

T.O.G.o.M for 2010

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Rated: PG

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Summary: There is a surprise twist in this rewrite of "That Old Gang of Mine."

Author's Note: Yes, it's another year come along and that means another shot at the most rewritten episode in all of Folcdom. You guessed it; another version of TOGoM but with a bit of a twist. Let the moaning begin.

Lois Lane frowned as she eyeballed the line of well-dressed Metropolis elite as they filed into the somewhat run-down looking warehouse which her sources had told her housed an illegal gambling operation. Each, in turn, walked up to the heavily boarded door and spoke to a pair of eyes that would glare down at them. If the person on the other side of the door liked what was said, the door opened and they were let in. The door would close and the process would repeat itself. She recognized a judge, several councilmen, and even an assistant D.A. enter the illegal club.

She had hoped to come and check out the place on her own, but her boy scout of a partner had insisted on coming along. She just hoped Clark wouldn't do something stupid that would get them both in trouble. The rumor had it that Capone, and the rest of those reanimated gangsters might show up here tonight. It was their best lead and she knew she had to be there just in case.

With a barely audible sigh, and a glance at the determined look on her partner's face, Lois gave Clark a little push in the back and propelled him toward the door.

Once in front of the foreboding portal a small window slid back revealing a pair of dark, shadowed eyes. "What's the password?"

Clark looked a bit thrown by the question. "Ah ... Joe sent me?" There was no response from the owner of the eyes. "Swordfish?"

Lois saw the shake of the fellow's head and could tell that they were about to be denied entrance. She stepped in front of Clark. "He's always kidding around. The fat lady sings."

As they were let in and moved into the entry hall Clark turned to Lois. "How did you know the password?"

Lois shrugged. "I was watching the other couples that entered ... closely."

Clark's eyebrows rose. "You can lip read?"

A small smile tugged on the corners of Lois' mouth. "Yeah ... I can lip read."

They wandered around a bit but didn't really see anything that led them to believe that their quarry had yet arrived, if they planned to come at all. Lois grabbed Clark by the sleeve and pulled him behind a column.

"This is a big place, and there are a lot of people here. Let's split up and just mingle. Play some games, and don't draw any unwanted attention to ourselves. If either of us finds out anything worthwhile, we'll find the other and decide what to do. Okay?"

Clark nodded, then turned and walked toward the bar. Lois stared after him for a few moments. She had a bad feeling about tonight. She tried to shrug off her premonition and headed over toward the slots. Maybe she could get

lucky on a nickel machine.

Clark looked around for Lois. He'd just had an encounter with Bonnie Parker over by the bar and he had to tell Lois about it. If Bonnie was here, that meant that Clyde and the rest probably were also.

He finally saw her striding angrily along the line of slot machines seeming to check out the occupant of each machine. He caught her just before she started down the next aisle of machines.

"Lois, Lois, wait up. I've got some news." He reached out and grabbed the sleeve of her jacket.

"Yeah, well I've got to find a little old lady who walked off with a bucket of my nickels."

Clark ignored her irritation. "Bonnie and Clyde are here."

She stopped her rush and turned toward him. "I ran into a guy who told me that Georgie Hairdo, the guy who owns this place, is dead."

Clark nodded. "I think it's time that we phone Henderson and get the police involved."

Before Lois could answer they were interrupted by the sound of gunfire. After a few startled screams, everyone's attention was drawn toward the entry landing. Al Capone stood there, surrounded by John Dillinger, and Clyde Barrow. Bonnie Parker slowly sauntered up next to Clyde and leaned against a railing.

Clark tried to hold Lois back but was unsuccessful as she made her way up to the front of the crowd. He rolled his eyes, and then followed.

"Ladies and Gentleman, may I have your attention. The former proprietor of this fine establishment has decided to retire and has generously agreed to turn over ownership to me, Al Capone."

"Hey, Al, maybe we could make this little cutie our head hostess." Dillinger stepped forward and reached for Lois. "I've always liked a lady in red."

Clark saw the glare that Lois gave Dillinger, but the gangster was determined to paw his partner. He didn't think about his actions, he just knew that he couldn't let that happen. He quickly stepped forward and stepped between Lois and Dillinger.

"Hey, who are you ... her brother?" The gangster gave Clark a shove, causing him to fall back a couple of steps.

Clark surged forward.

"Clark! Look out!"

He suddenly found himself falling to the side as the force of Lois' shove sent him to the floor. The tableau that followed seemed to happen in slow motion. He heard the sharp retorts of three quick gunshots. A quick glance showed him that Clyde Barrow was holding the smoking gun. He had been the target of the gangster's murderous intent and would have been on the wrong end of those shots if Lois had not knocked him out of the way. Instead ... NO!

"LOIS!"

Clark scrambled to his feet just in time to see a look of surprise on Lois' face as she clutched her midsection. He reached her just as her legs seemed to give way.

