

Summary: Thirty-six-year old Chloe finds herself in a conundrum when someone very dear to her leaves her side and accidentally sets the wheels of destiny in motion. Chloe is forced to take some painful decisions to protect two innocent people and recover or lose the love of her life for ever.

Rating: PG-13

Author: lexie

Disclaimer: all Superman and Smallville characters belong to DC Comics and Gough & Millar. No Infringement's intended.

Spoilers: Relic (borrowed some lines used by PI Mason), Perry, Shattered, Asylum (I've borrowed a couple of lines that Lex said to Clark)

FINDING THE WAY BACK

CHAPTER 1: Flying Away

Two years had gone by since Laura flew away from home. Chloe had known that day would come but that knowledge hadn't made things any easier. As her dad Gabe would remind her time and time again, she had done her part to the best of her ability. Nevertheless, when all was said and done, she would never relinquish the role that God had assigned her in Laura's life.

"It takes a father to know how you feel, sweetheart," said Gabe over coffee. "Now you know what I went through when you spread your wings. "

"Why couldn't she choose another career? Gotham's got two of the best universities in the country... Why go all the way to Metropolis?" she whined.

"Archaeology's been her dream ever since she could play with her bucket and spade, Chloe," said Gabe paternally.

"Don't you think I know that? I'd never ask her to give up her dreams, dad, but I'm afraid. "

"You'll have to trust her, Chloe. She's a wonderful kid. You've taught her right from wrong. "

"I trust her. Of course, I do. It's not her decisions I'm worried about. I'm afraid of the world out there, and what it can do to her," she choked.

"She's a strong girl just like her mum. She's old beyond her years, honey. "

"I wish I could have spared her that," she said bitterly.

"You're safe now. She's safe now. There's no use in dwelling on the past. He can't harm you any longer. Isn't it a relief to be able to use your name again? "

"Dad, I've never asked you this, but... did you resent my leaving like I did and changing my surname in the bargain? "

"Sweetie, you've always had a great heart and what you did you did to protect someone you loved, so... you can forget an old man's foolish pride," he responded, squeezing her hand.

"I should have told you the truth back then, dad," she said with glassy eyes.

"Let bygones be bygones, Chloe. He's no more. He cannot get to you, now. What he threatened you to do is no longer practicable."

"He might be dead but..." she said with a strangled voice.

"Chloe, you've got to pull yourself together."

"Dad... there's more to this than what I told you ten years ago."

"More?" he asked transfixed.

"It's the reason I'm so worked up. When I read those e-mails of hers, I was so happy at first. She seemed to be adjusting so well... making new friends... and then... a couple of months ago something happened. Remember I told you she had met someone?"

"Yes, that guy at the faculty. What about him?"

"I think she's in love with him."

"Our Laura in love!" exclaimed an exultant grandfather. "Why that long face? Is it like you and Clark?"

"Unrequited you mean? I don't know, but I hope so."

Chloe was lying in bed curled up in a ball. Pouring out her soul to her dad after hiding the truth for so many years had been a trying ordeal. If it hadn't been for Laura's e-mails and what Chloe had read between the lines, her lips might have remained sealed. But, now, just as she had run away to protect someone she loved in the past, she would have to go back to save two innocent souls. She was the only one who could do it, and there was no way she'd put it off. She realised now she had been foolish and reckless, but she wasn't willing to jeopardise two people's happiness and sanity for her own stubbornness. Least of all when the two reasons she had kept away were no longer part of the game.

Flying to Metropolis was something she didn't relish, but it had to be done. Once she got there she'd have to make some difficult decisions. Her relationship with Laura was amazing and Chloe loved more than life itself, but she was going to deal her quite a blow, a blow which might end up with her daughter hating her for the rest of her life.

As to the other people involved... one was definitely out of the picture, but the other two were completely oblivious of the predicament they would soon find themselves in. She hoped the truth wouldn't earn her a new pair of enemies to replace the devil who had chased her away from Smallville nineteen years before.

CHAPTER 2: Pain

The Torch

"Hi, Chloe!" exclaimed Clark, flashing his 100-watt smile at the young reporter before noticing her red-rimmed eyes and gloomy demeanour. "What's up?" he asked concernedly. "Are you feeling all right, Chlo'?"

"I'm fine, Clark," she responded, showing him her back to pull down a menu on her computer.

"You don't look fine to me. You know you can talk to me, Chlo'. We're friends, aren't we? I know I hurt you when I picked Lana over you but..."

"Drop it, Clark! Believe it or not, the world doesn't revolve around Clark Kent and Miss Lana 'Perfect' Lang," said Chloe bitterly.

"What's bugging you, Chloe? You've been crying and by the looks of it, it wasn't just a bout. It takes a big heartfelt cry to have red-rimmed eyes like yours."

"Gee, thanks, Clark! As if I needed you to remind me I look like a punching bag," she chuckled.

"Chloe, I've noticed of late..."

"Blame it on PMS, Clark. Give me a couple of days and I'll be back to normal. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to finish today's edition," she cut him off, entering her password to make some last-minute changes to her editorial.

"Ah! I almost forgot," he said turning round at the doorway, "Lana's organising something small to welcome Lex back. We want to smooth things a little for him."

"That's a nice thought," murmured Chloe, hiding her discomfiture by fishing for an imaginary blank CD in her bottom drawer.

"Can we count on you?" he asked, looking at Chloe's bent head.

"What time's the do?" she queried.

"At 6.30. He'd like you to be there."

"You're his best friend, Clark. I'm just a friend of a friend."

"He enjoys talking with you, Chloe. He's my friend but half of the times I find it hard to understand what he's saying. And, let's be honest, he's too much of a gentleman to say he doesn't give a damn for my teenage problems."

"He cares for you, Clark. Why would he put himself to so much trouble to bring you and Lana together if he didn't give a damn for your teenage problems as you say?" she chided him.

"I haven't got your wit or your humour, Chloe. You're the only one I know who can cross swords with him. "

"You give me too much credit, Clark. My educated guess is that after what Lionel's put him through, he'll look forward to hearing you prattle on about Lana- no offence, Clark. Besides, we've already talked, "she answered with a tremor in her voice.

"You saw him? "queried a surprised Clark. "How is he? "he added, coming back into the office.

"You'll find out soon enough, Clark. Now, please... I've got a deadline to meet, "she beseeched him, hoping he took the cue and let her be before she crumbled in front of him.

"What happened at Belle Reve? I know you went to see him... "

"Lionel put him there. You do the math, Clark. Don't expect him to remember what's been going on in the last couple of months. Please, shut the door when you leave. "

Against all advice she had been to Luthor Mansion the previous day after getting a call on her mobile from a sympathetic orderly at Belle Reve, who had informed her of Lex's release. Sylvia was an incurable romantic who had developed a deep hatred for Luthor Sr and what he was doing to the young couple. She knew she couldn't do much for them; Lionel had eyes and ears everywhere, and she couldn't afford to lose her job or worse. However, once Lex was released, she retrieved the piece of paper the blond reporter had slipped in her hand on one of her visits, and dialled the mobile phone which was jotted down.

Although Chloe had felt relief on hearing the news, she wasn't naïve. She was aware that his ordeal was far from over and that it'd take him a long time to recover, if he ever recovered. She knew she had made a promise, but she needed to see him one more time. She had every intention of keeping her word, but her heart drew her to him like the proverbial moth to the flame. Despite the fact that seeking him out would bring more heartache and pain, she couldn't help but want to dispel that heavy sense of foreboding which had seized her of late.

