloom doesn't mean I dress up like a pirate, huh? You know what that is?

LOIS: Instinct?

JIMMY: Absolutely.

He continues talking. Lois tunes him out, continuing to stare at Clark and Superman, tapping her pencil on her teeth. A slight smile creases one corner of her mouth.

Act III, Scene XII

Perry White's office. A copy of the Metropolis Star is slammed down on his desk. Perry, who did the slamming, looks as if he could chew through steel. He points a finger at the Star's headline.

PERRY: (*reading*) SUPER HOAX! PLANET'S HEADLINE OF THE CENTURY A FAKE!

We see Lois and Clark sitting on the other side of Perry's desk. Lois looks over at Clark. He glances back at her. There is a 'moment'.

PERRY: Well?

CLARK: Chief-

PERRY: Don't either of you two *Chief* me. Okay so we delivered it at gunpoint, but we still delivered the greatest scoop of all time! And now...you want me to *lose* it? To be laughed at by *this*?

He crumples the Star's front page, heartbroken and furious in equal measure. There is a fluttering of window blinds behind him. He turns. Superman has landed on the ledge outside.

PERRY: And you can get in here too.

Superman inclines his head in a 'who, me?' way, and obliges.

PERRY: Stop looking like that. It's driving me nuts.

SUPERMAN: As you wish.

He shakes himself and shimmers slightly, and as we watch his appearance shifts from a perfect facsimile of the Man of Steel to his real persona - the Eradicator.

CLARK: Mr. White...I'm sorry, I truly am. I hate to do this to the *Planet*, but you know it's necessary.

PERRY: I know. I know, damn you. That's the whole problem. I *know*. I'm a newspaperman through and through Kent, and God knows I try to be an ethical man, but to have you here...*working* for me...and for me to keep a lid on this...it's more than this old newshound can bear. I almost wish I could go back to not knowing.

ERADICATOR: As you wish.

He reaches out and touches Perry's head. A brief spark seems to jump from his hand to Perry's temple and then be absorbed.

LOIS: Perry!

CLARK: What are you *doing*-

Perry stands there for a moment, surprised, before he goes limp and slumps to his desk. Clark is immediately by his side. The Eradicator's appearance changes once more to that of Superman. Clark glares at him.

CLARK: What did you do?

ERADICATOR: What he wanted. The knowledge, the memories he wanted gone...are gone.

CLARK: You had no right!

ERADICATOR: (*shrugs*) It's done. You know where to find me.

He goes to the window and is gone. Clark watches him soar away with anger and no small degree of concern on his face. Perry comes to. He stands groggily and looks around him.

PERRY: Kent? Lois? I'm not feeling too good...

LOIS: (*soothingly, leading Perry to the door*) Yes, Chief. If I were you I'd go home and take the day off. No TV, no papers, nothing. You don't want to get an ulcer even after all Dr.

Reed's therapy, do you?

PERRY: *(hazily)* Dr. Reed...yes, I met her mother. Attractive woman. Hadn't set eyes on her on twenty years.

LOIS: You know her mother?

PERRY: Yes, I couldn't recall where from...but I remember her now.

He seems to sober up completely from the after-effects of the memory wipe as the thought impacts him fully. Lois and Clark are astonished to see him clutch at the doorframe for support.

PERRY: *(horrified)* Great Caesar's ghost...

Act III, Scene XIV

We fade in on a familiar face underneath an all-too-familiar bald head - Lex Luthor. He looks distinctly annoyed with life. As we pull back, we see that he's not, as we might have anticipated, stranded somewhere on the Antarctic tundra. He is, in fact, sitting in a darkened room. Light filters in from a small window. Outside, we glimpse a thronged market street. It looks like we're in Thailand.

LUTHOR: *(muttering)* Still better than that damn island.

There is a knock at the only door to the room. Lex looks up in astonishment. He glances around the room for a weapon, and not finding one, simply yanks at an exposed piece of piping until it comes loose in his hand. He approaches the door stealthily and yanks it open, ready to-

LUTHOR: *(astonished)* You?

DR. REED: Hello, Lex.

She steps into the room. Lex offers no resistance, but he does shut the door once she's inside.

LUTHOR: How did you find me? How did you get here?

DR. REED: Same way you did.

LUTHOR: Why?

DR. REED: I need to ask you a question.

LUTHOR: I'm listening.

DR. REED: Why did you save me? When I fell, from the Humvee...you caught me. Why? What was in it for you?