"Lois?" He cradled her as she slowly sank to the carpeted floor. "No, Lois, no!"

Clark, from the corner of his eye, saw Capone give Clyde an angry glare.

"Now why'd you go and do that. Now we have to get out of here. I can't be tied to no murder." He gestured to a

couple of non-descript thugs flanking him. “Grab the stiff; we’ll have to dump the body.”

The two no-necks came down and grabbed Lois by the legs and began to drag her off.

“No.” Clark tried to hold onto her but was pushed away by one of the thugs. He watched helplessly as Lois’ limp body was manhandled up the short stairway and out the door. “Lois?”

The classic black sedan roared around the corner in a particularly seedy part of Hell’s Kitchen. The vehicle barely slowed as the back door was opened and a bundle of limp flesh was tossed unceremoniously into the garbage littered street. Accelerating away, the sedan was out of sight in seconds.

Lois rose from her squalid resting place and made a futile effort to wipe the filth from her dress. Her hair was soaked from the puddle she had landed in. She inwardly cringed, thinking what that small pool might be made up of. She pulled the shoulder length wig from her head, revealing the short dark hair beneath. She silently cursed the fact that she’d have to wash and set the wig again.

Then it hit her. She probably wasn’t going to need the wig again. It had happened so fast, she hadn’t known what else to do. Clark would have been killed if she hadn’t acted, but pushing him out of the way had put her in the path of Clyde’s bullets. A roomful of people had seen those bullets hit her in the stomach and chest. She had no choice but to pretend. Unfortunately, in the morning, when the newspapers hit the stands the world would know what that roomful of people knew. Lois Lane was dead.

Lois swiveled her head, checking to see if anyone was in sight. With a sigh, she stepped deeper into a dark alley and then lifted quickly into the night sky.

Clark sat in his living room, Lois’ small clutch purse still held tightly in his hands. The room was dark. But it didn’t matter because his eyes didn’t see anything except Lois slumping into his arms, and then to the floor. Over and over again the horror replayed itself in his mind. Lost in his own personal hell, he wasn’t aware of his surroundings. If pressed he’d have a hard time telling anyone how he’d even managed to get home.

First he’d had to deal with an endless line of police; from the street cops who were the first to respond to the detectives who sauntered in later. Each asked him the same questions again and again. It was like they were all too stupid to talk to each other rather than him.

Then Clark had to call Perry and tell him what had happened. That had been enormously difficult. The Chief loved Lois like a daughter, and being told about her murder had devastated him. After the two men shared their all consuming grief for a time, Clark begged off and just went home.

He hadn’t realized that he still had Lois’ purse, which he’d picked up after Capone’s thugs had dragged her away, until he was home. He made no move to set it down anywhere. He just continued to hold it as he moved, zombie-like, to his living room and sat on the couch, staring at nothing.

Occasionally a tear would escape, to trickle from the corner of his eye and make his way down his cheek. He knew that he was still somewhat in shock. He was numb; he didn’t feel anything ... except the pain. The pain that twisted in his gut like a dull knife. Pain burning to the core of his

being.

God he loved her, and she never knew. He’d tried to tell her once, but had been forced to recant his confession. So she just saw them as friends. They were partners and friends; best friends, but he was in love with her. He had been ... from the first day he saw her. How could he not. She was Lois Lane.

And now she was gone.

“Jeez, you look terrible.”

Lois glared at her sister as she floated through the French doors that led into the living room from the back balcony. “So nice of you to notice.” She knew that Lucy was right, though. Her once fashionable red dress was torn and filthy. She clutched her soiled wig in her right hand.

Lois crossed the room and flopped down into the chair opposite the couch where her sister sat. She dropped her faux locks onto the coffee table and sighed. “Luce, I’m dead.”

Lucy Lane eyeballed her distraught big sis. “So I hear.” She almost smiled at Lois’ look of confusion. “Your boss, Mr. White, called. He told me what happened.” She reached over and gave Lois’ hand a squeeze. “He also said that your partner, Clark, was taking it pretty badly; having a hard time dealing with it, were his words.”

Lois sighed again. “Well, I guess that’s something.”

Lucy frowned. “What’s that supposed to mean? Are you saying that it’s a good thing that Clark is hurting because you were apparently killed right in front of him?”

Lois was taken aback by the vehemence of her sister’s response. “No, I ... well; a girl likes to think that she’ll be missed.” She shrugged. “I’m not happy that Clark is having trouble accepting my death, it’s just that ... we’re friends and I’d like to think that my apparent death would have some affect on him.”

“And did it?” Lucy leaned back and folded her arms in front of her chest.

“What?”

“Lois, according to what Mr. White told me, it’s been hours since you were shot. Where have you been? And why aren’t you in your Ultrawoman suit?”

Lois spread her hands in a gesture of helplessness. “Clark has it.”

“What?”

“I keep the suit, super compacted, in my purse. I dropped it when I had to fake my death. Clark must have picked it up because when I saw him, he was still holding it.”