When Chloe got to the mansion she was welcomed by Lex's butler, an agreeable man in his sixties who had been privy to the couple's secret rendezvous. He was the only man on Lex's staff he trusted implicitly and the elderly servant loved the young billionaire like a foster son.

"Welcome back, Miss Sullivan, " he said warmly on opening the front door. "Master Alexander's in his study. "

"Thanks, Stevens, "whispered an emotional Chloe. "How is he? "she croaked.

"He hasn't talked much since his arrival, miss. He's sought refuge in his den and hasn't come out yet. I sent him up a tray for lunch. At least his appetite's as good as it was before..."he explained with a shaky voice. "I'm glad you're here, miss. "

"It won't be for long, Stevens. I've come to say goodbye. "

"Goodbye?" he echoed with a puzzled look. "But I thought..."

"It's for the best," she answered, her eyes brimmed with tears. "I hate farewells. Promise me one thing, though... promise me you'll watch out for him while I'm not here."

"What has the old man threatened you with, miss?" he asked sagely.

"I won't answer that question. I'm sorry, Stevens. I've learnt my lesson and it wouldn't do any good to your master if I were to speak again- least of all in this house. You're an intelligent man. You must know Mr Luthor has eyes and ears in the mansion; that's how he found out what we had with Lex."

"Stevens! What's taking you so long?" called Lex from upstairs, startling Chloe and the butler.

"Miss... I forgot he had sent me for a bottle of brandy before you knocked on the door," he said, fetching the beverage from a console.

"Give it to me. I'll take it to the study," she said, grabbing the bottle with cold hands.

"It's been a pleasure, Miss Sullivan."

"Ditto, Stevens," she sobbed, embracing the man and pressing a kiss on his cheek.

Chloe dragged her feet up the stairs, afraid of what lay ahead. She stopped at the study door, which was ajar, and tried to pull herself together, wiping off a couple of treacherous tears with the heel of her hand. Her heart was hammering in her chest and her hands were sweaty. So much so that she had to tighten the grip on the bottle to prevent it from sliding and ending up in splinters on the polished hardwood floor.

She pushed the double doors gently and took a couple of hesitant steps forward. Lex was sitting in front of the fireplace with his back to her, and Chloe felt a sudden tug at her heart when she looked at his slouched shoulders.

"Lex?" she murmured a little nervously.

"Chloe!" he responded, turning around and standing up.

"Hi!" she exclaimed, pasting a smile on her face. "I got word that you were back home and... I... wanted to see how you were doing," she added, looking into his beautiful blue-grey eyes and feeling her own get watery again.

"Great, actually," he said calmly. "Never better. What have you got there?" he smirked, pointing at the bottle she was cradling in her arms.

"Oh! Stevens sends you this. He said you've asked for it."

"Yes, I've missed my daily fix while at Belle Reve," he said with the ghost of a smile. "Thanks," he told her, taking the vintage beverage from her hands.

"You're welcome," she blushed, feeling a jolt of electricity when his soft skin brushed hers.

"I'm afraid I haven't been too much of a host lately. Let's ask Stevens to bring up some coffee," he apologised, picking up the phone. "I heard you went to visit me at the asylum on several occasions," he continued once he had put down the handset. "As a matter of fact, I have it from a very well-informed source that you were the only one there besides my father."

"Clark paid you a visit once," she responded, sitting down on the sofa.

"It's nice to know I've got people who still care about me and my well-being," he said, sitting down in the armchair across from her. "I have to thank my dad for recognising my psychotic break in time and committing me to the asylum. I tremble to think what harm I could have done had I stayed on the loose. How's Lana, by the way?"

"Lana?" she echoed sadly. God! Lana, Lana, Lana. Why was it that the girl's name was always on the lips of the three most important men in her life- yes, even her father had fallen for the girl's saccharine smile. "She has a slow recuperation ahead, but she's doing OK. You've got nothing to blame yourself for, Lex. It wasn't your fault," she said vehemently.

"I'm not so sure, Chloe. Even though I wasn't in my right mind when I pushed her under the horse's hoofs..."

"You weren't mad, Lex," she murmured, averting her gaze.

"Do you want to tell me something, Chloe?" he asked, trying to read the expression on her face.

"It was just as you said, Lex... your island trauma precipitated everything. Having your dad spying on you, bugging your house, and robbing you of a 150-million dollar contract that you assumed was a done deal... a lesser man would have broken down sooner."

"We Luthors are made of resilient stuff, aren't we?" he stated with a lopsided grin.

"I have confidence in you, Lex. You've lived through a lot. You're a survivor as you've proven to the world so many times. I'm glad to see you at home," she said sincerely, holding his gaze and trying to control the butterflies in her stomach.

She could feel her heart break into a million pieces when she heard him utter his next words.

"You know, Chloe, there's one thing I'll never forget."

"What's that?"

"How important your friendship and Clark's is to me," he said pulling her into a hug and closing his eyes- unaware of the deep wound he had inflicted in the young reporter's heart.

Her gut instinct had been right. He had forgotten they were more than just friends and, although her heart cried in pain and she wanted to tell him the truth and everything be damned; she couldn't bring herself to do it. She loved him too much to sacrifice him for she knew Lionel wouldn't stop at anything next time.

Once she was back in her car, she let the tears fall and, looking one last time at the mansion in the rear mirror, she put the key in the ignition. It was at that moment that her mobile rang, and she felt a sudden tightening at the pit of her stomach when she recognised Lionel's number on the caller ID.

"Hello?" she sniffed.

"Hello, Miss Sullivan," he answered tersely.

"What do you want?" she snapped, wiping her tears with the palm of her hand.

"I thought we had an understanding. Imagine my surprise when I heard that you went running back to Lex."

"Cut the bullshit, Mr Luthor. You know damn well what was said in that room. Knowing you, you must have found the way to keep tabs on everything that goes on at the mansion."

"Do you want me to repeat it verbatim, Miss Sullivan?" he asked wryly.

"If there were some thread of humanity left in that rank soul of yours, you would understand my need to see your son one last time."

"It must hurt to know he doesn't remember your tender romance, Miss Sullivan. Had things been different, I would have welcomed you to the family with open arms. You're the only woman Lex has ever shown an interest in who I truly admire."

"How could you do this to your own flesh and blood? Why do you hate him so much?"

"Oh... but you're wrong, Miss Sullivan. It's because I love him that I had to do what I've done."

"You're one twisted bastard, and I hope you'll rot in hell for what you've put your son through. You'll live to regret what you've done to us. You may have the upper hand now, Mr Luthor, but I won't stop believing that one day everything'll come to the light and fate will bring your son and I together again."

"That day won't be too soon, I'm afraid. If you value Lex's life, as I'm convinced you do, you'll stay away."

"Don't fear. You've given me no choice. Goodbye, Mr Luthor, and don't you ever try to contact me again," she flipped the mobile shut and tossed it on the passenger's seat.

Five minutes later, when she was at a reasonable distance from the mansion, she pulled up, turned off the engine, and let the anguish kick in. Bitter sobs racked her young body as her mind replayed scenes of the two-month bliss which had ended so abruptly.

Her curious and inquisitive nature had brought them together but had also signed their death sentence. Finding a skeleton in Lionel's closet which could put him in jail for the rest of his life was no game. She had been foolish enough to believe she could blackmail the old man to extricate herself from the deal she had struck with him to spy on Clark. Lex had realised she was in deep waters and, ever the gentleman, had offered his help. Desperate, she had grabbed it with both hands and doomed him in the process.

The verbal judo they had always enjoyed engaging in when their paths crossed on occasion- mainly at The Talon when he would turn up to collect some invoices and have a cup of coffee- grew into something a lot deeper as time went by and they consciously sought each other's company. The subdued attraction, which had been there from day one- she could still remember him coming into The Torch office that very first time – flourished, and the flirty banter gave way to heartfelt passion.