LUTHOR: You're surprised?

DR. REED: It doesn't fit your profile, Lex.

LUTHOR: And what is my profile? Evil genius? Insane madman? Shall I tell you what *evil* is, Miss...Reed, isn't it? Evil is a point of view, a place to stand. I can happily cause the death of millions - *billions* - of people if I believed their deaths would benefit me. But show me a young woman falling off a car and...*(he pauses)* even monsters can have standards. You're welcome, by the way.

DR. REED: Interesting. But my name isn't Reed. My name is Tessmacher.

Lex sits down heavily. He is suddenly pale as a ghost.

LUTHOR: Tessmacher...?

DR. REED: My mother, Eve, she told me for the longest time that I was adopted. When I was 13, I discovered that was a lie, and she told me the truth. She told me about you. And I knew then, that someday...someday I would have to meet you. To see if the stories were true. To see for myself what you were. So I got a job at the *Planet* right next to Lois Lane, figuring that she was an itch you just couldn't resist scratching. And I was right.

LUTHOR: She never told me. Your mother. She never told me about you.

DR. REED: You were a little hard to get hold of, Lex.

LUTHOR: Your mother was...

DR. REED: ...weak. You see, I've done my research on you. Evil genius, greatest criminal mind of our times...and yet always accompanied by some brainless girl dragged along for the ride, who usually ended up betraying you. Like Mom. And *Kitty*.

She fairly spits the name 'Kitty'. Lex looks at her with realisation spreading across his face.

LUTHOR: You did it. *You* killed her.

DR. REED: I went to see her, to talk about you. She figured me out, was hysterical, promised to contact the *Planet* if I didn't stop trying to contact you.

LUTHOR: My God.

DR. REED: Your entire life, you've been searching for someone like you. A counterpart.

LUTHOR: And that's you?

DR. REED: Who better?

LUTHOR: So what do *you* want?

DR. REED: A father.

LUTHOR: (*looking at her quizzically*) And...?

It's now that Vanessa Reed - Vanessa Tessmacher, as she will now be known - finally takes off the mask we've not even realised she's wearing. Her eyes gleam with intent, her mouth opens greedily. We can suddenly believe all too readily that here stands the daughter of Lex Luthor.

VANESSA: Power.

Luthor smiles, apparently satisfied at this answer. He steps forward and embraces his daughter warmly.

LUTHOR: We have so much to talk about...

Act III, Scene XV

Lois and Richard White's house. Night is falling. Lois' car pulls into the driveway. She gets out, and sees a large van parked nearby. She frowns, and half-runs inside the house.

LOIS: Jason?

Jason appears at the end of the hallway. He's upset. He runs into his mother's arms.

LOIS: What is it, honey?

JASON: *(tearfully)* It's Daddy...

LOIS: Daddy? What's wrong with-

RICHARD: *(walking into view, holding a box)* Hello, Lois.

They look at each other, and an awful realisation floods into Lois. We cut to Lois and Richard sitting opposite one another on two of their armchairs in the living area of the house. Jason's toys are scattered around the room, and amongst them, directly between Lois and Richard, is a Superman action figure.

LOIS: So you're just leaving?

RICHARD: You think this is easy for me?

LOIS: I don't know, is it? It sure seems that way. I come home and find you practically packed and gone? God, Richard...didn't you even want to *talk* about this?

RICHARD: I've talked about this constantly for the last year, Lois. I've reached for you and seen you flinch away, and I've ignored it because...because I love you, I still love you, I'll *always* love you. But I can't do this any more. I can't guilt-trip you out of something you want. And that something isn't me. No matter how much I wish it was.

He gasps a little in pain and clutches his temple. Lois half-rises out of her seat, concerned. He waves her back, shaking his head.

RICHARD: I'm okay. I think it's just an after-effect. Not surprising I guess.

LOIS: Are you...remembering any more?

RICHARD: *(quietly)* I remember everything, Lois.

LOIS: It wasn't you.

RICHARD: Wasn't it?

LOIS: Of course it wasn't! There was hardly anything *left* of you by the time Luthor and Vale had done with you!

RICHARD: The programming they put in Metallo...in *me*...it had limits. It was supposed to obey their every commands. And yet...

LOIS: ...and you think that was *your* fault?

RICHARD: I went after Superman. I tried to eliminate him so I could raise Jason as my own. That's something no human could ever do. But once I had the power...

He exclaims in frustration and stands up, pacing the room like a caged animal. Eventually he leans against a wall, breathing heavily.

