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A/N: I wrote this fic a while ago and, because of the way I planned it, I know it will please Lexana and Chlexers alike. So if you're a fan of either ship, I invite you to give it a try.

“ADDICTED”

CHAPTER 1: The One in my Thoughts

LANA'S POV

Today's Friday and, as every week, I'm heading to Luthor Mansion to go over the numbers of The Talon with Lex. I'm particularly pleased with the figures this time and can't wait to see his reaction when he reads about the results of my new promotion scheme.

I miss these weekly meetings with him while being away at MetU. Chloe's a great friend and room mate but Lex has always been my confidant and guide. I know I can ask him almost anything and be sure he'll have an answer for it. I need his advice because I have no adult to turn to- Nell's away and she has never really understood me- and besides, his self-assurance provides me with the confidence I lack most of the time.

Although I was angry with him for a while for interfering in my relationship with Jason, I understand now he was just trying to protect me. Lex's the only one who sees me for whom I truly am and that is scary at times.

I arrive at the mansion and Lex's butler, Stevens, opens the front door to let me in. He no longer accompanies me to the study for this is an established routine, and he's aware that Lex is expecting me. As usual, I find Lex sitting at his desk checking something on his laptop and- as customary- he folds the screen down when I come into the room. I've always wondered what it is he's browsing- e-mails maybe? The stock market? Some confidential reports? However, nothing has ever prevented him from devoting this time of day to our weekly meetings, and I appreciate that in a busy businessman like Lex. He always has a free slot to go over the numbers and discuss strategies for the least profitable of his investments.

I had always wondered why he had accepted my business proposal, knowing it wouldn't be a multi-million dollar deal, and he surprised me once when he said he had only done it for me. That was the moment I realised how much he cares about this friendship and what's important to me.

“Good evening, Lana. How was your day?” he greets me with a warm smile.

“Hi! Busy but very satisfying, Lex,” I answer, accepting his hug and chaste kiss on my cheek. “I've brought these figures for the new coffee vouchers,” I say, handing him over the printed information.

“Very impressive, Lana. I thought your idea was worth pursuing but, let me tell you, I wasn't sure it'd work with the usual customers of The Talon.”

“Well, you were right, Lex. It has attracted some of the regular customers from The Beanery. “

“Then, you'll have to watch out. They'll try to come up with something more attractive to counterattack. “

“I have some tricks up my sleeve, Lex. “

“What are you thinking of? “

“My ideas aren't mature yet, but you'll be the first one to know, of course. “

“ Whether you like it or not, I'm a partner in this business. So the question of your not consulting me before putting the plan in motion has never crossed my mind, “ he adds with a smirk.

“I don't resent having to consult with you first, Lex. After all you're the businessman. “

“Well, you're turning out to be a terrific businesswoman, Miss Lang. “

“You're the best partner I could have wished for, Lex. “

When Lex finishes signing some cheques, I veer the conversation towards Clark. His poker face doesn't give much away, but something- call it a sixth sense- tells me he's not pleased, but he's too polite to say it aloud. I almost withdraw my question, but I can't help myself. I'm too confused about my feelings and I need him to help me sort out my problems.

At about seven I leave the mansion and get in my car. I thought talking things over with Lex would put my mind at rest about what's raging inside of me, but it's no use. I can't get the guy out of my head.

CHLOE'S POV

It's the end of the week and I'm travelling home to Smallville. I know I'm supposed to be on holidays but my column at The Daily Planet isn't on hiatus and, unless I want some upstart to step into my place, I have to keep up my good work. So far, the editor's pleased, and I'm happy to busy my mind with thoughts other than those of a certain guy.

As I approach the town limits I can make out the lights of Luthor Mansion. I haven't been there for a year, not since the trial. Things are rather strained between Lex and me now. If anybody asked me how we've arrived at this point, I wouldn't be able to give them a straight answer. We barely exchange pleasantries now and, the only news I get about him are through Lana- who, judging by the time it is, must be with him right now going over the weekly numbers. Clark's as pissed off with Lex as I am, though I don't know the reason. We've never talked about that. He's too busy again with thoughts of Lana, and I'm aware of what he's like when she's around.

I try not to think about the guy that's constantly in my thoughts, but I can't help myself and being in Smallville certainly makes things even worse.

LEX'S POV

Lana has just left and, as usual, ended our weekly meeting asking for my advice on her rapport with Clark. I haven't got the heart to tell her I don't want to talk about him. I saw the look in his eyes when he arrived at the airport the day Lana was leaving for France, and I could read the hurt in

them. I tried to talk with him before he gave his testimony in court, but he cut me short and... What the hell ! I'm tired of asking for forgiveness.

I went to the airport because I couldn't let her go away like that- Clark should have set his priorities straight. If I could make the time to see her off, even when I had to be in court at the time, so should he. He was the boyfriend then, not me!

These weekly meetings invariably turn out to be about Clark and, although I try hard not to resent him, I can't help myself. He's constantly in the thoughts of two women while I'm here alone, pining for a girl who I think I don't deserve and who doesn't know I love her.