Lucy flashed Lois a somewhat smug smile. “That’s what I thought. You’ve been flying around watching Clark, haven’t you?”

Lois looked embarrassed. “Yeah, I have been. At first I was worried about him in that club. Then I was curious as to how he would deal with everything. I watched him dealing with Henderson, then the call to the Chief, and later when he finally made it back to his apartment.” Lois scrubbed her hand through her hair. “What you told me that Perry said about Clark makes more sense now. I have to admit that while I was watching him I was confused.”

“Confused? How?”

“Well, Clark and I are partners, and friends. Maybe even best friends, but while I expected him to be upset over my death, his reaction seemed rather extreme to me.”

“What are you talking about? How can being upset over a friend’s murder be considered extreme.”

Lois stood and began to pace. Her arms flailed about haphazardly. “You know how it is. Like when Wendy was killed in that car accident in high school. She was my friend and I was really upset that she’d been killed. I cursed the driver of the vehicle that struck hers, and I even cried for awhile. But, within a short time I calmed down. My more extreme feelings dulled to just a general depression. It’s really hard to sustain that kind of emotion.”

Lucy spread her hands in confusion. “So, what does that have to do with Clark?”

Lois shrugged. “It’s just that I expected to see something like that. I expected Clark to be sad and maybe angry over what happened. But he didn’t react at all like that. He came into his apartment, he never bothered to turn on the lights, and he was still clutching my purse in his hand. He didn’t curse the fates, nor moan or whimper. He didn’t say anything. He just walked over to the couch and sat down. He sat there, holding my purse, for hours. Never moving, never bothering with the TV or the lights. He just sat there in the dark. It was very confusing. I couldn’t get a read on his reactions. At least not until you told me what Perry said. Now it finally makes sense.”

“How so?”

Lois turned and stared directly at Lucy. “He looked lost.”

“Lois sit down.” Lucy waved her sister back to her chair. Once Lois was seated she leaned forward, her arms resting on her knees. She sighed, then looked her sister in the face. Lois’ expression was wary. “You do know that Clark was in love with you, right?”

“What?” Lois was surprised by her sister’s words. “Don’t be crazy. Clark thought of me just a friend, like I do him.”

Lucy’s brow rose. “So, you just think of Clark as a ‘friend’?”

Lois blushed. “Of course.” Lucy’s stare bored into her. “Well, maybe a best friend ... or a little more. But I know that Clark only thought of me as a friend.”

“None are so blind as those who will not see,” Lucy muttered under breath. “Lois, the only person who knew the both of you that didn’t know that Clark was in love with you apparently was you. It was obvious to everyone else.” Lucy frowned, then pointed her finger at her sister. “Didn’t he profess his love for you once, back when you were thinking of marrying Lex Luthor?” Lucy ignored the glare that Lois gave her. “Well, didn’t he?”

Lois rolled her eyes. “Yes, but he told me later that he just said that to try and keep me from marrying Luthor.”

“And you believed him.”

“Yes, why would he lie?”

Lucy barked out a quick laugh. “Well, he apparently lied one of those times. But the real question is ... which time.”

Lois opened her mouth to speak, but quickly closed it again. She hadn’t thought about Clark’s behavior back then for quite some time. It was a chapter in her life that she tried to forget. The fact that she had even considered Luthor’s marriage proposal still astounded her. Add to it, that he turned out to be the biggest criminal in the city and she hadn’t even known. It was enough to make her want to hide her head in shame.

Clark had never trusted Lex. He didn’t have the advantages that she’d had, but his instincts had told him that Luthor was hiding something. Still, she had just chalked it up to jealousy and had dismissed Clark’s

warnings.

If she had been wrong about Luthor’s feelings toward her, could she also be wrong about Clark’s? Was it possible that he really did love her?

Suddenly the present came crashing back on Lois. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Which doesn’t matter?” Lucy was confused again. “That he lied, or which time he lied?”

Her helplessness in light of the situation she was in was finally beginning to crush down on Lois. “Any of it. Don’t you see? Whether Clark loved me, or just liked me as a friend doesn’t matter any more. Lois Lane is dead, and there is no longer a person for him to love, like, or be indifferent toward.”

“The man is hurting badly, Lo, don’t you think that he deserves to know that you aren’t dead?”

“What? I should fly over there and say, ‘hey Clark, could I have my purse back, it has my extra costume in it. Oh, and by the way, I’m not actually dead because I’m invulnerable.’ Is that what you think I should do?”

Lucy shrugged. “Well, he’d know that you aren’t really dead, and he could still be your friend as Ultrawoman.”

Lois snorted. “Not likely. He doesn’t even like Ultrawoman.” Lucy’s look of disbelief caused Lois to pause. “Well, he doesn’t dislike me. I can tell that he respects Ultrawoman and has some admiration for what she does, but he’s always very professional when we speak. It’s one of the things I always liked about Clark. He never came onto me, as Ultrawoman, like so many of the slobbering fan boys do. It was refreshing to be seen as something besides a super-powered sex object.”