RICHARD: You can't know what it's like. To fly, to have the strength to do anything you want to do, crush anything that stands in your way...but *he* does.

Lois glances down at the Superman action figure, frozen forever in a typically heroic pose.

RICHARD: He has that power, Lois. And yet he chooses to help us, rather than to rule us. And that, more than anything, makes him a hero.

LOIS: I know.

RICHARD: And that's why you love him.

LOIS: *(softly)* Yes.

Still looking downward, his arms outstretched, Richard's eyes close. He nods slowly as he accepts her answer. When his eyes open, they are glassy with tears.

RICHARD: I have to go.

We cut to outside the house. Richard is hugging Jason. The boy refuses to let him go, and when Jason White wants to hold you, you stay held. Eventually Richard manages to coax the boy's arms from around his neck. Tears drip down Jason's face.

JASON: Don't go because of me.

RICHARD: Because of you? Jason, this isn't because of you. I love you. I always will.

JASON: It's me. It's because you know about me.

RICHARD: I always knew my son would grow up to be strong. I just didn't know how strong. I am so proud of you. You saved your Mom's life, and your Uncle Perry's, *because* you're so strong. And I know you're strong enough to look after your Mom for me for a little while.

LOIS: Where will you go? You don't have-

RICHARD: I contacted Perry. He's been after someone to head up the West Coast edition for almost a year. (*he smiles weakly*) I've kinda gotten tired of undercover work.

LOIS: How long?

RICHARD: A few months.

LOIS: A few *months*? Richard, no...please, I'm asking you to stay. Jason needs you.

RICHARD: I'll be back to visit. And Jason can come to me. We'll work it out. And when I'm not around for him...(*he glances upward at the sky*) we *both* know Jason will be looked after. I can't think of anyone better to do it. But if I don't go now, Lois, I never will. And we'll both regret it, eventually.

LOIS: (*desperately*) You're a good man.

RICHARD: Yeah. But that was never enough for you. Was it?

Without waiting for an answer, he kneels down again and gives Jason another hug and kiss. He stands and looks at Lois. She reaches for him...

...and he flinches from her touch.

RICHARD: Goodbye, big guy. Goodbye, Lois.

We retreat into an aerial view of the scene as he walks away and gets into his car. Lois gets to her knees and hugs her son. They remain that way as Richard's car leaves their driveway and slowly but surely gets further and further from the house, until it's lost from our screens altogether.

Act III, Scene XVI

Clark Kent's apartment door. A hand raps once, twice. It opens after a moment.

MARTHA: Lois...Jason!

LOIS: Hey, Martha.

JASON: Hey, Mrs. Kent.

MARTHA: Come in, both of you!

She opens the door and Lois and Jason walk inside.

LOIS: Thanks for letting us come over. We just...I...*(she falters)* the house just didn't seem the best place for us, tonight.

MARTHA: I understand.

Jason still looks extremely fragile. He walks silently to the balcony and leans out over the railings, watching Metropolis go by around him. Martha sees how he is and glances at Lois.

LOIS: He misses Richard.

MARTHA: *(sighs)* Poor little guy.

LOIS: Is Clark...?

Her words hang significantly. Martha coughs slightly, a little embarrassed, and possibly a little unused to discussing her son's greatest secret so openly, particularly with Lois.

MARTHA: ...he's around, yes.

LOIS: I can't believe how easily the world bought the hoax story.

MARTHA: Oh, you'd be surprised how blind people can be to what's right in front of their eyes.

LOIS: *(grimacing)* Point taken.

MARTHA: You know one of the few good things to come out of this mess?

LOIS: *(sceptically)* Please, tell me.

MARTHA: He was afraid not so long ago, afraid that Clark Kent didn't matter to anyone.

LOIS: *(grunts)* And now the whole world knows that name.

MARTHA: No, it's not that. They'll forget the name soon enough, now they don't believe he's Superman. But when the Eradicator told him what he could do...that he could assume the likeness of any person...he had a choice. He could have had the Eradicator appear as Clark and he could have been Superman, and it would still have worked.

LOIS: But he didn't.

MARTHA: But he didn't. He chose Clark without even thinking about it. Because Clark is who he *is*, Lois. Oh he went a little too far with the clueless and clumsy act, but he couldn't disguise his heart. *That's* why I could never understand how no-one recognised him.

Lois absorbs this. Martha approaches her and whispers in her ear, conspiratorially, and yet by her standards in a tone of voice completely devoid of humour.