CHAPTER 2: Coffee Talk

Chloe arrived at The Talon and saw the object of her thoughts sitting alone at a table, sipping coffee while absorbed in his writing. At a distance, she spotted the other male in the coffee house working on something and also drinking a cup of java.

“Hi, Lana! “ said Chloe, approaching the counter to order an extra large cup of espresso.

“Hi, Chloe! You've come for your usual dose of caffeine, haven't you? “

“You bet. Dad's only got instant coffee in the larder. It beats me how he can survive on that, “ she grimaced. “ What's up with those two? “ she asked, gesturing towards the former best friends.

“You've noticed, haven't you?

“You don't need to be a rocket scientist to realise there isn't a breach but an abyss between them, “ she smiled knowingly.

“I feel guilty, “ said Lana.

“Guilty? Why on earth would you feel guilty, Lana? “

“This started the day I left for Paris. You should have seen the look on Clark's face when he saw Lex at the airport. “

“At the airport? “

“Yes. Clark arrived late and saw us together. “

“Did Lex kiss you? “

“No. It was just a hug, Chloe. But... well... I had given Clark the opportunity to open up before I left and he chose to turn it down. Then, I met Jason and the rest is history. “

“So that's why Lex and Clark exchanged those glances at court? I've always wondered... “

“What? “

“Nothing. “

“What happened between you and Lex? “

“In what sense? “

“Well, your relationship with him is almost as strained as the one he has with Clark. “

“Why don't you ask him, Lana? Because I don't know. Our break up, if you could call it that way, didn't happen overnight but gradually. And I can't put a finger on what actually occurred yet. “

“Would you rather things were the way they used to be? “

“You must learn it's impossible to turn the clock back, Lana. We're who we are, and there are things that'll never change. Like Clark Kent being in love with Lana Lang. “

“I really don't think... “

“Come on, Lana! “ exclaimed Chloe.

“Would you do me a favour, Chloe? “

“Sure... unless you want me to do the dance the seven veils on the counter to attract more customers, “ she said, grinning widely.

“No, it's nothing like that, “ she cracked a smile. “ I'll take another coffee to Clark and see if we can have an amicable chat. Would you refill Lex's cup? His coffee must be cold already. I don't know what he's working on but he hasn't left that table in the last three hours, “ she said, looking towards his table.

“This wasn't on my list of favourite things to do on a Saturday afternoon but, seeing you're short of personnel... Give me the coffee pot... I guess he won't bite. “

“Thanks, Chloe, “ said Lana, turning round the counter in Clark's direction.

“Miss Sullivan, “ Lex greeted her, leaving his Montblanc on the table.

“Mr Luthor, “ answered Chloe. “ Lana said your coffee must be frozen by now. Would you care for a refill? “

“I'd love a fresh cup, Miss Sullivan, “ responded Lex. “ I thought you'd be in Metropolis on a Saturday, “ he added.

“I don't need to go all the way to Metropolis to get a decent cup of coffee. “

“At least there's something about me you approve of, then. “

“Mm? “ she murmured, raising her eyebrows.

“The last time I checked, Miss Sullivan, I had a share in this business. So... you have to concede there's still a business of mine you can't say anything negative about. “

“Well, now that you mention it... The Talon lacks something Metropolis Java has. “

“And what would that be? “

“Ice-cream... I love their chocolate ice-cream with nuts! “

“I think we can arrange that. Ice-cream's a good idea now the summer's approaching. “

“Do you always think of what you can get out of a business arrangement, Mr Luthor? “

“Why is it that I feel we're not talking about ice-cream here, Miss Sullivan?

“You're a smart guy, Lex, “ she said, reverting to his first name.

“Seeing we're on a first name basis again, Chloe. Why do you care so much about my affairs? “ he asked with a smirk.

“Go to hell, Mr Luthor! “she snapped, walking hurriedly to the counter with the coffee pot.

“Chloe, could you come over here for a minute? “ asked Lana from Clark's table.

“Sure. Let me pick up my things, first, “ she answered, collecting the pile of books she'd borrowed to do some research.

“Hi, Chloe! Sorry I didn't greet you when you came in. I was working on this paper I have to hand in at the beginning of the new semester. “

“Don't worry, Clark. I know we're still friends, “ she responded with a wide smile.

“Hey ! What happened back there? What did he say to upset you? “ asked Clark with a frown.

“Nothing, Clark. He said nothing. The fact is I snapped. I saw him there so cool and composed. I just don't know how he does it. “

“It's just a façade, Chloe. If you caught him unawares, you'd see sometimes the weight of the world upon his shoulders, “ she said, letting her eyes stray to where Lex was sitting.

“Lana, about Tuesday..., “ interrupted Clark, trying to call her attention.

“Yes? “ answered Lana.

“Would you like me to give you a lift to Metropolis? I've got to go to the city to get some things for mum. I wouldn't mind. “

“Thanks for the offer, Clark, “ she said, smiling sweetly, “ you'd save me two bus tickets, “ she said, kissing him on the cheek.

“Great! “ exclaimed Clark, and Chloe could see her friend was back on cloud nine.

“Well... guys... a research's waiting for me. See you tomorrow, Clark, “ said Chloe, leaving her chair and kissing him goodbye.