Lucy laughed. “Well, can you blame them? It’s not like the suit exactly hides your more womanly attributes.”

Lois scowled at her sister’s mocking. “You know the suit is tight because it makes it more aerodynamic. Also, my aura only projects a few millimeters from my skin so the suit has to be tight to keep from being destroyed every time I perform some super feat.”

“So, why the cape? That surely isn’t aerodynamic, and I can tell you I’ve had to make plenty of spares over the last few years when you come back with them singed, torn, or even lost.”

Lois pouted a bit. “I like the cape. It looks really good while I’m flying. Besides it has another, more practical purpose.”

“What?”

“It keeps all the perverts from ogling my butt.”

Lucy had to bite her lip to keep from bursting out laughing. She quickly regained her composure. “That still doesn’t tell me what you plan to do about Clark.”

“No, it doesn’t.”

Clark knew that he should get up. That he should go to bed, do something. Lois was gone and sitting, alone in the dark wasn’t going to bring her back.

He’d spent hours just sitting in his living room trying to cope with the emptiness in his gut. He’d loved Lois, even though she only thought of him as a friend. He’d tried to tell her once, but she broke his heart when she told him that she didn’t think of him ‘like that’.

He hadn’t meant to confess his feelings so early in their relationship, but his hand was forced when Luthor had asked her to marry him. The Daily Planet had been nearly destroyed, and everyone was lost. He was afraid that Lois, feeling bereft with the loss of the job she loved, might take

him up on his offer. In the end she'd turned Luthor down. Later, together with Perry, Jimmy and Jack, they had uncovered enough evidence to prove that Luthor had been behind the troubles at the Daily Planet. Thanks to their efforts Luthor was now in prison.

Lois had seemed badly shaken when she found out exactly what kind of man Lex Luthor really was. Her confidence had taken quite a jolt and Clark took it upon himself to take back his declaration of love and tell Lois that he just thought of her as a friend. He didn't think that she needed the added pressure of trying to get the Planet up and running again with a partner who worshipped her.

So, she didn't know how he really felt, and now it was too late; too late for her, too late for him, too late for happiness.

Clark's dark thoughts were interrupted by a somewhat hesitant knock on his door. It barely registered on his consciousness. It was really late and the strangeness that someone would be at his door at this hour was the only thing that caused him to take notice. He considered ignoring the late night caller until he heard the soft, familiar voice.

"Clark, let me in. I know you're in there."

His heart practically wrenched itself out of his chest as shock and unrestrained, wild hope flared up. He rose quickly and reached the door. He didn't bother to look through the spy hole. He just pulled the door open and stared at the petite figure that stood on his stoop.

"Lois?"

"Yes, Clark, it's me. Can I come in?"

Like an automaton he stepped aside. His mind was in turmoil. It was Lois! But it couldn't be! The woman was the right size, and she was wearing the same red dress that Lois had been wearing, though it was quite dirty and torn in several places.

He closed the door without taking his eyes off her. She turned to face him. There was something wrong. Her hair ...

"What happened to your hair?"

She reached up and fingered the short locks. The corners of her mouth turned up slightly in a wistful smile. "It got dirty."

Confusion, hope, bewilderment, and relief all warred with each other in his mind. Lois was dead, but she was standing in front of him. He saw her shot down in cold blood and dragged off to be disposed of like yesterday's garbage. But she was alive. It was Lois.

The only other possibility was his grief had unhinged him and he was hallucinating her standing there. But if that was the case why would he imagine her with short hair.

He took one step toward her, then stopped. "Lois? I don't understand."

"I know you don't. That's why I'm here, now. To explain it to you. To explain everything." The smile she gave him was a sad one. "Can I have my purse back?"

He suddenly realized that he still had her purse clutched tightly in his left hand. His mind still a jumble of incoherency, he reached out so she could take the purse from him.

"Thanks."

She snapped open the small bag and then began to spin. Almost immediately she was nothing more than a blur of colors. The colors changed as the miniature tornado came to a halt. He recognized the colorful suit instantly.

"Ultrawoman?"

"Yes, Clark, I'm Ultrawoman. That's why I wasn't killed this evening. Bullets can't hurt me."

Clark was stunned. His legs suddenly felt weak so he stumbled back into the living room and collapsed onto his couch. He stared up at the small woman who followed him into the room and sat in the chair opposite.

It was funny, in a way. Lois was never a frail-looking woman, but her trim body never showed a bulkiness of musculature, yet she was the strongest woman on the planet. And she had been the woman he thought he loved.

"Why are you telling me this now?"

Frown lines formed on her brow. Her expression was hard to read. "Because you needed to know. I underestimated the hurt you felt over my apparent death and for that, I'm sorry. You deserved to know that I hadn't died from Clyde's bullets."

