

T.O.G.O.M. for 2011

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Summary: Clark is at it again (or Tank is). This time Clark stays dead for quite a while and has to get pretty creative to make his way back to the land of the living. How long is too long for Lois to forgive?

Perry White, Editor-in-Chief of the Daily Planet, the foremost newspaper in the free world, was frustrated. He had a hot tip and no one to give it to. He stormed around the bullpen glaring at every reporter he passed. They could read his mood, and each in turn shrank away from his scrutiny. So caught up in his own concerns was White that he didn't notice the man in the shiny blue suit until he almost ran into him.

"Superman!" White stepped back. "Ah, I'm sorry, I didn't see you there."

Superman clapped the chief on the shoulder. "That's okay. No harm done."

Perry glanced around and then back to Superman. "So, not that it's not good to see you, but what are you doing here? Can I help you with something?"

Superman shook his head. "I was just looking for Ms. Lane. I thought she might want the story of my latest rescue."

"That would be great, but that's part of my problem this morning. Lois isn't here." Perry frowned. "And with Kent gone I'm really short on experienced reporters right now."

It was Superman's turn to frown. "She's not here? Do you know where she is?"

Perry shook his head sadly. "No, no I don't." He sighed. "Clark's death hit her pretty hard, you know. Probably a lot harder than she even thought it would. After she and you were able to stop those rehydrated gangsters, she asked for some time off. I could see she was tore up pretty badly, so I told her to take all the time she needed. That was two weeks ago."

"Doesn't she usually throw herself into her work when she's upset?"

Perry shook his head. "She's not upset. She's hurt; she's hurting real bad. That girl was always like a daughter to me, yet the men in her life have always treated her badly. You only saw the vibrant and determined reporter. That was the face she would show the public. But somehow Kent was able to reach the scared, vulnerable little girl hidden behind the walls of protection she'd built around herself." White leaned against Lois' desk. "I had high hopes for those two. I really thought they might have a chance to make it...together."

Superman just nodded.

"You know, Superman, it's kind of ironic. After being dead for so many years, those hoodlums get a second chance only to revert to form and kill the most decent man I've ever known. Now that they've been caught and put behind bars, they are all facing death once again."

Superman seemed perplexed. "I don't understand. New Troy doesn't have the death penalty."

Perry shrugged. "Apparently, there was something not quite right in the reanimation process. All the clones, or whatever they were, are dying. Capone has died already."

"Does Lois know?"

Perry shook his head. "I don't know. I haven't heard from her since she left. Tell you the truth, Superman, I worry about that

girl."

Perry White turned and slowly walked back toward his office. After several steps, he stopped and turned back to the superhero.

"If you do happen to see her, would you tell her to call me? I need to know she's all right."

Lois Lane checked herself in the smudged and dirty mirror in the tiny restroom of the New Troy State Prison. The guard's uniform that she was able to secure didn't fit too well, but it would pass a casual inspection. It had cost her five hundred bucks, but it was vital to her plan.

Also vital had been the new, short haircut and the heavy-framed glasses that she wore. She had been to this facility too many times in the past interviewing prisoners and officials to count on someone not recognizing her. She had gotten the uniform from one of the guards that she'd gotten to know over the past couple of years.

At first the woman had been very hesitant to allow Lois to use one of her uniforms for a Lois Lane scheme that she didn't want to know. As Lois upped the "rental fee" the woman's resistance lessened until Lois had finally found her price.

One last finger combing of her new do, a big breath, and she was ready.

Lois slipped out into the hallway and made a beeline toward the infirmary. That was where Clyde Barrow was currently being held. She knew that both Capone and Dillinger had already died. Something had been off in their cloning process, and the reanimated gangsters' bodies were breaking down. Clyde had begun to show signs of the problem and had been placed in the medical facility of the prison. She figured it wouldn't be long before Bonnie began to show the signs of her own imminent death.