“Goodbye, Miss Sullivan, “ said Lex when Chloe passed his table.

“Goodbye, Mr Luthor, “ she answered. “ Enjoy your coffee, “ she added under her breath.

“Lex? “ asked Lana, sitting down at his table. “Am I interrupting? “

“No, it's all right. I'm almost done, “ he answered, recapping his pen.

“I've been talking with Clark and... I think I've hit on a new idea for The Talon. “

“Is this idea yours or Clark's? “

“Does it really matter? “

“If it works, I don't see why it'd matter. “

“Well... I was thinking about offering our customers a new service. It'd be perfect for special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries or some personal celebration. Instead of buying a bunch of roses, a box of chocolates or any such present, our customers could have breakfast or tea delivered to whoever they wanted to surprise. “

“I've heard of a similar service in Metropolis. “

“Yes, but it isn't offered here yet, and coffee doesn't stay hot or the croissants crispy all the way from Metropolis, “ she added with a smile.

“You've got a point there. The idea needs some work, but it could be practicable. “

“Good. I'll call on you as soon as I get the numbers and the budget. I'll have to talk with Mrs Kent about the supplies. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll finish something and go straight up. I've got to start studying for my astronomy exam. “

“Have you asked our own stargazer to lend you a hand? “

“Lex, couldn't you do something about this? “

“I'm done feeling guilty, Lana. Why is it always me the one who has to take the first step? He was as much my friend as I was his. If he wants to patch up things, he knows where to find me, “ he said, putting away the papers in his briefcase and making his way to the entrance door. “ See you, Lana. “

“Goodbye, Lex. “

CHAPTER 3: The Sunday After

CHLOE'S POV

Yesterday I ran into him at The Talon. He was sitting all by himself, working on something. He was so enthralled that he didn't even notice I walked pass his table on my way in. I told myself it didn't matter, that I'd rather have it that way. But who am I kidding? He ignored me when I knew damn well- because I'd been looking through the shop-window before entering- he had been talking to Lana, gracing her with that smile which illuminates his face. Lana. Always Lana. We're roommates and I do my best to like her, but I envy her because she's got the undivided attention of the one

person I'm craving to attract.

LANA'S POV

Chloe came by the coffee shop in the afternoon. She noticed Lex and Clark and the chasm that separates them now. I can't dispel this feeling that's haunting me: I'm to blame. I talk with him and, whenever I mention his former best friend, he cringes or makes some cynical remark. I can't help myself. I always bring his name up. I love him, what else can I say? I'd like them to be friends again, but if I stand in between them- ultimately, someone'll get hurt.

LEX'S POV

I don't know what brought me to The Talon yesterday. I could have stayed at home and finish what I had to do in the comfort of my study. It must be pure masochism what took me there, and the conscious knowledge that, since she's here in Smallville on holidays, she'd be there. I saw her at the counter talking with her girlfriend and looked at her smile that smile that brightens up her face. I strained my ears, trying to listen to what they were talking about- Clark, I suppose. He's the one on both their minds. She's in love with the guy, and I can't blame her. I wish I could be more like him so that she could love me. I heard her talk with him and saw her grace him with that special smile, the one she reserves for him. She kissed him, a chaste kiss, but what the hell she just said goodbye to me!

CHAPTER 4: Escape Plan

Chloe was working on a new research, but this time it had nothing to do with meteor freaks or Luthorcorp. She was planning on preparing a series of short articles about the early pioneers in Smallville. She borrowed material from the local library and consulted town and church records. According to the information she managed to gather, the first settlers in Smallville were not the Smalls but the Lyttons, so she decided to focus her investigation on that family. Chloe undertook her research with a zest that surprised even Gabe, who was used to his daughter's investigative exploits.

“Chloe, honey, aren't you exaggerating? These are supposed to be vacations. You're doing more work now than during the first semester at MetU. “

“How do you know, dad? You aren't in my dorm room when I'm studying. Besides, I'm not on holiday. This is work for The Planet. “

Chloe tried to justify herself in front of her father, but the truth was she needed this to divert her attention from what was really eating her. Her editor would have accepted any of the pieces she had already stored on her computer, but she had to do this research to keep her sanity.

“Chlo, telephone for you. “

“Who is it? “

“Clark. “

“Clark? Oh, damn it! What does he want now? “ she mumbled, walking to the phone. “ Hey, Clark. What's up? “

“Hi, Chlo! I need to speak with you. “

“Now? Does it have to be now, Clark? I'm in the middle of a research. “

“I really need to talk to you, Chlo. Please. I promise I'll help you with your research. “

“OK, OK. I can be there in an hour, Clark. “

“Fine. I'll be at the barn. See you, Chlo. “

“Bye, Clark. “

Chloe didn't relish the idea of meeting Clark to talk about Lana, because she knew what the conversation would be like, just as she didn't particularly like the idea of having to visit Lex to find an important piece of the puzzle he got concerning the Lyttons, a discovery she had made a few minutes before Clark's call.

CHAPTER 5: The Girls Call On the Boys

“Excuse me, Lex, can I come in? “ said Lana from the doorway.

“Come in. I thought you were on your way to Metropolis with Clark, “ he said, gesturing for her to sit down.