A part of Clark was ecstatic that Lois hadn't been killed earlier, but there was still something nagging at him. Lois wasn't dead, but what was her status? He respected Ultrawoman and, like the rest of the people, was grateful for all that she did for them. But you couldn't be a friend to Ultrawoman. She couldn't have friends.

Clark's voice was soft and full of emotion. "A roomful of people saw Clyde Barrow gun down Lois Lane at close range. They saw her lifeless body dragged out by Capone's thugs." Clark knew that even though Lois hadn't been killed, nothing had really changed. "How to you plan to fix that?"

She couldn't look him in the eye. Her head dropped and he saw her hands tighten into fists. "I can't."

"I can't."

Lois knew that Clark realized the true nature of the situation. She may have not been killed by the gangster's gun because she was Ultrawoman, but Lois Lane was still dead just the same. He had cut right to the heart of her problem. She could still be Metropolis' resident hero but the crusading reporter was gone.

"Clark, I can't say that I truly know what our relationship was. I know you were very important to me. You were my best friend, and maybe you were more. I just wish that we'd had the time to find out."

He ran a hand through his hair. "Yeah, me too." He stood up and walked around to the back of the sofa. "So what *are* you going to do?"

Lois wanted to say that she was going to stay around Metropolis and continue to hang out with her friends and family. That the only thing that would change would be that she'd be doing it as Ultrawoman rather than Lois Lane. She wanted to say that, but she couldn't. It wouldn't be true.

"I guess I'll pack up the stuff I'll need and move out of mine and Lucy's apartment. I'm sure I can find some remote place that I can call a base of operations. Maybe it's time that the rest of the world got some attention from Ultrawoman. Metropolis has pretty much had the monopoly on the super hero for some time now. Maybe it's time that changed."

"I guess that would make sense." Clark's voice was flat, almost mechanical. Lois could see that the hurt and the loss that he'd been dealing with earlier were still with him. Her revelation had done nothing to change that.

He walked over to his door and opened it for her. "I wish you the best of luck, Lois. I'll miss you."

She slowly walked over and laid her hand against his cheek. "I'll miss you too, Clark. Be well."

Lois was already out the door and a hundred feet into the night air when she heard the door close behind her. She stopped and looked down at the tiny speck that was Clark's apartment building. Just then her special hearing kicked in. "I love you, Lois."

A tear rolled down her cheek. "I love you too, Clark."

Epilogue

Lois leaned back in her canvas lounge chair and watched her sister Lucy splash in the warm waves as they rolled lazily toward the white sand beach. She had brought her sister to this remote, deserted island which she had made her default home since the gangster Clyde Barrow had ended her life as Lois Lane and left her only Ultrawoman.

It was a pretty little place; with large palm trees, and wide sandy beaches. She'd even found a spring feed fresh water pool up at the top of a rocky shelf near one end of the island. She built a small, crude hut not far from the main beach. She didn't spend much time on the island, but used it as a place to crash when she needed to rest and recharge. This time she brought Lucy along for a sort of family vacation. The younger Lane seemed to be enjoying herself.

Lois pulled her sunglasses down and eyed her sister warily as Lucy came rushing out of the water toward her. The last time, she had tried to pull Lois into the water with her. Unfortunately for Lucy, Ultrawoman had suddenly manifested and stopped the young woman's plan instantly.

Lucy came and flopped down in the sand next to her sister. "Hey, Lo, this is really a great place you've got here. You should have been killed long ago."

Lois glared at her impudent sibling. "Not funny, Luce."

Lucy quickly looked shamefaced. "Yeah, sorry, I just mean that this is a really cool place. You've done alright in finding a place to hang out when you're not doing the super routine."

Lois closed her book and set it on the sand next to her. "Yeah, it's nice enough, but it can get pretty lonely sometimes. That's why I don't spend a lot of time here."

"Well, you can always drop by and visit me anytime you want, you know."

Lois smiled. "I know. But I don't think it would be a good idea to have Ultrawoman being seen hanging around Lucy Lane too much. Don't want to put any ideas into anyone's head."

Lucy leaned back on her elbows and let the sun burn down on her face for a few moments. "I totally understand that. But it has been just you and me for quite a long time. Ever since mom and dad died, it's always been the Lane sisters against the world." Lucy turned her gaze toward Lois. "Do you ever miss them?"

Lois reached out and grabbed Lucy's hand. "All the time. It's not like they are in my thoughts every minute of every day. But how can I not miss the two people who took in an orphan from space and made her a part of their family. They never made me feel like I was some sort of freak, even after my powers started to manifest. Their love for me ... and you was total." Lois sighed. "It's too bad that their love for each other wasn't quite as strong."

Lucy echoed Lois' sigh. "Yeah, but I think things between them were really starting to turn around. They both were looking forward to that family trip that was planned. Too bad we never got to go."