Lois thanked whatever fates watched over undercover reporters that no one questioned her right to be walking the hallways of the prison. She rounded a third corner and finally found herself outside the infirmary door. She could see through the glass in the door that several people were in there hovering around one of the beds. She couldn't see the occupant, but it could only be Clyde Barrow. After all, there was a priest present in the group.

Lois eased the door open, watching the backs of the people in the room as she did so. No one turned as she entered. Carefully she moved toward the other side of the room and stepped behind a curtain.

She could hear the priest trying to administer final rites to the reborn gangster, but Clyde wouldn't have it. He cursed the priest and all the rest of the prison staff that were there. He continually shouted for everyone to just leave him alone. Finally they gave up and granted him his wish. If the criminal wanted to die alone, then they would let him.

Of course, Lois had no intention of letting that happen.

She watched as the small group filed out of the room. The last guard turned off the light and closed the door.

She waited a couple of minutes to make sure they'd all gone. Then she glided over and locked the door. She moved quietly over toward the bed she held Clyde.

"Who is it? Who's there?" His voice was still a bit hoarse from his earlier yelling.

"You probably don't remember me, Clyde, but we've met before." Lois reached over and turned on the lamp on the nightstand. It threw out a small, dim pool of yellow light.

He turned his head toward her. "I don't know you. I never saw you before in my life."

Lois' dry chuckle held no measure of amusement. "Which life would that be? You probably weren't paying attention to me while you murdered in cold blood the most decent man I've ever known."

She could see his mind working as he stared intently at her. She pulled off the heavy rimmed glasses. “Is it coming back to you?”

He snorted. “You’re that dame in the red dress that Dillinger was after. You do something to your hair?”

“Yeah, something.”

He turned his head. “Leave me alone. I’ll call for the guard.”

Lois grabbed Clyde’s chin and pulled his head back toward her. “Don’t turn away from me, you piece of dirt. I’m not done with you.” She plucked at the uniform shirt she was wearing. “And if you hadn’t noticed, for the moment, I’m your guard.”

He frowned at her. “So, what is it you want from me? Can’t you see I’m dying?” He snorted. “Is that it? Are you here to gloat because I’m dying?”

Lois shook her head. “Gloat? Not really, but I am here to watch you die. I’m going to get a great deal of satisfaction watching you take your last breath and know that not a single person on this earth is going to care.”

“Bonnie will care.”

Lois’ laugh was harsh and held no measure of mirth. “Do you really think so? This is the second time that hooking up with you has led to her death. I don’t think you’re in the forefront of her fondest memories right now. Besides, she’s probably too concerned about her own impending demise to give any thought to a scumbag like you.”

“If you’re so bent on revenge for your boyfriend, why don’t you just kill me?”

The corner of Lois’ mouth curved up slightly in a wolf-like smile. “Believe me, the thought had crossed my mind, but then that would put me on the same level as scum like you.” She patted his cheek. “And the fact is... I don’t have to.”

Lois leaned back in the chair she had pulled up and stared hard at Barrow. She could see sweat beginning to bead up on his forehead. “Did you know that before the end most of the muscles in your body will constrict and cramp in a most painful manner? This won’t be the easy death of a bullet-riddled body. No, you’ll finish your miserable life crying like a baby.”

She saw fear in his eyes. “What’s wrong with you?” His voice no longer held the belligerence it had earlier.

Her eyes turned cold. “You want to know what’s wrong with me?” She took a deep breath. “I’ll tell you what’s wrong. In one miserable second, my life was irrevocably changed. In that one hot-headed moment a lowlife gangster, who shouldn’t have even been alive, altered my life forever.”

He tried to turn his head to the side again, but Lois slapped it back toward her.

“Clark Kent was my friend, my best friend and my partner. He was the most caring and compassionate man that I’d ever met. Probably the most decent man I’ll ever meet. I may not have always been the best partner or the best friend to him, but he was always there for me. Even in the beginning when I didn’t want a partner he stayed true to the kind of person he was and accepted me for who I was. The saddest part of this whole mess is not that I’m going to miss him for the rest of my life. The saddest part is that, even though I know deep down he loved me, I now realize that I love him too... and I never told him.”