MARTHA: So if you claim to love him, Lois Lane, you had *damn well better* love him for Clark Kent, and not for the blue tights and the cape. Because if you don't, you're wrong for him. And if you hurt him, you'll have *me* to answer to.

JASON: *(re-entering the apartment from the balcony)* What's going on? Why are you whispering?

MARTHA: *(smoothly)* Just telling your Mom what you might like for Christmas, honey. I think she got the hint. Didn't you, Lois?

LOIS: *(looking at Martha with a healthy respect)* Oh yeah. I got it.

JASON: Where's Uncle Clark?

MARTHA: Just sorting out some unfinished business...

Act III, Scene XVII

The Fortress of Solitude, in its current glorious bells-and-whistles incarnation. Superman settles to the surface. He calls to the empty air around him.

SUPERMAN: We need to talk.

The crystalline figure of the Eradicator forms from the Fortress itself, a further reminder - if one were needed - of how completely the two are bonded. He nods to Superman deferentially.

ERADICATOR: How may I serve?

SUPERMAN: I thought you were my brother, not my servant.

ERADICATOR: (*inclining his head*) Something troubling you, Kal-El?

SUPERMAN: I'm curious.

ERADICATOR: Regarding?

SUPERMAN: Luthor's escape.

ERADICATOR: I explained. The power drain-

SUPERMAN: -released the containment beam. So you said. Fine. So that's how he escaped the Fortress. But I'm a little hazy on how he managed to hike several hundred miles across Antarctic wasteland.

ERADICATOR: He could have failed to do so.

SUPERMAN: I've searched, believe me. He's not out there.

ERADICATOR: He's resourceful. Does he not modestly term himself 'the greatest criminal mind of our times', after all? I'm sorry, Kal-El, are you accusing me of *assisting* in Luthor's escape?

SUPERMAN: No. I'm just curious, as I said.

ERADICATOR: Need I remind you that if not for me, Metallo would have killed you?

SUPERMAN: And when he didn't, you wanted me to kill him. That's not something I would have expected from my *brother*.

ERADICATOR: I advised in your best interests. I will keep such advice to myself in future, if you would prefer.

SUPERMAN: What will you do now?

ERADICATOR: *Do?* Kal-El, I am a computer program. I do not get bored. I will remain here and I will wait, and when you call upon me I shall serve. As I have always done. Or if you wish, I will shut myself down, since clearly you seem dissatisfied with me.

SUPERMAN: That's not what I said.

ERADICATOR: Is it what you wish?

SUPERMAN: (*hesitating for only a fraction of a second*) No.

ERADICATOR: Good. Then you know where to find me. But before I go...one question.

SUPERMAN: Yes?

ERADICATOR: Why go to such lengths to protect the Clark Kent persona? Why not simply live as Superman? You would have nothing to fear.

SUPERMAN: If I don't have anything to fear, then how will I know what's worth protecting? What's worth dying to protect? Living as Clark...it's more difficult than fighting off ten, a hundred Kryptonite-powered cyborgs. But it's what makes me human. And I can't lose that.

ERADICATOR: I understand.

SUPERMAN: (*smiling*) So do I. Finally, so do I.

Act III, Scene XVIII

Night has fallen on Metropolis. We enter Clark's apartment via the balcony. Martha Kent pats Lois on the shoulder. Lois jumps a little. She's sitting on the back of the largest sofa. We see that a makeshift bed has been made for Jason upon it. Lois has her hand trailing in her sleeping son's hair, as if she's unwilling to let go of him even for a moment.

MARTHA: Goodnight, Lois.

LOIS: Goodnight, Martha. *(pause)* Will he-

MARTHA: Yes. Any moment now is my guess. Goodnight.

She pads off in the direction of the spare bedroom. Lois watches her go. The bedroom door closes.

SUPERMAN: Lois.

Lois turns, and there he is, already on the balcony.

LOIS: *(accusingly)* Were you waiting for your mother to go to bed?

SUPERMAN: I'm gonna lose some of the tough-guy image saying yes, aren't I.

LOIS: I've met your mother. So no.

Superman smiles. For a second so does Lois, but it soon fades. She looks down at Jason and strokes his cheek fondly as Superman enters the apartment, his cape fluttering in the winds.

LOIS: He left.

SUPERMAN: I know.

LOIS: He left because of me.

SUPERMAN: Yes.

LOIS: *(snaps)* That wasn't a question.