“We're leaving in half an hour. I've just dropped by to give you the numbers and projections for the gift breakfast we've talked about. “

“I see you've already talked with Mrs Kent, “ he said, browsing the file.

“Yes. She said it could work out fine, provided reservations were made in advance.”

“Leave me the papers then, Lana, and I'll study them. I'll tell you what I think of the plan when you're back. What else is on your mind? “

“What do you mean? “

“I know that look, Lana. Is there anything I can do to help you? “

“I'm worried about Christine. “

“What's the matter with her? “

“I know she's been seeing someone. I don't know his name. You know her, she's really reserved. But yesterday, when she was polishing the floors, I noticed she had a couple of bruises. It wasn't the first time, Lex. “

“Do you think he's an abuser? “

“I'm afraid so. “

“OK. I'll look into it. Don't worry, Lana. He won't lay a finger on her again. “

“Thanks, Lex. “

“You're welcome, Lana. You'd better hurry. You said you were leaving in half an hour. “

“You're right. I must leave now or I won't make it. “

“Have a nice trip. “

“Thanks. I'll see you when I'm back, “ said Lana, opening the study door. “ Oh, Chloe! Hi! “ she exclaimed with a puzzled look.

“Hello, Lana. Clark's waiting for you at the barn. “

“I know. I was on my way to the Kents. “

“Have a nice trip. “

“Thanks. Well... I really must go, “ she said, hurrying down the corridor.

“Miss Sullivan, is that actually you? “ asked Lex with a smirk.” What brings you to the Lion's Den? “

“Need. “

“Need? Are you teasing me, Miss Sullivan? “

“I need information, Mr Luthor. I'm doing a research. “

“And I suppose this information you need has something to do with an obscure business Luthorcorp's allegedly involved in. “

“Not everything revolves around the Luthors, Lex. I'm investigating some of Smallville's early settlers- or I should say the real founders of Smallville- the Lyttons. “

“The Lyttons? And what do I have to do with this family? “

“I looked through the town records and came across a very old property deed. Did you know the grounds where the mansion sits were owned by them three hundred years ago? “

“The Lyttons, you said? “ responded Lex, pouring himself a glass of bourbon.

“The lady at the land registry office told me the juiciest information about the family must be on the shelves of your private library. So... what do you say, Mr Luthor? Would you allow me into your sanctuary? “

“I'll have to think about it. “

“I'm leaving for Metropolis today, but I'll be back on Thursday. “

“OK. I'll have your answer when you come back, Miss Sullivan, “ he responded, standing up when he saw she was ready to leave.

“Goodbye, Mr Luthor. And thanks. “

“Have a nice trip. “

LEX'S POV

Today she came to see me before leaving for Metropolis. Her visit was an agreeable surprise, and the first thing that came to my mind when I saw her was the idea she had proposed the other day to offer something new to the customers at The Talon.

She looked radiant and I had to school my features not to show the emotion that overwhelms me every time I see those eyes. I'm besotted and she took me aback by a discovery she's made. I'll do whatever it takes to see her happy, and if that entails digging up on someone or other, so be it. I promised her I will have my answer ready when she comes back from Metropolis. And then, I went and said ' Have a nice trip '. What a lame goodbye when I felt like kissing her senseless !

CLARK'S POV

Today she waltzed into the barn and I felt my heart was about to come out of my chest. She smiled at me and I thought I had been unfair to her. Maybe I have been wrong all the time. Maybe it is time for me to confide in her. But what if she does not feel the same? What if I ruin what we've got by opening my heart to her? Why does love have to hurt so much?

CHLOE'S POV

I went to see him before leaving for Metropolis. He knew I'm doing a research. I told him. I shouldn't have seen him, but I wanted to. I'm a masochist, what can I say? I'm more in love with him each passing day. When I look into those eyes and he flashes that knee-weakening smile, I feel like letting him know how I feel about him. But there's Lana; she's always there, standing between the two of us, and I realise I have no chance.

LANA'S POV

When I saw him today my heart did a somersault. I tried to appear composed and keep the conversation flowing. We conversed about the plan I have for The Talon again. I wanted to talk about something else, about how I feel and how things have changed since that scene at the airport. I'd like him to open up to me, but I fear he won't and I'll end up hurt again.

CHAPTER 6: First Outburst

“Good morning, Miss Sullivan. How was your trip? “

“Uneventful, but a good respite. Thanks. “

“It's strange to hear Metropolis referred to as a good respite. I thought there was nothing like country life to wind down. What is it about Smallville that's got you all worked up? “

“Since when are you interested in my affairs again, Mr Luthor? “

"I'm sorry if I've offended you. I thought it was the polite thing to ask, taking into account we'll be working close together on this research of yours. "

"Working together? "

"Yes. If I'm going to give you access to my library, I want to take part in the investigation. "

"Are you afraid I might run away with a family heirloom? Or have you got something hidden you don't want me to find? "

"I need a distraction as much as you do, Chloe. Besides, it'd be interesting to know something about the place I'm living in now. "

"What makes you think I'm doing this because I need a distraction, Lex? "

"Call it a hunch, Chloe. How long's it been since you went out on a date? "

"What? "