Despite the seriousness of the matter which had brought them together, Chloe couldn't remember ever feeling so elated in her life. Neither could she think of any time when Lex had looked so relaxed or flashed a smile which wasn't a practised gesture. Her interlude with the handsome billionaire had revealed that, although she cared deeply for Clark, what she had thought was 'love' had been in fact a major crush. Clark had been her first love, but what she felt for Lex was too big for words. Her childhood and teenage infatuation with her best friend paled in comparison. She was seventeen going on eighteen now and had a long life ahead of her. Still, in her heart of hearts she knew that there would be no man in her life other than Lex.

Her love for him was so big that, in order to protect him, she'd sneak out of Smallville without a goodbye. She had to sever all ties if the plan was to work. Lionel had left her no easy way out. She would have to hurt the people she cared for the most to save the one person whose love she craved the most.

CHAPTER 3: Like Family

Metropolis 2022

It was four o'clock in the afternoon and Laura was sprawled on the cosy sofa of her living room, sipping a cup of frothy coffee and leafing through her Ancient Greek History notes when the John Williams' "Raiders of the Lost Ark" ringtone announced the call she had been eagerly awaiting.

"Hi!" she exclaimed on the phone with a Cheshire smile.

"Am I interrupting?" said a masculine voice.

"Nah... I was killing time. What about you?"

"I've just finished with my tutoring. Listen... can I ask you a favour?"

"Sure. What can I do for you?"

"I'll be tied up for a while and I promised sis' to pick her up after her violin lessons."

"You want me to go for her?"

"Could you?"

"Sure! Tell you what... I'll collect her and bring her to my apartment. We'll wait for you. What do you think of ordering some takeout?"

"It certainly sounds better than having dinner alone. You're sure you don't mind?"

"Not at all."

"You're a dear. Bye-bye."

Laura walked to Metropolis Conservatory and arrived in time to see the familiar twelve-year old girl climbing down the first steps, her violin case in her left hand and a welcome smile on her smooth milky face when she spotted the young blond waving at her.

"Hi, sweetie!" Laura greeted her. "Your brother's asked me to come for you."

"Are we going to your place?" she asked enthusiastically.

"What is it about my humble abode that thrills you so much?" laughed the blonde girl.

"It's got character," said the younger girl matter-of-factly.

"Character, eh? There's hardly anything that escapes your keen eye, so if you say my house's got character, I suppose I'll have to take your word for it. You know, I've bought a beautiful chess set at an antiques market. How's your game these days?"

"I've learnt some new moves."

"Have you? Well, then, I guess we'll have to try them out," she cocked an eyebrow.

"Laura?" whispered the girl.

"Yes?" she asked, flashing her Sullivan smile.

"Thank you for being my friend," said the twelve-year-old gravely.

It was close to eleven o'clock and Laura had just finished doing the dishes. They had had a family dinner like the ones she loved sharing with her mum and Gabe back in Gotham. She missed them so much that many a time she felt the urge to dump everything, jump on a plane and fly all the way back to her foggy hometown. However, she was a grown-up woman now, and she had to prove to herself and her mum she could do it on her own. From the very beginning she had noticed her mother's reticence to let her go and how hard Chloe had tried not to let her anguish show; but they were too close not to read each other's thoughts. Her mum had stood by her even when her heart was breaking and she'd never forget that. Laura's decision to move to Metropolis must have come as a shock and still, Chloe had let her fly away and Laura loved her the most for it.

When Laura came back into the living room she found her male guest dozing off. She looked at his relaxed demeanour and felt warm love wash over her.

"Hey!" he mumbled sleepy. "I'm sorry, Laura," he apologised straightening up.

"Why don't you stay here tonight?" she suggested.

"I don't know..."

"Come on! She's already asleep in my bed. It'd be a shame to wake her up now. It's freezing cold outside and, by the looks of it, it's going to snow heavily," she stated, looking out of the window.

"I wouldn't like to impose."

"Humour me. I'll bring you some sheets, a pillow and a blanket. The sofa's all yours," she beamed.

"Are you sure you don't mind? If you prefer, I could make room for the elf, too."

"No! I like sharing my bed with her. I've always missed having a little sister to pamper."

"Don't tell her that or you'll have a permanent tenant," he smiled that smile which she knew always made the whole female population at MetU swoon.

"I wouldn't mind," she smiled back. "Here you are," she said, handing him the bedclothes. "Give me ten minutes, and the bathroom's all yours."

"Thank you for everything, Laura," he responded sincerely.

"My pleasure," she answered before going into her room for the night.

CHAPTER 4: Their Small Victory

Gotham- April 2004

Chloe lay exhausted in a hospital bed of Gotham Memorial. Although she had come to loathe the smell of disinfectant after her frequent visits to Smallville Medical Centre and had promised herself to stay away from healthcare facilities, fate had had other plans in store for her.

She squirmed uncomfortable and tried to sit up. She felt drowsy and her mouth was flurry.

"The discomfort will go away in no time. Trust me, I've been through this more than once," said the robust woman lying in the other bed. "Let's press the buzzer. You'll love Nessie. She's the best nurse in this aisle."

"Where's ... "started Chloe, feeling her eyes turn watery.

"Lie back, honey," her room mate told her, eying her with concern. "Don't fret. Nessie'll talk with you."

Nessie was a matron in her early sixties with an imposing personality but a big tender heart. The blond girl in room 317 became a favourite of hers as soon as she set eyes on her. It broke Nessie's heart to see a young woman like her having to face such an ordeal all by herself. The blond was strong- Nessie had to concede that; there were no family or friends to stand by her and, still, she put on a brave face.

The baby girl had been born prematurely and was a tiny little bundle. Being just seven months, her lungs were underdeveloped and she was extremely fragile. It had been touch and go for several weeks. Her heart had even stopped beating once, but she was a little fighter that angel.

Laura. Chloe had named her Laura. Their small glorious 'victory' against all odds. Laura Alicia. Her consolation and comfort. She had inherited her dad's survival instincts all right.

"She'll be a real beauty one day," said an ecstatic Nessie, rocking her while Chloe finished doing up her blouse.

"Nessie, you'll spoil her rotten if every time she whimpers you pick her up," smiled the blond reporter, walking towards Nessie.

"Look at those eyes," said the matron, pinching the baby's tiny nose. "They seem to have a hundred years," she mumbled.

"Thanks for everything, Nessie," croaked Chloe, taking the bundle from the elder woman's arms.

"If you ever need anything, honey, you know where to find me. I'll miss you both."

"Wipe those tears, Ness. We'll come back for Laura's regular check-ups."

Mother and daughter would visit Gotham Memorial on more occasions than Chloe could remember. There had been times at which Chloe had to struggle hard against her urge to contact Lex and unburden her soul. She had almost lost Laura again after a severe asthma attack, which had ended up with the five-year-old in hospital for a whole fortnight. It was during that stint at the medical centre that the doctors had discovered her white cell count was off the charts just as her dad's. It was such an unusual condition that Chloe was afraid her medical records would end up in the hands of Lionel Luthor of all people. God, however, had chosen to spare them, and Chloe was

allowed to see her daughter grow up into a beautiful teenager and then, into an attractive young woman.

Chloe thanked the Lord for Bruce Wayne. Arriving in Gotham with a small suitcase and money to last her only a month, Chloe had set out to look for a job, which she found ten days after starting her search. A paid job with social benefits at Wayne Enterprises came in more than handy when she found out that she was pregnant with Lex's child. She hadn't had her period for two months and blamed it all on the stressful times Lionel had put them through, but when it didn't come down the following month, she decided to buy an over-the-counter pregnancy test to confirm what she already knew in her heart.