Clyde tried to look fierce but couldn’t break Lois’ knife-like stare. “So, what is this going to do? Tormenting me is not going to bring your partner back.”

“No, it won’t. But maybe I’ll be able to sleep at night knowing that Clark’s killer received the justice he deserved.”

“So what do we do now?”

Lois shifted on her chair, trying to get more comfortable. She folded her hands in her lap.

“We wait.”

Lois walked out of the prison using the employee door and

moved quickly toward her Jeep. Clyde had tried to man up and die without uttering a sound. He didn’t want to give her the satisfaction, but in the end he did wind up crying and cursing her. She got out just before a shift change brought a new guard to check up on the prisoner. By now they would be making the arrangements to bury the infamous Clyde Barrow... again.

She felt hollow inside now that her carefully orchestrated plan had come to an end. She didn’t mourn Clyde’s passing, nor did she regret being there when he died. But she didn’t get the closure she wanted and she didn’t really get any satisfaction out of his passing. Clark was still dead, and despite what she told Barrow, she doubted she’d be able to get any decent sleep for a long time to come. The same nightmare visited her night after night.

Lois sighed as she started up her Jeep and then pulled out of the parking lot and onto the highway adjacent to the prison. The criminals had all been caught, and Clark’s killer had his sentence carried out by fate. The whole sordid mess was finally over. What was she supposed to do now?

Lois closed the outer door to her apartment and knew immediately she wasn’t alone. Someone was in her apartment; she could feel it. Without turning on the light she turned and gazed into the darkness of her living room. A tall figure was silhouetted by the dim light that came through her window. Metropolis was a big city, and it was never completely dark. The outside street lamps provided pools of lighter gray even through her drapes.

She knew immediately who it was who stood in the middle of her living room. She didn’t know too many people who wore a cape. Not in this century anyway.

“Superman, what are you doing here?” *And how did you get in?* was the unvoiced part of the question.

He moved toward her as she flipped on the overhead fixture. She didn’t look at him as she moved toward the kitchen and opened the refrigerator door. Pulling out a cream soda, she pulled out a chair and sat down at her dining table. She raised her brow, still waiting for his answer to her question.

He seemed like he was confused. He stood there silently, staring at her. It took her a moment to understand his hesitation. A wry smile crossed her lips.

“I got it cut.” She leaned back and took a sip of her drink.

“Ah, it looks... nice.”

Lois rolled her eyes and shook her head. “So?”

It was like he suddenly came out of a fog. His attention snapped back into focus. “Perry is really worried about you, and he asked me to tell you to get in touch with him if I saw you.”

Lois shrugged. “So, you saw me, though it seems more like you came looking for me rather than happening to come across me.”

“I was worried about you too.”

“I’ll be fine... eventually.”

“Will you?”

“What choice do I have?” Lois stood and moved toward her bedroom. “Well, if you see Perry before I do, you can tell him that I’ll be back to work in a couple of days.” She turned and gave the Man of Steel a sad smile. “Thanks for dropping by, but I’m kind of tired, and I think I’ll go to bed early.”

Superman seemed hesitant, unwilling to just leave. “Lois, do you know that the cloned gangsters are dying? There was something wrong with the process, and their bodies are breaking down.”

Lois nodded. “I know. In fact I’m pretty sure only Bonnie is still alive.”

A frown wrinkled his brow. “Can I ask you where you were today?”

She shrugged. “You could ask.”

“But you won’t answer.”

She shook her head. “No.” She leaned against the door jam. “I’m going to bed now. Tell Perry not to worry. Goodnight.”

Lois turned and went into her bedroom, closing the door behind her as she went. She didn’t even wait to see him go. She figured he’d leave the way he came in.