"You've heard me, Chloe. How long? "

"Listen, Mr Luthor. I'm not here to talk about my private life or to be pitied by you. "

"Why are you here, Chloe? "

"I'm starting to think this was a mistake. It was foolish of me to believe we could.... "

"Pretend last year never happened? Listen, Chloe. One day you'll understand the reason I decided to... "

"Push me away? You know something, Lex, don't worry. I'm used to not counting for anything. Clark's been doing it to me all the time. Men seem to regard me as someone they can use when in need but not... "

"As a prospective romantic partner? Chloe, I know what it's like to love someone with all your heart and to see that person only has eyes for another one- worst of all, for someone you're well-acquainted with. "

"That's the reason why you were willing to help me with my research? "

"Don't tell anyone I said that, Chloe. I've got an image to keep up. "

"Haven't you hired a PR firm to do that for you, Lex? "

"Chloe, could we stop fencing without swords? Why don't we let bygones be bygones? What would you say if we wiped the slate clean and started afresh? "

"Coming here to ask for your help again was hard, Lex. However, we could call this investigation an olive branch. I'm willing to try. "

"I'm free on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. "

“Can you manage the three days? “

“Sure, Chloe. I assume you'd like to finish the research before your holidays are over. “

“That's right. “

“See you tomorrow at about six, then? “

“See you, Lex. “

Chloe left Lex's study at around five and, once again, came across Lana, who was on her way in. They both stopped in the corridor and exchanged a few words before going separate ways.

“Hi, Lex! “ exclaimed Lana, entering the study after knocking on the door.

“Lana, you're back from Metropolis, too. I trust you've had a nice trip. “

“Yes, I managed to do most of the things I'd planned to. “

“Well... I suppose you're here to get your answer, aren't you? “

“What did you think of the proposal? “

“I'll give you the green light. It's got possibilities. “

“Thank you, Lex, “ said Lana, smiling widely. “ Listen... I just need one more little favour. “

“What is it now? “

“Do you remember it's time for The Talon's annual balance? “

“I do. What's on your mind? “

“I was thinking... could we get together an extra day every week to go over the papers? Clark's offered to help me sort out all the bills and... “

“What don't we leave this to my accountants, Lana? “

“Lex, please, I need a distraction or I'll go insane. “

“ You know how to twist men round your little finger, Miss Lang. OK, I'll find the time to see those papers with you. “

“Great! “

CHAPTER 7: Second Outburst

Clark's Fortress of Solitude

“I love her with all my heart, Chloe. “

“You know what, Clark: why don't you tell her what you've just told me? Stop beating around the bush. Aren't you tired of this dancing around? 'Cause let me tell you... I am. “

“You are? “

“Wake up, Clark! You aren't the only one who's pining for someone. I've got feelings, too, you know. I'm done with being not the third wheel but the spare wheel. What is it with you guys ? I'm not disposable, Clark. “

“Chloe, I'm sorry. I didn't know you felt like this. You're my friend, and that's why I always turn to you when I need someone to talk to. “

“Forget about it, Clark. I don't know what came over me. “

“I understand now. I've been so wrapped up in my problems that I haven't realised you also have yours. When was the last time you went out with Jimmy? “

“You're the second person today who's asked me about my dates. I don't want your pity, Clark. I'll get over it, trust me. It's not the end of the world. “

“Do you want to talk about it? “

“No, I don't feel like talking about my pathetic private life just now. “

“And your research? “

“What about it? “

“I remember offering you my help. Will you accept it? Please, Chloe. I don't want any rifts between us. Can we pretend I haven't ignored you the last few months? “

“OK, OK. You win, Clark. You'll help me on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I won't be able to make it the other days because I'll be elsewhere doing some digging. “

“Where? “

“I can't divulge that information, Clark. Sorry. “

“Hi, guys! Can I come up? “ said Lana from the bottom of the stairs.

CHAPTER 8: Heaven and Hell

CHLOE'S POV

I saw him after coming back from Metropolis. They say that distance makes the heart grow fonder and it's true- I'm madly in love and seek him out like an addict. This time it was harder than usual- he asked me about boyfriends for crying out loud! I don't know what came over me but at one point I couldn't help myself and exploded. I told him I was tired of feeling used and discarded. I wanted him to know he had hurt my feelings. Men can be so blind! He offered to help me on my research and I, hungry for his attention, gave in. It'll be heaven and hell to spend several days of the week in

the same room with him, knowing he's in love with another girl.

LEX'S POV

She came to see me as soon as she got back from Metropolis. I had been expecting her visit and preparing myself for the encounter. I gave her the answer she was waiting for and saw her face beam. I don't know how I'll pull it off. Meeting her more than once a week is madness, but I'm looking forward to the next time I'll see her. She's my drug and I'm hooked like a junky.

LANA'S POV

I ran into Chloe when I went to see him. I don't know what they had been talking about. I'm really intrigued. She looked flushed, as if they had been arguing or making out. I was surprised and tried to cover it up. I hope I'm wrong. What will I do if he's in love with Chloe?