"Yeah." Lois gave Lucy's hand a squeeze.

Lucy cocked her head and stared, reading her sister's

mood. "You miss Clark don't you?"

Lois turned her head and returned Lucy's gaze. "Desperately."

"Have you ever brought Clark here?"

Lois shook her head. "No, I've never really had a chance to ask. He won't let go of the formality when ever I'm around, because I'm around as Ultrawoman. It's like he refuses to see me as Lois, even when no one else is around."

"Well, it's only been a couple of months. Maybe he'll loosen up some as time goes by and he becomes more used to the situation."

Lois shook her head. "I don't know. He's never been able to get past the powers."

Lucy chewed on her bottom lip. "I was sorry to hear about his folks. Was he close to them?"

Lois nodded. "Very; it hit him very hard. I really wanted to be there for him, but I knew he wouldn't appreciate the presence of Ultrawoman at their funeral." Lois allowed herself another sigh. "He seems to be pretty much back to normal now. I had to rescue him twice in the last week."

Lucy chuckled as she stood up. "So, what's for lunch?"

Clark struggled with the ropes which bound his hands behind his back. They were tied too well; he couldn't make any headway toward loosening them. Another jolt threw him against the metal bulkhead of the small plane upon which he was a prisoner.

Clark had gotten a tip about a gun-running operation that began in Metropolis and brought the illegal arms to several feuding factions warring in Africa's Congo region. He tracked them to a small airstrip several miles north of Metropolis. It was while they were loading a shipment onto the small cargo plane that he'd been caught.

Not wanting to leave behind a body to be found by authorities, if someone should chance by, the smugglers decided to take Clark along with them. They'd decide what to do with him along the way.

Clark had no illusions as to what his final fate would be. He just didn't know when, or where. As the saying goes, where there's life, there's hope. Of course, if he did manage to free himself somehow, he still had no place to go. The plane was over open ocean, and not exactly outfitted with parachutes and life rafts.

Another jolt bounced Clark around. The movement of the plane was followed quickly by a crack of thunder that was deafening. Not long after they'd taken off they'd flown into a storm. It had been increasing in intensity ever since. While the winds and rain shook the small plane around causing Clark to have a rather uncomfortable ride, it did have a beneficial side effect. The small crew of thugs was more worried about staying in the air than they were about what to do with their nosey reporter captive.

Having his hands tied behind him made it difficult for Clark to keep his balance as the small plane was continually tossed about by the ferocity of the storm. There was no way he could hold onto anything to keep himself stationary. So he found himself being bounced around amongst the crates of illegal arms.

Another deafening crash of thunder signaled their most violent shaking yet. Several crates broke loose from their moorings and were thrown about the hold, and Clark was thrown about right along with them.

Among all the things that Clark had envisioned might happen, what happened next was the last thing that he

expected. It was one of those situations where a combination of things all had to happen in a certain sequence to reach the result that occurred. Two heavy crates of weapons slid across the floor of the plane and slammed into the loading door in the side of the plane. Clark was the third object to be pitched into the over stressed door.

Clark had an above average build but wasn't exactly what you'd call heavy. Still his bulk was enough, after the two significant hits by the weapons crates, to cause the latch on the door to fail. In an instant Clark was in free fall.

The noise created by the howling wind and the continual thunder drowned out any scream of shock and surprise that escaped from him. The pointlessness of yelling quickly forced Clark to give it up.

Before he could contemplate what action might be open to him he found himself grabbed around the waist and his downward momentum changed to horizontal flight. A small, powerful figure in a colorful costume had a firm hold on him.

"Ultrawoman ... how?"

"Not now; I'll explain when we get you safe."

Just that short exchange had been difficult to hear over the incredible noise caused by the storm, so Clark agreed that it would be best to hold his questions until they had a change to reach solid land, where normal conversation would be possible.

Suddenly an incredibly bright flash and thunderous boom occurred simultaneously. Every hair on his body stood up and crackled with hundreds of tiny sparks. Immediately after the boom, he was once again in freefall.

The flash temporarily blinded Lois as the violence of the lightning strike sent her hurtling through the air. It took her several seconds to regain her equilibrium and stop her headlong tumble through the sky. Her ears still rang from the loudness of the thunder. Her skin still tingled. She had been hit by lightning before, but never a strike as massive as that one.

Omigod! "Clark!" She frantically scanned around her, looking for Clark. He couldn't have hit the ocean all ready ... had he? Could he have survived the strike? The lightning had hit her in the back, so her body was between Clark and the strike, but would that have been enough to protect him? And where was he? She didn't see him anywhere.

Immediately Lois was skimming just above the waves of the ocean in a frantic search for Clark. Spiraling out from the central point she expanded her pattern rapidly. She prayed that he hadn't slipped beneath the waves. If he had there was virtually no chance that she'd find him.

Suddenly she spied a dark form bobbing on the water's surface. It was Clark!