Having a child a couple of months before turning nineteen had been a life-altering experience for Chloe, but one she wouldn't have changed for the world. Laura had given her the strength to keep going and bear the pain of being away from her love, her dad and her best friend. Lionel might have erased their love from his son's brain, but it lived in their daughter and he hadn't been able to destroy that.

CHAPTER 5: Bringing Down the Devil

Smallville 2013

It was eight o'clock in the morning and Lex was already on the way to Plant 3. The new equipment they had ordered from Germany had been recently installed, and the manager had informed him the previous evening that he was ready to give him a complete report on the improved output of the plant. The man had insisted he needed to talk with him asap to fix a problem with the German engineers who had travelled with the machinery. Reluctantly, Lex had agreed to meet him early in the morning.

Ever since Lana's untimely demise, he had made a routine of staying at the mansion for breakfast, and he had never let anything interfere with that family reunion. It gave their lives a semblance of normality, and he didn't want to sacrifice that for anything in the world. Still, Plant 3 remained one of Lexcorp's steady sources of income- Lionel had made sure some of Lex's best business fell through by underbidding him- and Luthor Jr couldn't afford to jeopardise it by neglecting his fertilizer affairs on account of his father-son issues. Of course that didn't mean he was doing nothing about the lost contracts. He hadn't found out the leakage yet, but he had confidence that he would and, when he did, there would be hell to pay.

Lex stepped on the gas. The sooner he got to the plant, the sooner he could come back home in time for breakfast. He was negotiating a bend when his mobile rang, so he let it ring several times before answering the call.

"Luthor. "

"Good morning, Mr Luthor, " chuckled a masculine voice.

"Who's this?" frowned Lex. "Where did you get this number?"

"I've ended up in a tabloid courtesy of your old man, but I won a Pulitzer once. I still have my sources, Luthor."

"White?"

"You've got a prodigious memory, Luthor."

"I thought I'd made myself clear when I kicked you out of Smallville, White. What is it that you want now?"

"I've kept my promise, Mr Luthor. You asked me never to come close to Miss Lang again and I didn't. By the way, I'm sorry for your loss."

"Somehow I don't think that you've called me to give me your condolences. You're for years late."

"No, you're right. Do you remember our little conversation in your study?"

"I'm afraid there are some blanks in my mind. I presume you're aware that I was committed for a while."

"So you remember kicking me out of that Godforsaken town but not about our conversation?"

"That's right. Could we cut to the chase, Mr White? I haven't got all day."

"I believe we could do each other a great service. What would you say if I told you I've got what you need to get your dad off your back for ever? Something from the distant past and something concerning a recent death."

"I'd say I'm interested, but what would you stand to gain?"

"The pleasure of seeing the bastard pay for what he's done to so many people. But I won't speak over the phone. I'll tell you what I want in return. I think it'll be a very small price to pay to get even"

"When shall we meet?"

"In Metropolis in an hour."

"OK. We should see each other somewhere neutral. There are some empty warehouses which used to belong to a fishing company called Shark. You'll find them on Pier 305."

"I'll see you in an hour, Mr Luthor."

"Taylor, something's turned up. I won't be able to make it this morning. We'll put off our meeting for six o'clock. Try to stall the engineers. You've done a pretty good job so far, and I have confidence in you. OK. See you later, then," said Lex to his manager on the phone. "OK, White, let's listen to what you've got to say," he said gravely, addressing the veteran reporter.

"Ten years ago I told you I had something on Lionel that could bring new meaning to the phrase 'sins of the father', but you were too concerned about what might happen to your friend Kent back then. Now things have changed. You married his girl and I assume you're no longer bosom buddies," he chuckled.

"I'm not here to listen to you speak about my personal life, White. Tell me, if this information you've got on my dad is so damaging as you want me to believe, why did he stop at simply destroying your career? "

"I made sure I wasn't the only one who had copies of the file I've got on him. Several Metropolis lawyers have a sealed envelope with instructions to make the story known in the event of my death. "

"Why come to me now? "

"I'm tired of working for a second-rate tabloid, hardly making ends meet. We both know I'm capable of a lot more. I was an extraordinary reporter once. I had my doubts about approaching you again, taking into account how our last meeting ended, but then I came across something which I knew would capture your attention," he explained, handing him an envelope.

"What's this? "asked Lex, fingering the manila envelope.

"Go ahead. Open it. The contents are really surprising. "

"Where did you get this? "asked the billionaire after perusing the report inside. "Is this some kind of sick joke? "

"Far from it, Mr Luthor. I'm sorry. It must be a shock, but you know your dad. Don't tell me you don't believe him capable of doing something like that. You can't be that naïve. What you've got in your hands is a copy of the original autopsy report. "

"What else have you got on him? "snapped Lex, feeling the bile surge up.

"Here's the file I've made multiple copies of. Did you know that your grandparents died in a tenement fire? "

"Yes, my dad told me what happened. "

"Did he? "echoed White, raising an eyebrow. "Did he tell you that the so-called 'fire' was in reality an explosion which blew the windows out of two city blocks? "

"What are you hinting at, White? That my father had something to do with my grandparents' deaths? "

"The Edgecliff Condos. Do they ring a bell? "

"Sure. They're owned by Luthorcorp. "

"Well... they stand on the site of the tenement your grandparents died in. "

"My dad didn't wield the power he does now, White. How could he have covered up a murder in those days? "

"He and his buddy Morgan Edge conspired to kill your grandparents. Edge blew up the building. Your dad got rid of his bastard father Lachlan and his gin-soaked mother. The slumlords who controlled City Hall told the police to drop the case, and they split the insurance money with Lionel and Edge. Your dad used his cut for his first start up and you know the rest. Everything's there, Lex, in black and white. You get Morgan Edge to testify against your dad, and it's bye-bye Lionel Luthor. "

"Now... tell me what it is that you want in exchange for this. "

"I want to be the new editor of The Daily Planet. "

"I'm afraid you've come to the wrong Luthor, White. I've got no leverage at The Planet. I may keep a story out of the press but getting someone a job at that paper is... "

"You may not have that power yet; but once your dad's out of the picture... Your promise that I'll get the post once your dad's sentenced to the chair is more than enough. "

"You're ready to trust a Luthor, White? "

"I'm ready to trust Lex Luthor. You seem to be a man of your word. "

"You've got yourself a deal then, Mr White. Or shall I say 'Mr Editor' ? "

Lex and Perry White went straight to the DA's office with the dossier which the reporter had kept under lock and key for so many years. Needless to say they were welcomed with open arms; the office had tried to prosecute Luthor Sr. on other counts in the past but had always lack enough evidence to send him to trial.

White was immediately put under protective custody and Morgan Edge was apprehended as an accessory. Lionel found himself behind bars facing a trial for murder punishable with the death sentence while Edge struck a deal with the DA- life imprisonment in exchange for his testimony as a witness for the prosecution.