(Six Months Later)

Clark dropped from the sky to land behind the barn of the Kent farm. He quickly spun into a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt. He scanned the fields, the out buildings, and then finally the house. There was no one here other than his mother. He had to be careful. Clark Kent couldn’t be seen visiting his parents anymore. After all, he was supposed to be dead.

It was annoying and quite an inconvenience to have to be so careful when he came to see his parents, but at least they were isolated enough so he could still spend significant time with them. That wasn’t the case back in Metropolis. He had to be in the suit nearly all of the time there.

He moved at super speed, just as an added precaution, until he was on the front porch. He let himself in and soon was confronted with the smiling face of his mother.

“Clark!” She rushed over to give him a hug. “It’s good to see you. We weren’t expecting you until tomorrow.”

Clark returned his mother’s hug. “Well, things seemed to be quiet, so I took advantage of the situation and came out early.”

“I’m glad. Your father went into town to pick up some more groceries. He should be back soon.” She lead him back to the kitchen table, where he took a chair while his mother went over to the cookie jar and put several cookies on a plate. She brought the plate over and set it in front of Clark. She sat in the chair next to him. “So how are things?”

He shrugged. “Okay, I guess. I’ve been able to help a lot more people, and I’ve even moved up and down the coast a bit. I’m sure you saw the coverage of the hurricane down in Florida.”

She nodded. “Yes, I did. You got some nice coverage during the relief and clean up efforts.”

“Yeah, so I guess you could say that Superman is doing okay.”

She reached over and grabbed his hand. “But...”

Clark just shook his head. He knew he couldn’t keep anything from his mother. “I miss her.”

She patted his hand. “I know you do honey, it’s only natural.” She paused for a moment. “So, how is Lois doing?”

Clark shrugged again. “She seems to be doing all right. As expected, once she went back to the Planet she really threw herself back into her work. She’s cracked several major stories. She even crippled Intergang when she tied them to CostMart and exposed Bill Church as the head of the fledgling organization. They thought Metropolis would be easy pickings with Luthor out of the way, but they didn’t figure on Mad Dog Lane.”

Clark leaned back in his chair and sighed. “I’m worried about her, though. She seems even more reckless than before. I find myself rescuing her from trouble more than ever. It’s like she doesn’t care about her own safety.”

Martha Kent nodded. “Mmm, that’s not good, but at least you get to see her more that way.”

“Mom!”

“Well, you do, don’t you?”

Clark frowned. “I do and I don’t. I think that when Clark was shot by Clyde Barrow and Lois finally realized that her feelings toward her partner were a little deeper than just friendship, her attitude toward Superman changed also.”

“What do you mean, Sweetie?”

“I think she also realized that her attraction for Superman wasn’t grounded in reality. She came to the logical conclusion that Superman was not someone she could... love.” He ran his

head through his hair. “She’s thankful when I rescue her and cordial when we meet, but our dealings are much more formal and... professional. She did date some Fed named Scardino for a short time, but it didn’t last. He wasn’t good enough for her, anyway.”

“That’s got to be rough, honey, but isn’t that really for the best? Isn’t that kind of what you always wanted? To distance her from Superman for her own safety?”

Clark fidgeted in his seat. “Yeah, sure, of course. But that was when I could be with her as Clark. Now that I can’t, I really miss her. It drives me crazy sometimes. I’m not sure I can take it much longer. Maybe I should just leave Metropolis entirely.”

Martha gave his hand a squeeze. “I suppose that could be one solution, but do you think that would really make you happy?” Clark shrugged. His posture spoke of defeat. “You know, Clark, I’ve been thinking about your situation for a while now, and I think I might have an idea.”

Clark was more nervous than he could ever remember as he stood outside Lois’ apartment door. He raised his hand to knock, but held it. Was he really doing the right thing?

He wasn’t sure how he let his mother talk him into this. It had seemed like a reasonable solution to his problem of not being able to be with Lois at the time, but now it seemed... crazy.

He let his hand fall to his side and made ready to leave, but stopped when he heard a sound coming from down the hall. He glanced over and saw Lois turning the corner and coming up the hallway. She cocked her head and gave him a slight smile.