She sped to him, scooping up his unconscious form and flew toward the shore as fast as she dared. As luck, or fate, would have it; the closest land was her island.

It took nearly five minutes for Lois to get Clark to her hut on the island which she now called home. It was the longest five minutes she'd ever endured. His breathing was shallow and his pulse sporadic. She feared that he had been electrocuted, might be near death.

She laid him on her small bed and rushed to find a towel. She bent over him, using the towel to dry him off as much as possible. Lois was beside herself. She had only minimal training in first aid and CPR. She covered Clark in blankets, to keep him warm, other than that she had no clue

as to what more she could do.

She pulled a chair up close to the bed and sat down. She found herself brushing the wet hair off of his forehead. The knot in the pit of her stomach was twisting and it hurt. The thought that Clark might die ... it was something she refused to contemplate.

"Please don't die, Clark." A few tears escaped to run down her cheeks.

All of a sudden Clark sucked in a quick, huge breath, then abruptly sat up, dislodging the blanket. He turned and looked at Lois, his expression conveyed his confusion.

He reached out and touched her cheek with the palm of his hand. "Lois? How? What happened? Where are we?"

His bewilderment caused Lois to laugh in relief. "Give me a second and I'll explain everything." Her look immediately changed to one of concern. "But first, how are you feeling? Are you alright?"

Clark held his hands out in front of him, turning them over and then running them over his arms and legs. He looked up into her worried gaze. "I ... feel ... fine. In fact I don't think I've ever felt so good. What happened?"

Lois reached out and hesitantly touched his cheek. "We were struck by lightning."

"What ... lightning? How did I survive that?" She shook her head. "How was it that you were there when I fell out of the plane?"

Lois chewed on her bottom lip. "Well, I was following you."

"Following me?"

Lois grabbed his hand. "Let me explain." Lois took a deep breath and captured his eyes with her own. "I stopped by the Planet and talked to Perry. He mentioned that he was worried about you since he hadn't heard from you in a while. So I went to your apartment and hacked into your computer." Lois smiled at the memory. She was flattered that his password had been LoisLane. "I saw your story notes and tracked you to the airstrip."

"You broke into my apartment?"

Lois ignored Clark's comment. "You had already been taken and so I followed the plane."

Clark was confused. "If you knew I was on that plane why didn't you come and get me. Or capture the whole gang or something?"

Lois stared at her feet for a few moments before bringing her gaze back up to Clark. "I was watching. I thought as long as you weren't in any immediate danger I could follow the smugglers to their destination and take down the entire operation. But the storm put an end to that idea. Once I saw you fall out of the plane, you became the priority."

Clark frowned. "Do you think they made it through the storm?"

Lois shook her head. "I don't know. I haven't seen a storm that bad in a long time. It's not something any rational pilot would try to fly through. From what I could see the thunderheads were too high for such a small plane to fly above."

Clark shrugged. "Well, I wouldn't complain if that plane load of weapons wound up at the bottom of the ocean, but I wouldn't wish for any one's death, even criminals working for Intergang."

"Yeah, well, you're safe and that's what's important to me." Lois reached out and pulled Clark to his feet. "I think I should fly you to Metropolis and let a doctor look you over."

Clark shook his head. “No, really, I feel fine. I don’t need to see any doctor.”

“But Clark, we were hit by lightning. You fell hundreds of feet to the ocean. It’s a miracle that you didn’t break any bones. Still, there could be any sort of delayed reaction, or something.”

For the first time in months she saw Clark smile. “Well, if there is any delayed reaction, it’s that I feel better than I ever have before. It’s like I feel super charged.”

Lois laughed as the two of them strolled outside her little hut. “Not that I doubt you. Still, I know I’d feel better if a doctor checked you out.”

Clark frowned at Lois. “I’m telling you I feel great.” He walked over to a large boulder that Lois sometimes used as a picnic table. “I feel like I could lift this boulder and ...”

Both Lois and Clark stood frozen, their mouths agape in shock and awe. Clark had playfully grabbed at the boulder and was currently holding it over his head. He quickly dropped it and stepped back.

He turned to Lois. “How did I do that?”

Lois shook her head in disbelief. “I have no idea.”

Clark sat on the beach watching the sun set in a bloody panorama into the ocean. He’d been on Lois’ island, as he’d come to think of it, for nearly a week. He and Lois, as Ultrawoman, had been experimenting and testing what appeared to be powers that he now possessed.

The only conclusion that the two of them could come up with was that somehow the lightning strike had affected a transfer of Ultrawoman’s powers to him. How or why it should have happened neither of them knew, but apparently it hadn’t had any effect on Lois’ powers. She seemed just as powerful as ever.

]From what they could tell, he had acquired all the powers she possessed. They had been testing them over this past week, and he had quickly gained a competent mastery over all of them. Flying had been the most difficult, because there had been no physical analog that he could use as a trigger. Lois wasn’t able to explain how she did it either. She just said that it seemed to be a matter of willing it to happen.