Kansa Penitentiary

"What does it feel like to know that close to drawing your last breath, dad' "

"Keep dreaming, Lex. I'll get out of prison clear of all charges and then, those responsible for putting me here will know who I am. "

"I'm afraid the game's over, dad. You see, your partner in crime has just done a deal with the DA's office. Surprised? Life imprisonment's better than death, wouldn't you say? Oh, yes. Your buddy Morgan's squealed, " laughed Lex. "Tell me. Dad. There's something I can't get yet. I may understand up to a certain point your need to get a ticket away from Suicide Slums, but poisoning my wife? "What did she do that could pose a threat to you? "

"You're delusional, Lex. "

"That's not what the autopsy report- the 'original' autopsy report- states. Lana was poisoned. How did you do it? "

"Lex... "

"Or maybe I was wrong. Maybe it was me you wanted to get rid of. Am I right? "

"Whos'fed you all this bullshit, Lex? "

"That's irrelevant, dad. "

"I thought we had an understanding, "said an exasperated Lionel, pacing up and down his cell. "

"Who did you have an understanding with? ""

"Come on, son. Don't play dumb. You know damn well who I'm talking about . Your secret source should have known better than to put ideas in your head again. "

"Again? Has this anything to do with what you didn't want me to remember after I was released from Belle Reve? "

"Some things are best forgotten, son. "

"You've murdered three people, dad! You've left your son a widower and your grandchildren motherless. You destroyed the career of a Pulitzer prize winner and God knows what else. "

"White? Is White your secret source? "

"You cannot touch him, "warned Lex, chiding himself for his stupid slip.

"White... " said Lionel under his breath. "After all these years... "

"You sound surprised, dad. Who sis you think my source was? "

“You know, Lex, I’m sorry for what happened to Lana, but she wasn’t the woman for you, son. ”

“How dare you, dad? ”

“I know why you married her, Lex. You didn’t love her. Don’t deny it. We both know you can’t resist a damsel in distress. She saw in you her knight in shining armour and you couldn’t ... ”

“Shut up! ”

“Tsk ts. You had the chance to be happy a long time ago and you blew it, son. You had to keep prodding. Neither of you could rein in your curious nature. ”

“What the hell are you talking about? ”

“Your sessions at Summerholt Institute weren’t entirely successful, I take it. Well... I’m afraid I’ll carry with me one more secret to the grave, son. ”

“I’m done with your games, dad. ”

“One day everything will come to the light. You won’t hate me more than you do now, Lex. I only hope you won’t kill the messenger. What this person did for you, son... I wish I had someone who could love me that much. ”

“I won’t let you play your mind games with me again, dad. There’s nothing left to say between us. It’s a shame you won’t see your grandchildren grow up, ’stated Lex gravely, turning around and leaving the room.

“ I hope there’s still forgiveness in you, son. You’ll need it when the time comes. ”

“Make your peace with God, dad. His forgiveness is the only one that counts. ”

CHAPTER 6: There are still Gentlemen in this Town

Metropolis 2022

It was snowing heavily when Chloe left the airport and walked to the taxi rank carrying a suitcase, a holdall and her inseparable laptop. There was only one cab available for hire and, to her dismay, the thirty-six year old blonde saw a self-centred yuppie beat her with a scornful look.

“That’s just swell! Damn it, ”she stamped her feet on the snow-covered pavement.

“Excuse me, can I offer you a drive? ”chuckled a masculine voice.

“Pardon? ”replied Chloe, turning around and looking at the young man who was standing behind her with a small smile on his handsome face.

"I wouldn't like you to leave Metropolis with the idea that its male population is made up of jerks."
..

"Thanks for your kind offer, but I'm afraid I'll have to decline."

"Why? Do I look like a psycho to you?" he asked with a broad smile which revealed two cute dimples.

"If you had spent your adolescence in the country town where I grew up, you wouldn't question my reservations."

"You don't strike me as a peasant..."

"That's because I'm not. Now... if you don't mind, I'll get inside. I don't want to catch my death in this snowstorm."

"Listen, I've got my car parked a few yards away. I can at least drive you to the city centre. I can tell you from experience that Metropolis airport cabbies flee when the weather gets rough. You won't find transport for a long time."

"Then I'll stay at the airport hotel."

"Has anyone ever told you're a hard nut to crack?" he asked with a lopsided grin.

"Yes, but with my record of misfortunes, I'd rather be safe than sorry."

"OK. Your loss," he said resignedly. "Don't you go saying, however, there are no gentlemen left in Metropolis."

"I already knew of one..." she mumbled.

"Pardon?"

"I said thanks, anyway. Have a safe ride. I don't envy you, you know. Driving in this blizzard..."

"I've got to get home. I don't like leaving my sister alone for too long. Have a nice stay," he smiled, opening the parked Mercedes with the remote. "You remind me of someone, you know," he added as an afterthought.

"That's the oldest line I've heard in years," she cocked an eyebrow.

"It's not a pick-up line. Trust me," he wrinkled his nose, and Chloe felt a pang. She hadn't seen that gesture in years.

Chloe checked in at the airport hotel. Working for Wayne enterprises had its perks; she only had to drop its CEO's name and show her personal card with the embossed company logo to get her a room.

She opened the door swiping the key card they'd given her at reception, kicked off her shoes and dumped her luggage on the floor. The heating was working at full blast and she found breathing difficult; though she didn't know if it was due to the stifling heat inside the room or to the wrinkling of that young man's nose.

Maybe she was just being paranoid, seeing things which weren't really there. It was only natural to be thinking of Lex and everything or everyone connected with him now that she was back in Metropolis. She could have sworn the boy had Lana's dimples when he smiled and made that funny wrinkling with his nose which Chloe had seen so many times on the brunette's face.

'Things could have been worse, ' she thought. 'You could have run into Lex himself. And what, then? What would you have told him caught unawares? Hi, Lex! Delighted to see you after so many years. By the way, did you know we have a daughter who's living in Metropolis? So the bastard's met his long-deserved death... What in heaven's name possessed you to marry your best friend's love?' 'You must get a grip, Sullivan. You know that something like this was bound to happen- that is if the boy's who you think he is... maybe you need that pair of glasses you're so against wearing. Looks be damned! Breathe deeply. That's it. Breathe in. Now, breathe out. Pick up your mobile and call her. Everything'll just be fine. '

"Laura?" asked Chloe excitedly.

"Mum?" answered the girl with a wide smile. "Hey! How's the weather in Gotham? We're covered in snow down here. "

"I know, honey. "

"Have they shown it on the news?" she frowned.

"No, Laura, I'm here in Metropolis. "

"You're here? Where are you? Why didn't you call to say you were coming? I could have picked you up, "she complained.

"I'm at the airport hotel, Laura. "

"I could... "

"No, missy. You aren't leaving your cosy living-room to get out in this awful weather, "Chloe interrupted.

"Mum, I'm not a weakling. My lungs are just fine, 'she whined.

"I'll spend the night at the hotel and join you tomorrow for breakfast. "

"But... "

"Don't argue with me, Laura. "

“OK. I’ll be waiting for you with a pot of freshly-made coffee,” she sighed.

“Prepare yourself for the third-degree, sweetheart,” responded Chloe before hanging up.

“The third-degree?” repeated a puzzled Laura.

CHAPTER 7: Mother and Daughter Talk

Laura’s Apartment- Metropolis 2022

“Have you got more where this came from?” asked Chloe, picking up her empty coffee mug.

“Mum, you’ve almost downed the pot on your own! What’s up?”

“I’ve been a caffeine-addict all my life, Laura.”

“Yes, but don’t you think you’ve had enough for one day. Is there something you want to talk about? You sounded strange on the phone. And what was that about the third-degree?”

“I’m worried,” said Chloe, getting up from the sofa and starting to pace the room nervously.

“Is grandpa all right?”

“Yes, dad’s doing great. No, I’m not worried about him.”

“Is Wayne planning on downsizing? He’d be a fool to lose you.”

“No, nothing of the sort. He’s even offered me a promotion.”

“That’s great news, mum! Why are you so gloomy, then?”

“How serious is this business with the boy you’ve been seeing?”

“Is this what’s got you so worked up?”