SUPERMAN: Even if it had been, you already knew the answer.

LOIS: Jason will miss him.

SUPERMAN: Of course he will.

LOIS: You saved him. You could have...*(she trails off, unable to say 'killed him')*...he asked you to. And if you had, no-one could have blamed you for it.

SUPERMAN: He would have.

Jason mutters in his sleep and turns over.

LOIS: Richard wants you to look after him.

SUPERMAN: You know I will-

LOIS: I know that. But he *wants* you to. Don't you see?

Superman gets it. He nods, looking quite overcome with the gesture.

LOIS: I want you to look after him. You were right, on that rooftop - God, it seems like an age ago now. He has power, but he has goodness. Your goodness. And if you can show him how to use his gifts, he can become a hero like you. But that's *his* choice. And if he chooses not to...

SUPERMAN: Is that what you think? Lois, he can choose my path or he can become a dentist or a clown or even a *lawyer* and I will still love him. Nothing will ever change that.

His words hang in the air.

LOIS: I'm in love with you. *(he makes to reply; she holds up a hand)* Please. Just let me finish. I'm in love with you. But it's not as simple as that. There's Jason. And there's everyone else. And there's the fact that if I'm involved with Superman, sooner or later the world will find out. And when that happens, I'll be putting me and Jason right back in danger again. So I can't. I can't do it.

SUPERMAN: I...understand.

And that's when a smile tugs at Lois' mouth.

LOIS: But Clark Kent...Clark Kent now, *he* can buy me dinner. If only he were around. Have you seen him?

Superman's misery vanishes in a wonderful moment as Lois' words sink in. For a second he looks fit to burst with joy. Finally after a few moments of simply standing there grinning like an idiot, he collects his thoughts into some semblance of order, and coughs ostentatiously.

SUPERMAN: Ahem. Actually I think I saw him going into the building.

LOIS: Did you now?

SUPERMAN: Yes. Oh...(he cups a hand to his ear theatrically)

LOIS: Superman, is someone calling for help?

SUPERMAN: Yes. Damn the timing. Gotta go.

He walks quickly to the balcony, sends one dazzling smile back at Lois, and then rockets off into the night.

LOIS: (under her breath) One...two...three...

The doorbell rings. She walks to the apartment door and opens it. Clark Kent stands there, as confident and as happy as we've ever seen him. He adjusts his glasses, proving that some habits never die.

LOIS: Clark! You just missed Superman!

CLARK: *Superman* was here? Oh. Neat.

He enters the apartment. Lois closes the door. She's talking excitedly.

LOIS: Yes! Honestly Clark, *neat*? Is that all you can say?

CLARK: No. I can also say - Lois, how about dinner. You and me. Saturday night.

DiMarcos.

LOIS: In little Italy?

CLARK: In *Italy* Italy.

LOIS: Sounds good, Clark.

They stare at each other. The atmosphere fairly crackles with energy between the two. There's five years and more of tension building behind this moment. Lois steps closer, to within arm's reach of Clark. He isn't slow about gathering her into his arms. She bends her head up to him as he dips his lips to hers - and stops.

CLARK: Sorry.

He fumbles for his glasses, to take them off. His hand is covered by hers. She shakes her head.

LOIS: Leave them on.

CLARK: (softly) Yes ma'am...

And with that, they kiss. For quite some time.

So long in fact that we pull back from the kiss and spiral outward into the Metropolis night, leaving them behind as we climb upward through the strata of the city, until it lies beneath us - the Big Apricot in all its glory, a glowing, beating heart of life in the darkness that surrounds it.

The voice catches us by surprise as it begins its narration.

ERADICATOR: (voice-over) Weakness. I was created to be strong, in order to save our people, save our planet from destruction. And because of weakness, I was not allowed to complete my goal. And now, the last of our race to escape our planet stands as a God amongst

men, and still he is weak. He claims to *care* for them, and yet he does not see that for their benefit he should *rule* them. They have the power to destroy this world with their weapons. But he does not take those weapons away. They war, and they kill, and they do so safe in the knowledge that should a bridge collapse or a train derail, their so-called saviour will be there to save them. *Superman* they call him, but he is weak...

During the last few sentences, we have travelled back into Clark Kent's apartment. Some time has passed. Clark himself is asleep in his bed, alone. We travel toward his sleeping form until we seem to pass straight through him...