CHAPTER 9: Coming Back For More (Version One)

The Talon

It was Friday, the last weekend of Lana and Chloe's holidays, and the girls had decided to celebrate and say 'Mission accomplished'. Lana had managed to finish the annual inventory in record time thanks to Clark and her partner. Meanwhile, Chloe had tied up her historical research on the Lyttons with the aid provided by the same helpful pair of former friends.

Lex arrived at the coffee shop to find Lana and Chloe talking amicably over a cup of foamy coffee. Clark was nowhere in sight and Lex wondered whether he was to blame for his absence. They had crossed their first words in months while helping the girls, but their relationship could hardly be called harmonious. Still, Lex had hoped -for Lana and Chloe's sake- that Clark could bury the hatch for a while; he was more than ready to do that for the woman he loved.

“Good evening, Lex. I'm glad you've decided to accept the invitation, “ said Lana.

“I couldn't say 'no' to two beautiful ladies, “ he responded with his trademark smile. “I've brought a couple of bottles of cold Bollinger, “ he said, setting them down on the table.

“Champagne, Lex? “ asked a surprised Lana.

“You're of age now, aren't you? “ he responded, looking at both girls.

“I'll bring the glasses, “ said Lana, going behind the counter.

“I've baked something, “ added Chloe. “It doesn't compare to Mrs Kent's cakes but... “

“Let me guess... chocolate and mocha, right? “ said Lex with a smirk on seeing her carrying the cake to where they were sitting. “I didn't know you were fond of baking, Chloe. “

“Well, it isn't something I go bragging about. I'm definitely better than my cousin Lois, but no way near Martha Kent. “

“Is Clark coming, Chloe? “

“We've invited him, but I'm not sure he'll come. “

“Is it because of me? “

“No, Lex. I don't think so... He had other plans for tonight, “ she answered, looking towards the kitchen.

“Other plans? Does he know you're leaving on Sunday? “

“Oh, he does! That's why he isn't here, “ she responded, eying Lana talking on her mobile phone.

“Don't you resent him for it? “

“For what? “

“For not being here, Chloe. “

“I don't, Lex. I have no reason to resent him. I want him to be happy, and the decision he's taken we'll make two people blissful and leave one heartbroken. “

“Does Clark know? Does he know how you feel? “

“About their getting together again? Of course, he does. We've talked about it. I've pushed him in the right direction, just like you used to do in the past. I'm sorry, Lex. “

“Why should you be sorry? “

“Don't ask me to spell it out, Lex. I understand how you feel. “

“Are you still talking about Clark and Lana, Chloe? Because if that's the case... “

“Of course, I'm talking about them. I had a chat with Lana last night, and she poured out her heart after hesitating for several weeks. I couldn't but encourage Clark to go for it knowing she's still in love with him. I wouldn't have egged him on if another name had left her lips. I must tell you, her confession surprised me. I could have sworn her affections lay elsewhere. “

“Let me get something straight, Chloe. Are you saying you're sorry because you think I'm in love with Lana Lang? “

“Aren't you? “

“What made you think Lana is the one I'm in love with? “

“You said you needed a distraction, that you loved someone who was in love with another guy- a man you knew very well. I assumed it was Lana. Who else could it be? “

“Clark's not the only man I know, and Lana's not the only girl who's in love with a person of my acquaintance, Chloe. “

“So... you aren't in love with Lana? “ she repeated, swallowing the lump in her throat and avoiding

his eyes.

“No, I'm not, Chloe. She's a very good friend and a terrific business partner, but the kind of love I feel for her is that of an elder brother for a little sister. “

“Hey, guys! “ said Lana, coming back with the flutes. “Excuse me for the delay. It was Clark on the phone. I shouldn't be asking you this but... would you mind if ... “

“Go ahead, Lana, “ said Chloe. “ We understand. “

“Thanks, “ she said beaming. “ Listen, why don't you stay? You can lock up, Lex. You've got another set of keys. It'd be a pity to leave the champagne uncorked. “

“Take a bottle to the barn, Lana, “ said Lex with a smirk. “ Send my regards to Clark. “

“Thank you, Lex, “ she responded, embracing him warmly.

“Chloe, could I have a word with you before I leave? “

“Sure, “ answered the young reporter, getting up and walking to the kitchen.

“Tell him, Chloe, “ murmured Lana.

“What? Are you nuts? “

“What have you got to lose? “

“How about my heart, Lana? He isn't in love with the person I thought he was, but he's definitely in love with someone else. “

“Trust me, Chloe. If you aren't willing to tell him what you feel, at least be clear about what you don't. I think that'll do the trick. Good luck, Chloe, “ she finished, giving her a peck on the cheek.

“Good night, Lex. “

“Good night, Lana, “ he responded, locking the door behind her and coming back to the table where Chloe was sitting.

“Why don't you cut two pieces of cake before the mocha gets ruined, Chloe? “

“Aren't you afraid of food poisoning, Lex? “ she asked, placing the first slice on a small plate and handing it over to him.

“Appetizing and mouth-watering. Clark doesn't know what he's missing, “ responded Lex, holding her gaze.

“How can you tell without having tasted it? “ asked Chloe, unsure about what he was actually talking about.

“It isn't necessary. I know just by looking at it what it'd be like, “ he responded matter-of-factly.