“How far...” , started Chloe, swallowing the lump in her throat and thinking how she could phrase the question without being blunt.

“Mum, why don’t you ask what you want to ask without mincing your words? It isn’t like you to beat around the bush.”

“I’m not a prude, Laura, believe me. I know what it is like to be in love with someone.”

“I love him, mum. And if what you’re asking is whether we’ve already slept together, the answer’s ‘No. Not yet.’”

Not yet. The answer was both a relief and a source of anxiety. It meant that Laura and the young man hadn't rushed things, but it also implied that they didn't rule out the possibility to take their relationship to the next level in the near future. Chloe wasn't prudish- for God's sake, she had given her virginity to the only man she'd ever truly loved the day she turned eighteen without a wedding band on her finger! Her reservations about Laura's budding love didn't spring from Gabe's conservative upbringing but had deeper and more conflictive roots.

"Mum? Mum? Are you OK?" asked a worried-looking Laura, shaking Chloe by the arm.

"I'm sorry. I've just zoned out for a moment," she replied with a sad smile.

"Where you thinking about dad?"

"Something like that."

"I won't end up pregnant if that's what you're worried about, mum."

"Honey, getting pregnant's the lesser of evils," she squeezed Laura's hand.

"What do you mean?"

"Never ever think of my pregnancy as an unfortunate accident because it wasn't. I loved your father- I still do- and he did return my love in full measure. Had circumstances been different..."

"He wasn't married, mum. I still can't understand why, if he loved you as much as you claim he did, he could forsake you."

"He didn't forsake me, Laura. How could he forsake me if he didn't remember we'd ever been together in the first place?"

"Did he have amnesia?"

"That would have been so much more humane than what actually happened to him"

"I'm not a baby any more, mum. Why don't you tell me the truth?"

"I'll tell you part of the story now. But I've got to do something first before making any names."

"Is he here in Metropolis? Is that the reason you didn't want me to study at MetU?"

"Everything I've done has been done to protect you both. Never doubt my love, honey. And for everything you hold precious, Laura, don't you ever resent him"

CHAPTER 8: Tête-à-tête

Luthorcorp Headquarters- Metropolis- 2022

"Alex, I've heard compliments are in order," said Lex beaming when he entered his office on the top floor of Luthorcorp Plaza to find his son already waiting for him.

"Hi, dad!" he answered, hugging him warmly.

"The youngest tutor at MetU and you're but eighteen, Alex. Your mum would be so proud..."

"The genius lies in the genes, dad," he smiled.

"Well... I'm very good at playing the market, as to being a genius..."

"Come on, dad! You're pulling my leg, right?"

"I'm so glad you've got your mother genes, Alex. Believe me, son, when I tell you it's a blessing my genes haven't prevailed in your blood."

"What are you saying, dad?"

"That you should be proud of your Lang-Small heritage, Alex. Have you talked to Henry, yet?"

"I was going to phone him this evening. Maybe visit him at the weekend."

"He'll love to brag about his grandson in town."

"Dad, can I talk to you about something?" he asked uncomfortably.

"Sure. What's on your mind?" he smiled knowingly. "A slip of muslin, perhaps?" he cocked an eyebrow.

"You've been reading too much eighteenth century literature, dad."

"Your blushing tells me I've hit the target. Is this girl by any chance called Laura?"

"Who's told you about Laura?"

"Have you forgotten there's an observant twelve-year-old at home who's got a penchant for love stories? The more secret the better."

"Lilly's been talking to you."

"You should know better than to take her with you, Alex, if you want her to keep her mouth shut. She always comes running to me with the latest gossip. She's the terror of the people downstairs. Haven't you noticed how diligent's the personnel at the mansion? They no longer idle away. They're too afraid of the elf's eavesdropping. She's got eyes and ears everywhere. Luthor blood runs thick in her, I'm afraid."

"You know, then."

"Why don't you tell me? As much as I love your sister, a child's view of reality is always distorted."

“How did you know that mum was the one for you? ”

‘You knew this question was coming, Lex. Slip on that poker face and tell the boy something he can believe. If you told him it was love at first sight, you would be selling him a blatant lie. That you cared for her wouldn’t be a lie. That you’d always got a soft spot for her wouldn’t be far-fetched. But loved her? Loved her with that passion which shakes your very foundations and makes you do things for your partner that you’d never thought possible? No. Definitely not.’

“You’re aware, son, that your mother was my third wife. ”

“What you means that third’s the charm? ”

“No, not necessarily, Alex. Your mum was the first woman I married who saw in me something other than my money. Does that answer your question? ”

“You mean I should beware of the heartless fortune-hunters? ”

“Definitely. ”

“Well, you’ve told me what she saw in you, but why did you pick her? ”

“You should know by now, Alex, that it’s the woman the one who chooses, ”he smirked before the intercom buzzed. “What is it, Jennifer? ”

“I’m sorry to disturb you, sir. There’s a woman here to see you. I’ve told her she must ask for an interview, but she insists you’ll receive her without a previous appointment. ”

“What’s her name, Jennifer? ”

“Miss Chloe Sullivan, sir. ”

“Sullivan you said? ” frowned Lex.

“Show her in, Jennifer, ” he responded, getting up from his swivel chair and walking round the desk. “Alex, would you mind if we continued our father-son chat over dinner? ”

“Sure, ”responded the young man with a puzzled look on his face. “Today’s Lilly’s cooking night, ” he added, picking up his trench coat.

“Tell her I’ll be there on time, ”he replied warmly, putting his hands in the pockets of his perfectly pressed black trousers.

“Sir, Miss Chloe Sullivan, ”announced Jennifer, letting the blond woman in.

“You? You’re Chloe Sullivan? ”asked a dumbfounded Alex on his way out.

“Yes, the one and only Chloe Sullivan, ”she quipped with her best smile, stretching out her hand for a handshake. “And you must be Alex Luthor, right? ”

"I knew you reminded me of someone," laughed Alex, shaking her hand vigorously under his father's intense gaze. "Your niece looks just like you."

"My niece?" asked Chloe with a tremor in her voice.

"Laura."

"Laura? Are we talking of this paragon of virtue who's been your sister's favourite topic of conversation for the last two months?" asked Lex with a puzzled look.

"You mean Laura Sullivan, my daughter."

"Your daughter? But... you're..." blurted Alex, looking at her from head to toe.

"Too young to be a mum of a nineteen-year-old?" she cocked an eyebrow. "I'm thirty-six. Six years younger than your dad, Alex."

"Are you implying that I'm old, Miss Sullivan?" interrupted Lex.

"Far from it, Lex," she replied, looking at him for the first time since she stepped into the office and congratulating herself on her astounding self-control. "You've never looked better."

"Ditto, Miss Sullivan. What once was the promise of a beautiful woman has become a reality at last," he responded, not bothering to hide the masculine appreciation of the feminine mature curves.

"Your dad's always known how to flatter a woman, Alex," said the reporter, feeling her body respond to the electricity which was charging the atmosphere around them.

"If I'm not wrong, Miss Sullivan, you were very good with words yourself. That's why it came as a shock when we found you gone without an explanation or a simple goodbye," he stated gravely.

"You knew each other?" Alex butted in, sensing the tension between them.

"I was a friend of a friend."

"I thought we were friends, too, Miss Sullivan."

"Could you please stop calling me that, Lex? There was only one man who used to address me that way and I just..." she blurted bitterly, feeling her eyes turn watery.

"I'll leave you two alone. It's been a pleasure meeting you, Chloe," said Alex, slipping out of the room.

"Chloe it is then. What brings you to my office after nineteen years of silence?"

"Remorse."