At first he could float, and hover about a few feet off the ground. Gradually he was able to direct his movements. As of yesterday, he had taken a lengthy solo flight around the island. Lois had been upset with him that he’d done so without her around. She didn’t want him trying anything too dangerous when she wasn’t around. They didn’t know if the power transfer meant that he had Ultra powers forever, or just temporarily.

He had his own theory on that. Clark had noticed that he seemed to gain strength by being in the sun, which there was plenty of on the island. It was like he could feel himself being continually recharged by it. He’d been pushing himself quite a bit during the past week and he never got the feeling of the powers waning. He was convinced that he had these powers for good.

But that brought up another question. Now that he had these powers; what should he do with them?

He felt, rather than heard, Lois’ arrival. He turned and watched as she floated down next to him. She had a basket with her, which he knew contained food. She always brought something when she came back from her patrol. She’d told him that she worked out early that she didn’t actually need to eat, but who didn’t enjoy eating. So they indulged themselves every evening.

Lois spun out of her costume into a pair of shorts and a tank top. She set the basket in front of Clark as she sat next to him. She gave him a smile. “Have I told you how sexy you look without glasses?”

He’d lost his glasses when he went into the ocean, but apparently he didn’t actually need them anymore. He returned her smile. “I think you might have mentioned it once or twice.”

“So, when I came in you appeared to be pretty deep in thought. Anything you’d care to share?”

Clark picked up a pebble and tossed it toward the ocean. It didn’t land for about thirty seconds. “I’ve been thinking about what all this means; about what I should do?”

Lois leaned her head against his arm. “Any conclusions?”

Clark tossed another pebble. “Well, I’m not a big believer in fate, or destiny. I think a person makes their own destiny. But there had to be some reason why I got these powers.” He turned and gazed into Lois’ eyes. “My whole world has been turned upside down, not unlike yours had been not so long ago. Amidst all this chaos I know two things for certain.”

“What are those?” Her voice was a husky, soft whisper.

“That there is no one I’d rather be with than you ... and that I love you very much.”

Lois blushed and smiled at the same time. “I know how you feel because I feel exactly the same way.”

Clark reached over and played with the ends of Lois’ hair. “So, what would think about being partners again?”

Lois grinned as she traced his lips with her finger. “I think I’d like that. But what about your life as Clark Kent? I can tell you that a secret identity is a hard thing to keep up. And with us being together, I think people might be able to make the connection easier. Still it is nice to be able to have that illusion of normalcy sometimes.”

Clark sighed. “Yeah, I’ve been thinking about that. My parents are now gone, and I don’t really have any close family. Lois Lane was always my anchor and when she was taken from me I really felt like I was set adrift. Even though I knew ‘the secret’ I couldn’t see any way where I could relate to Ultrawoman.” Clark stared at the deepening twilight along the horizon line. “I don’t see any reason why Clark Kent needs to come back. As far as the rest of the world knows, he was simply lost at sea while on a story. Maybe we had to lose who we were in order to be together as who we are now. Does that make any sense?”

“I only know that I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you with me.” Lois reached over and grabbed his hand. “You know that I told Perry and Jimmy that I rescued you, but I didn’t elaborate on your condition. Truth be told, I’m pretty sure both of them know that Lois Lane and Ultrawoman are the same person. Would it bother you that they would know the truth about you also?”

Clark shook his head. “No, in fact I think it would be a good idea to have someone normal that we can relate to. It would help to keep us grounded. I’d hate to have to put so much pressure on Lucy.”

Lois blushed again. “Speaking of Lucy; I sort of have her working on a costume for you.”

“What?”

Lois giggled like a little girl. “Well, I was hoping that you’d want to partner with me and use your new powers to help others. I know that is the kind of person that you are. So, I’ve got her looking into materials and boots.”

Clark gave her a raised brow and a wry smile. “I see, so

you planned all along to turn me into what ... Ultraman?"

Lois shook her head. "No, I don't want it looking like you are just a copy of me. I was thinking along another line."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I've got Lucy looking into a blue body suit with red boots and cape. Maybe even some red trunks to break up the long line of blue."

"Why red and blue?"

"To match this." Lois pulled some kind of embroidered appliqué from her back pocket. "It was on the blanket my folks found me wrapped in when they discovered my space ship. I think if it was placed on the suit over your chest it would help draw attention away from your face. Less chance that people would recognize you."

"Why didn't you use it?"

"I'd already adopted my costume before I remembered it, and the colors would clash. Besides I wear a mask, and have enough problems with people staring at my chest as it is." She handed it over to him. "I'm not even sure which direction it goes, but if you hold it like this it looks kind of like an 'S'."

Clark frowned. "An 'S'? What's it stand for?"

"I think I'll call you ... " Lois leaned in and gave Clark a tender kiss. "Superman."

THE END

(Can we call it done now?)