“Would or will? “ she whispered.

“Semantics, Chloe, “ he responded with a smirk.

“Why don't you have a bite, Lex? “ she suggested, looking at the plate.

“A bite? “ he responded, raising an eyebrow.

“Come on, Lex. You know what I meant, “ said an embarrassed Chloe.

“My, my, Miss Sullivan, I never thought I could make you blush. “

“Why are you doing this, Lex? “

“What? “

“Don't play with me. “

“I'd never do that to you, Chloe. You should know me better than that. “

“You did it once, Lex, “ she whispered with a catch in her voice.

“You misunderstood me, Chloe, “ he said, tilting her chin up. “ I told you that one day you'd understand why I did what I did. I valued your friendship and the fact that you'd come to me showed you trusted me enough to put your life in my hands. Very few people trust in me the way you did back then. I felt honoured and special because you ran to me and not to Clark, the boy you'd always been in love with. Don't deny it, Chloe. You may be over him, as I have just found out-the way you avoided looking at me when I said I wasn't in love with Lana was definitely revealing- but at that time you only had eyes for him. That year, when we joined forces to send dad to jail, something happened that took me by surprise. I fell for my best friend's best friend. So you see, Chloe, that was the reason I had to- as you put it once- push you away. “

“But...why, Lex? Why didn't you tell me this, then? You surely must have realised I wasn't indifferent to you. “

“There were times I believed you returned my feelings but, then, I thought my love for you was making me see things that weren't really there. I've been fighting these feelings for you for the last three years. Seeing you smile, hug and kiss Clark made me wish I were him, but I was aware I'd never be someone like him. “

“Lex, “ she said, squeezing his hand, “ Clark's still my best friend but he's not the one I'm in love with. You are. “

“Chloe, three years ago I thought I wasn't what you needed in your life, and I still very much doubt it. You deserve better. “

“Why are you always selling yourself short, Lex? How can a sharp businessman like you be so short-sighted when it comes to his own love life? “

“You should stay clear of me if you don't want to get hurt. “

“Well, guess what, I can't. I've also tried to fight this and failed abysmally. I kept coming to Smallville even when I should have been in Metropolis just because I needed my fix of Lex Luthor. It didn't matter he didn't seem to care about me. You're my addiction, Lex; an addiction I'm not

willing to give up. “

“Are you sure about this, Chloe? You should know by now that being around me is the most certain way to get hurt or worse. “

“So is being around Clark, Lex. Look at Lana and all the times she's ended up in hospital or nursing a broken heart. I'm willing to risk it, Lex. So what do you say? “

“I'd say this tastes heavenly, “ responded Lex, savouring the chocolate and mocha. “ But I guess your lips would taste even better, “ he added with a smirk.

“How do you know without having tried them? “

“Is that an invitation, Miss Sullivan? “ he asked with a devilish grin.

“Will I have to spell it out, Mr Luthor? “ asked Chloe, leaning towards him.

“You're definitely my addiction, Miss Sullivan. But it's an addiction for which I'm not willing to go into rehab, “ he murmured, pressing a passionate kiss on her lips.

CHAPTER 9: Coming Back For More (Version Two)

The Talon

It was Friday, the last weekend of Lana and Chloe's holidays, and the girls had decided to celebrate and say ' Mission accomplished '. Lana had managed to finish the annual inventory in record time thanks to Clark and her partner. Meanwhile, Chloe had tied up her historical research on the Lyttons with the aid provided by the same helpful pair of former friends.

Lex arrived at the coffee shop to find Lana and Chloe talking amicably over a cup of foamy coffee. Clark was nowhere in sight and Lex wondered whether he was to blame for his absence. The had crossed their first words in months while helping the girls, but their relationship could hardly be called harmonious. Still, Lex had hoped -for Lana and Chloe's sake- that Clark could bury the hatch for a while; he was more than ready to do that for the woman he loved.

“Good evening, Lex. I'm glad you've decided to accept the invitation, “ said Lana.

“I couldn't say ' no ' to two beautiful ladies, “ he responded with his trademark smile. “ I've brought a couple of bottles of cold Bollinger, “ he said, setting them on the table.

“Champagne, Lex? “ asked a surprised Lana.

“You're of age now, aren't you? “ he responded, looking at both girls.

“Excuse me, guys, I've got to take this call, “ interrupted Chloe when her mobile rang and Clark's name appeared on the display.

“It's Clark, isn't it? “ asked Lana worried.

“Put your mind at rest, Lana, “ answered Chloe, placing a hand on the girl shoulder.

"I'll go for the flutes, " said Lana, going behind the counter." You know, Lex, you've brought the perfect booze for the cake I've got in the fridge. "

"Let me guess... strawberries and cream, right? " asked Lex with a smirk when Lana leant down to fetch the cake.

"How did you know I'd go for strawberries? " she asked with a grin.

"They're pink, aren't they? " he responded, putting on a serious face.

"You're pulling my leg, aren't you, Mr Luthor? " she answered with a fake frown.

"Not at all, Miss Lang. You know I've always seen you as a strawberries and cream girl, never as a meringue kind, " he responded sincerely.