"Is this some sort of guilt trip, Chloe? I assume you talked to Clark first. It was quite a blow for him, you know, losing his best friend. "

"You were his best friend, Lex. I was always the spare wheel, his personal search engine. As to your assumption, you're wrong. I haven't been to see Clark. "

"Why come to me first? If you expect me to soften him, I'm afraid you'll be sorely disappointed. We aren't on speaking terms. We haven't been for the last eighteen years. "

"I thought that much, but that isn't the reason of my coming to you first. "

"You said you were here because of remorse. The only thing I can think of for which you might want to apologise is leaving without saying goodbye. And I don't expect you to give me a full explanation of the reason which made you fly away from Smallville. I'm still very good at maths, "he smirked. "Is Laura Clark's ? "

"You're wrong on all counts. I went to the mansion to say goodbye to you the day you were released from Belle Reve; although I didn't... couldn't utter the actual words. I found out I was pregnant with Laura a month later. And she's definitely not Clark's, Lex. A man as observant as you are would realise that immediately if you were to see her in person. "

"For all I know she looks just like you. If you didn't leave Smallville because of your pregnancy then, I'm afraid I'm more clueless than before. Still... you don't owe me an explanation. As you said, although I thought we were friends, you just considered me a friend of a friend, it seems. "

"Don't do this, Lex. "

"Don't do what, Chloe? If you expected me to welcome you with open arms after you walked out on your friends... "

"It isn't true that you don't care for an explanation, Lex. You wouldn't be talking to me like this if you didn't. "

"Clark and you were the only friends I had, Chloe. What did you expect? "

"And what about Lana? "

"What about her? "

"You married her. She must have meant something to you. I can't believe you made her your wife just to spite Clark. "

"You don't know me that well. I've changed. Life does that to people, Chloe. "

"It doesn't change who you're in essence, Lex. You'd never have married her if you hadn't at least respected her. "

“Well... I’ve been known to do some pretty foolish things in my life. But yes, of course I respected her.”

“But you didn’t love her.”

“What’s all this about, Chloe?”

“I just want to know if she made you happy.”

“And what is that to you?”

“Please, Lex.”

“She gave me two wonderful children. Does that answer your question?”

“I’ll take that as a qualified yes. You must be proud of Alex. He’s one of a kind; a true gentleman. We met at the airport, you know. He offered me a ride to the city centre in the middle of the storm, which I declined.”

“You’ve always been too independent to ask for or accept any help.”

“It seems you don’t know me that well after all. There was a time when I swallowed my pride and accepted your help.”

“I’m afraid I don’t remember.”

“I didn’t expect you to. Not after what that bastard of your father did to you,” she choked, her eyes brimmed with tears.

“That’s in the past, Chloe. It’s over and done with,” he stated gravely, looking into her misty green eyes. “Why don’t you take a seat? You look pale. Would you like something to drink? A coffee, perhaps? Or a glass of something stronger?” he offered concerned.

“A little brandy would do,” she responded, checking the tears. “Thanks,” she murmured, taking the tumbler and feeling a jolt of electricity course up her arm when her hand touched his.

Lex also felt the sparks and tried to distance himself from the unexpected source of discomfort by resuming his place behind the desk. He was surprised at her tears after so many years and couldn’t help but believe there was as lot more than just empathy behind her words.

“Chloe, my dad did immeasurable harm to countless people in his lifetime but...”

“You don’t know half of it, Lex,” she whispered, her voice cracking as she held his gaze.

“Was he the reason you fled Smallville, Chloe?”

“I didn’t want to leave but he left me no choice.”

"Did he threaten your life? "

"Not my life but someone's who meant, and still means, the world to me. "

"Clark. "

"He was as obsessed with Clark as you were, Lex. But no, I didn't flee to protect Clark. "

"Then, who? Why didn't you come to me, Chloe? "

"I couldn't do that to you, considering... God! "she explained, getting up of her seat and fidgeting with the pendant which dangled from the gold necklace round her neck. It had been the only jewel she hadn't sold to get money for her getaway- it had been a present of his she couldn't bring herself to part with. "I was always able to engage in verbal judo with you in the past, but I can't seem to find the words to tell you what I've come here to say. "

"Sometimes, the direct approach's the best answer, "said Lex, observing her closely and trying to understand what the hell was wrong with her.

"I know that by telling the truth I'll hurt the two people I hold most dear in the world, but I owe it to them. I should have done this a long time ago, "she said emotionally, fishing for half a dozen CDs which she left on Lex's desk.

"What are these? "asked Lex with a frown.

"They're meant for you alone, "she answered, holding his questioning gaze. "I want you to have them. They hold the key to that part of your life your father robbed you of and more. "

"Where have you got them from, Chloe? "

"Just read the files, Lex. They'll speak by themselves... I'm done carrying this pain, " she said with a crack in her voice, touching her chest. "I wish I could spare you this, but there's too much at stake. I hope you'll understand the reason I did what I did back then. It's been the hardest thing I've ever had to do, but now two people are being unwitting victims of the choices I've made. You'd hate me if I were to keep this from you any longer... "

"Couldn't you at least tell me what kind of information's stored on these CDs? "

"My diaries, Lex. "

CHAPTER 9: Finding the Way Back

Laura's Apartment- Metropolis 2022

The interview with Lex had been the second most difficult moment of Chloe's life. It had taken her all the strength she could muster not to crumble in front of him the minute she set eyes on him

again. She had sensed the hurt and reproach in his voice, the lust and love in his eyes. Maybe he didn't know it then, but he loved her- a look into those blue-grey eyes of his she had often got lost in had told her that much. Lionel might have erased the memory of them but his heart had recognised her. Although Lex had always been a master at hiding his emotions and thoughts behind a mask, she prided herself on being the only one who could read him like an open book.

Chloe hated herself for being so inarticulate at the office, stuttering and hesitating, beating around the bush- he must have realised the portent of what was on those discs because her erratic behaviour had been so unlike herself. The Chloe he had known would have told him the truth without sugar-coating it; she would have told him how much she had missed their verbal judo and craved for his touch and his warmth. She had been but half a woman without him. Now, she could only hope he had gone past the initial shock of the first CD and kept on reading to see what it really meant to love and be loved.

She had lost track of how many hours had gone by since she summoned the lift on the top floor of Luthorcorp Plaza to leave him space and time to process what he would discover on those discs. Endless hours she had spent sitting in the dark of Laura's apartment after a bitter argument with her daughter, which had ended up with the young woman storming out aggrieved.

Chloe had picked up the handset on more than one occasion, toying with the idea of calling her dad. However, there was only one voice she wanted to hear, just one pair of arms she yearned to be wrapped in. Once again she felt jealous of Lana and of the time she had had next to him. The Princess had had Clark's devotion, why couldn't she stay away from Lex?

In the meantime, Lex was downing the bourbon decanter in his office overwhelmed by the words on the screen of his laptop, feeling the tears blurring his sight and then spilling unchecked down his cheeks. Resentment, wrath, love, passion, hatred, clashed in his chest until the onslaught was so big that he swept the desk clean in a rage and then, crumbled in racking sobs.

Now the last words of Lionel's made sense; the bastard must be laughing from the grave. Still his dad had been wrong in his assumption that it wasn't possible for Lex to hate him even more. Kill the messenger? How could he ever kill someone who had shown him the true meaning of love?

Chloe was putting freshly grounded coffee in the percolator when the doorbell rang. She had no doubt in her mind who was at the door for she had been expecting his arrival the whole afternoon.

As she walked to the door and checked it was him through the peephole, she could feel her hands tremble and her pulse race. This was the moment she had played so many times on her mind while living in Gotham, watching their girl grow up.