...finding ourselves on Krypton once again. The blazing sun overhead looks close enough to touch and, in cosmic terms, it is. Krypton is in its death throes. The massive city Superman finds himself standing within (once again clad in black with the silver 'S') is shaking apart at the seams. Giant chasms open in the surface, bottomless pits into which Kryptonians are sent tumbling to their dooms.

A Kryptonian woman slides down the smooth crystalline surface toward oblivion. Superman dives for her instinctively, but passes clean through her. She screams as she falls from the precipice to her death. Superman, meanwhile, is unable to stop his own momentum and passes clean through a crystal wall, finding himself inside a large chamber currently holding three people he instantly recognises.

SUPERMAN: Father! Mother!

Lara, his mother, has an infant wrapped in her arms. She ignores her son's calls to her and places the baby reverentially inside the life-support chamber of the rocket. It gurgles up at her. She squeezes its hand, tears running down her face

SUPERMAN: It's me...

He stands beside his mother, looking down at himself as a tiny child, no more than a few months old at most. For a wonder, his infant self seems able to perceive his adult self standing there.

SUPERMAN: (to his mother) Thank you.

JOR-EL: You're welcome.

Superman turns. Jor-El is looking directly at him. Lara remains oblivious. She steps back, choked with tears, as the life-support chamber begins to close shut around her only son.

SUPERMAN: Is he doing this?

JOR-EL: He?

SUPERMAN: The Eradicator. He's sent me visions before. Is he doing this?

JOR-EL: (urgently) What happened in this vision?

SUPERMAN: I saw how you created him to pass judgement on Zod. How the Council rejected him as arbiter.

JOR-EL: Rejected? The Council *approved* his appointment as arbiter.

SUPERMAN: Then why...

JOR-EL: He found Zod innocent. Recommended that Zod be installed as head of the Council. In his view, only General Zod, madman, criminal, murderer...only he possessed the strength necessary to take the steps to save Krypton...from this.

SUPERMAN: *What?*

JOR-EL: The Council were horrified. As was I. They reversed the decision and I attempted to erase the Eradicator's program from the Kryptonian databanks. I thought I had succeeded.

SUPERMAN: He escaped. He escaped the only way he could - onboard my ship.

JOR-EL: *(horrified)* He's on Earth?

SUPERMAN: Yes. I helped him. I helped him to rebuild the Fortress.

Jor-El walks over to his son and finally reaches out for him. Shaken, unsure, Superman steps forward and his father embraces him.

JOR-EL: My son, you have made me proud. Know that. Know that always.

SUPERMAN: ...thank you.

The embrace ends. Jor-El looks gravely at his son.

JOR-EL: But know also that you are about to face the greatest danger you have ever known.

Behind them, the rocketship holding Superman's infant self blasts off into space, smashing through the ceiling of the dome in which they're standing. Superman watches as it leaves Krypton's orbit, escaping bare moments before...

JOR-EL: What happened to Krypton was *not* an accident.

...overhead, the red sun Rao goes nova. The explosion and the shockwave take only a few seconds to hit Krypton. Superman is powerless to prevent it. He watches as his entire homeworld is annihilated, his parents obliterated in one cosmic cataclysm.

The vision ends.

Clark sits bolt upright in his bed, covered in sweat, his eyes wide and panicked.

CLARK: What have I done?

We travel upward at a phenomenal rate, going into orbit in only a few seconds, then around the curvature of the Earth until we arrive at the South Pole, where we dive downward until we pass through the ceiling of the central Dome in the Fortress of Solitude. We see the Eradicator. He's still talking. He seems to be talking directly to us. Disgust drips from his words.

ERADICATOR: He wants to be *human*. I was not created to serve humans. Only Kryptonians. And there is only one Kryptonian on this planet worthy of my service. Only one with the strength to do what is right. To rule this planet, to destroy weakness, and to remake this world in the image of Krypton.

The camera turns one-hundred and eighty degrees, revealing who the Eradicator was addressing.

It's a man in his thirties, a thin waspish figure, small in stature but possessed of the intensity, the purpose, the sheer single-minded insanity of expression of a hundred Lex Luthors. He is clad from head to toe in a black jumpsuit similar to that which we've seen Superman wear in the visions, but rather than a large 'S' in the centre of the chest, this man sports a large 'Z'...

ERADICATOR: And that is you...General.

We zoom out until we can see both figures facing each other. We watch as the Eradicator steps forward and kneels before Zod. Zod's expression remains impassive.

ERADICATOR: How may I serve?

ZOD: Bring him. Bring me Superman...

Fade out.

THE END