"I haven't baked it. I'm hopeless at cooking! " she answered in an attempt to hide her embarrassment.

"Is Clark coming, Lana? " asked Lex suddenly sober.

"I don't think so... No, " she murmured, looking towards the small office at the back, where Chloe was still on the phone.

"What's happened? Have you two fought again or is it because of me? "

"You? " asked Lana taken by surprise.

"Why are you wearing that strange look on your face, Lana? I thought he and I'd be able to behave like civilized men, judging by the last three weeks, but it seems I was wrong. He can't stand the thought of having to share a meal with me. "

"You're wrong, Lex. It's not you but me. I could see by the look in his eyes when we went to Metropolis he was hoping we could get together again. "

"And you're not? "

"Hoping to get together, you mean? "

"Yes. I thought that was what you wanted; taking into account what you told me the evening you went to the mansion to show me the figures for the new coffee vouchers. "

"No, Lex. I asked for your advice and you misunderstood my words completely, " she said, blushing and lowering her eyes." I've been fighting these feelings inside of me for too long, and this morning I decided I couldn't let Clark delude himself any longer. What we once had is gone and no matter how hard I try I can't give him what he wants from me, " she added, raising up her eyes to meet his.

"Guys, I hate to do this but I've got to leave, " interrupted Chloe apologetically.

"How is he, Chloe? " asked a concerned Lana.

“You know... but stop worrying. It was for the best, and I'm not saying this because I... “

“You're a marvellous friend, Chloe, “ responded Lex. “ I hope one day Clark wakes up and sees the amazing woman he's got under his nose all this time, “ he added with a warm smile.

“Thank you, Lex, for trying to brighten me up. I'm glad we're friends again. “

“So am I, Chloe. Now, go and don't worry about us. We'll see how to while away the time, “ he responded with a smirk, looking at Lana out of the corner of his eye.

“Lana, may I speak with you before I leave? “

“Sure, Chloe. What is it? “

“In private, please. “

“OK. I'll be right back, Lex. “

“Take your time, Lana. “

“Listen, Lana. Do you remember the conversation we had last night? “ asked Chloe in the kitchen.

“Of course, I do. Why do you think I went to see Clark this morning? “

“Yes... well... the thing is... I dropped by the mansion today because I had to return a couple of books I'd borrowed from Lex's library, and it suddenly hit me. “

“Hit you? What are you talking about, Chloe? You aren't having second thoughts, are you? “

“Wipe that frown, missy. I'm not interested in Lex that way but, by the looks of it, he's interested in you. “

“Has he told you so? “

“No, Lana. He'd never talk about his private life with me, least of all make names, but you should have seen him today when you were finishing with the annual inventory. The look on his face was priceless. Fortunately, he didn't realise I was standing at the doorway or I wouldn't have caught him unawares. He was devouring you with his eyes, Lana. He's completely smitten. Trust me. “

“Are you sure? “

“Lana, please, don't be so dense. He isn't in love with me. He's never looked at me the way he looks at you. He may wear that poker face most of the time, but nothing escapes this sleuth, “ responded Chloe, tapping her nose.” I've got to leave now. But, please, do it for me. You two love each other, so stop running away. “

“Oh, Chloe! How I wish things could also work for you!” said Lana, embracing her tightly.

“Hope is the last thing I'll lose, Lana, “ she responded, wiping her eyes, and bidding her goodbye.

Lana saw the reporter to the door and locked it behind her. She took a few moments to collect herself and control the shaking of her hands before ambling back to the table where Lex was sitting.

“We should talk some sense into Clark. She doesn't deserve this suffering, “ murmured the girl.

“We can't help who we fall in love with, Lana. The heart's stronger than the mind, and the harder you fight it the worse it gets, “ responded Lex with a knowing smile. “ How about a piece of that strawberry and cream cake? “

“There's a chocolate and mocha cake as well, “ answered Lana, getting up to fetch the tray.

“I'm very fond of mocha, but I love strawberries and cream, “ he answered, smiling to himself, and uncorked a bottle of champagne.

“Is the piece big enough, do you think?” she said, handing him the plate and a fork.

“I'll want a second serving, “ he responded, holding her gaze. “I don't think one'll be enough. Strawberries and cream have always been my weakness, “ he added, pinching the cake with his fork and noticing Lana's red cheeks.

“Could I have a glass, Lex? “ she asked, swallowing the lump in her throat.

“You're a grown-up now, Lana. You don't need to wait any longer to take what you want. It's yours for the taking. Has Clark ever told you look adorable when you blush? “ he asked passionately.

“Lex, is all this true? “

“It can be as true as you want it to be. Just say the word, Lana. “

“I'm afraid of making a fool of myself, Lex. “

“More afraid than I am ? I love you, Lana. There, I've said it. I know I don't deserve you but... “

“Why do you say that, Lex? Everybody deserves to be loved and know happiness in this life, “ she said, squeezing his hand tightly.” Are you going to deny me that? “ she whispered.

“I could never deny you anything, Lana, “ he responded with cloudy eyes.

“Then, don't. I love you, Lex. My love's yours for the taking. “

“I think I'll have my second serving now, “ answered Lex throatily, cupping her face in both hands and kissing her passionately.