She removed the lock and chain and, taking a deep breath, opened the front door. There stood Lex in his long black Armani coat- the first three buttons of his immaculate white shirt undone- looking as cool and breath-taking as when she was a teen.

I have been here before,

But when or how I cannot tell:

I know the grass beyond the door,

The sweet, keen smell,

The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before, -

How long ago I may not know

But just when at that swallow's soar

Your neck turned so,

Some veil did fall, I knew it all of yore.

Lex took off his designer sunglasses and locked his stormy blue-grey eyes with hers, seeing her shiver and turn a delightful red. He was sure she could tell he had been crying, but he couldn't care less; Lionel Luthor's lectures about tears and manhood be damned. He wanted her to see that, unlike his father, he was still human. He needed his eyes to speak for him because he, who had always been so articulate- couldn't find the words to express the turmoil that was raging in his heart.

Chloe got lost in the depths of those beloved orbs just as she had when he had made a woman of her the night of her eighteenth birthday. She could see her love reflected in them and felt the tears prick in hers.

Lex heard her stifled sob and, incapable of staying away from her one minute longer, wrapped her in his arms while kicking the door shut. The sweet apple fragrance of her shampoo invaded his nostrils and, feeling her tremble in his embrace, he sought her lips in a hungry kiss. She tasted of coffee and chocolate mint, and he didn't seem to get enough of her as he claimed her mouth once more, pleading her to let him deepen the kiss. Chloe snaked her arms around his neck, feeling the smoothness of his scalp with loving hands and revelling in the way his tongue was making love to her mouth.

Lex tasted their salty tears and felt his pulse quicken when her warm hands divested him of his coat and then, his jacket.

"Chloe, "he moaned as she undid the last button on his shirt. "Tell me our daughter's not at home, "he murmured, feeling her smile under his lips. "Good. It's taken us too long to find each other again, "he added, nibbling her neck.

"God, I love you, Lex! "she answered shivering, as Lex silenced her with a kiss, picked her up and carried her to the sofa.

"What have we done? "asked Chloe sitting up. "We've got carried away and forgot all about Laura and Alex, "said she, freaking out.

"Chloe..."he responded soothingly. "Everything's been taken care of, "confided Lex, tucking some loose strands of blonde hair behind her ear. "I talked with Alex before coming here. I told him the truth, "he whispered.

"You told him they share the same blood, Lex? How did he take it? "asked Chloe nervously.

"I told him to grab happiness with both hands, Chloe. I gave them my sanction. "

"What? "asked Chloe outraged, jumping off the sofa.

"Come here, Chloe, "he pulled her back to the couch.

"But..."blurted the blond reporter before he silenced her by putting two fingers on her thoroughly kissed mouth.

"I've got some explaining to do. You see... Alex's not my son, Chloe. I love him as if he were my own. I've given him my name, but I didn't sire him. He's known it for some time and kept it to himself. "

"Lana wasn't unfaithful to you, was she? "

"God, no! She was expecting Alex when I offered her marriage. "

"You knew she was pregnant when you proposed? "

"I did. Knowing the Teagues and what they're capable of, I offered her my protection. "

"The Teagues? You mean the billionaires who own the largest law firm in Metropolis? "

"Right. Lana fell for Genevieve's only son, Jason, when she was staying in Paris. When she realised they had been trying to manipulate her as part of a war against the Luthors- it was too late. "

"Are you ever going to stop this hero complex, Lex? "

"Hero complex? I thought that was Clark's domain, "he smirked. "Dad called me a knight in shining armour. "

"That you're not, Lex." she denied.

"How so?" he frowned.

Chloe Sullivan's no damsel in distress, "she quipped, straddling his lap.

"Independent, are we?" he murmured, nibbling at her earlobe and placing his hands on her hips.

"Chloe?" he added, cupping her face in his hands.

"Mm," she mumbled smiling sleepily.

"How could I ever forget this? God, you're so beautiful! What have I done to deserve your love?"

he asked with a catch in his voice.

"You made me feel appreciated, Lex. While everyone took me for granted and came to me only when they needed to use me as their own search engine, you saw the real me. I wasn't truly alive until I loved you, Lex," she responded, feeling a tear falling down her cheek.

"Clark's a fool. You know that, don't you?" he said, kissing the tear away.

"I never loved Clark, Lex. Mine was just a childish crush."

"I'm glad because I've no intention of sharing your heart with anyone," he said passionately.

"What about Laura?"

"Your heart's big enough for both of us, Chloe," he stated, and saw her lower her gaze and bite her lower lip.

"Hey," he murmured, tilting her chin up. "I already love her, Chloe," he added, looking into her misty eyes green orbs. "She's our child."

"I'm sorry, Lex." she cried. "I can't forgive myself for keeping you two apart. I just..." she sobbed.

"You don't have anything to blame yourself for, Chloe," he said, wiping her tears.

"How can you stand there and tell me that, Lex? You're her father and you deserved to know the truth. You've got every right to hate me for what I've done."

"How could I ever hate you, Chloe?" he whispered, resting his forehead against hers. "I agree you should have come to me earlier but... the only one I'll blame for all eternity's my dad. I knew he hated me but..."

"You know, he had the gall to tell me he did everything because he loved you."

"That sounds like dad," he responded with the ghost of a smile as a knock was heard on the door.

"Daddy, is the coast clear?" asked a giggling twelve-year-old at the front door.

"Those are the kids. Shall we make ourselves presentable?" he smirked.

"Lex?" she said nervously, tugging at his sleeve. "I'm scared."

"No more than I am, sweetheart," he responded, pressing a kiss on her lips. "I'm dying to see what the Sullivan- Luthor gene pool has produced."

Chloe unlocked the door with shaky hands and opened it gently to find Alex, Laura and a freckled red-haired in the corridor.

"Hi, dad!" exclaimed the youngest kid, breaking the tension that electrified the air around them. "You look just like Laura," she told Chloe with a beaming smile.

"And you look just like your dad," murmured an emotional Chloe, cupping her cheek and raising her eyes towards Laura.

The young woman was standing upright next to Alex, holding his hand tightly as if he were her lifeline, looking at a point beyond her mother. Chloe grabbed Lex's left hand and gave him a squeeze. She was so afraid of the way Laura would react.

Young green eyes and steel grey-blue ones locked and studied each other. Chloe thought that, despite her Sullivan looks, Laura was a hundred per cent Lex's in attitude. Damn that Luthor self-control! Seconds ticked but they felt like hours to Chloe; and then, the world started to spin again and she saw Laura let go off Alex's hand and rush to where Lex was standing. Chloe felt Lex suddenly hold his breath as their daughter wrapped her arms tightly around him and he struggled with his Luthor-like reserve. *'God, Lex, let go!'* begged Chloe. *'Just show her an ounce of what you did to me but an hour ago and she'll be yours forever.'*

And then, the miracle of miracles happened, and the younger Luthor closed his arms around his daughter and, burying his nose in her blond hair, said throatily: "You're as beautiful as your mum when she was your age."

"You're not half bad yourself, dad," she quipped, wiping her tears with the heels of her hands.

"I see you've also inherited her sense of humour," he smirked.

"Mum?" said Laura, stretching out her arm to take Chloe's hand.

"Oh, baby!" sobbed Chloe, embracing her tightly and feeling Laura tug at Lex's hand to bring him into the embrace.

The former Torch reporter breathed relieved for the first time in months. She was aware that they still have a long way to go and several issues to resolve, but it was a beginning. It was the first step to rebuild what Lionel Luthor had tried to destroy so ruthlessly for they have just found their way back.

THE END

Author's Note: the excerpt of the poem included in this chapter is from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Sudden Light'.