“Sorry I’m late, but I got hung up at work. Deadlines.” She pulled her key out of her pocket and opened the door. “Come on in and make yourself comfortable. I’ve just got to change out of my work clothes.”

Clark tried his best to calm his racing heartbeat. At least Lois hadn’t seemed to recognize him right away. He fingered the moustache and goatee he was wearing. Did they really make that much difference? He’d parted his hair differently also, but without glasses would she recognize him as Superman?

Lois stepped out of her bedroom dressed casually in a pair of jeans and a red pullover top. She looked great. Clark couldn’t suppress the smile. Lois colored slightly and returned his smile. She sat down in the chair across from where he sat.

“So, you’re Clark’s cousin Joe. Martha called me and mentioned that you were coming to Metropolis. She asked me if I’d mind showing you around town a bit.”

“I hope you don’t mind, Ms. Lane. I don’t want to impose.”

Lois leaned back in her chair and waved off “Joe’s” apology. “No problem, it’s not like my time away from my job is in great demand. So, your father is Jonathan’s brother?”

“Yeah, Uncle Jon’s brother Joe. I’m actually a Joe Jr., but I don’t go by that since my father’s dead.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Thanks. He died in Viet Nam. I’ve spent most of my life after college bumming my way around the world.”

Lois grinned. “Sounds familiar. You do look a lot like Clark, which is unusual since I know Clark was adopted.”

Clark wondered if his discomfort showed. He gave her a weak smile. “Yeah, people used to say that. I didn’t really see it. Clark was taller and more athletic than I am.”

Lois eyed him carefully. “I don’t know. Maybe. Still, I’m surprised Clark never mentioned you.”

He shrugged. “I was never around much. We lived in Seattle. My mother died shortly after I finished college. I don’t think I visited Smallville more than twice in my life. I only made contact recently because I heard about Clark.” He gave Lois a look of compassion. “I heard you and Clark were ... close?”

Lois’ face took on a faraway look. “Yeah, we were. We were work partners and best friends.” She captured his attention with a

direct stare. “Did you know that Clark was in love with me?”

Clark was taken aback by Lois’ bald statement, but composed himself as quickly as possible. “Ah, no, Aunt Martha never mentioned that.”

Lois let her hand trace the belting along the back of the chair. “The truly sad thing is I was in love with him too, but I never told him.”

Clark was stunned. “M-may I ask... why?”

Her smile was sad. “Like too many things in my life, I didn’t know my own feelings until it was too late.” There were several uncomfortable moments that went by. “But enough of past mistakes. One must look ahead, right?”

“Ah, right.” Clark had all he could do to keep his focus. His head was spinning with all the revelations he’d been hearing.

“So, Martha didn’t say, but why after all this time have you decided to visit Metropolis?”

“Well, after visiting with Aunt Martha and Uncle Jon, I realized I had sort of lost my wanderlust and was looking for a place to make a new start. They suggested I give Metropolis a try. Clark had seemed to like it a lot.”

Lois smiled. “And here you are. So what, are you hungry? I could order us in some take out. I have several good places on my speed dial.”

Clark shook his head. “I appreciate your meeting me, Ms. Lane, but I can see that you’re tired, and I don’t want to take up any more of your time. Perhaps another day?”

They both stood, and Lois escorted him to the door. “You’re right, I am beat. It was a full day.” She stopped at the door.

“Tomorrow is my day off. Why don’t you come by about ten o’clock and we can make a day of it. I’ll show you all the real sights of Metropolis as only a native can.”

“That would be great.”

She opened the door and he stepped into the hall. “Oh, and Joe?” He turned to look at her. “My name is Lois.”

He smiled. “Goodnight, Lois.”

Clark watched until the door closed gently behind him. He couldn’t keep the smile off his face.

Lois leaned against the door as she listened to the retreating footsteps. A sigh escaped from her lips as they curved into a shy smile.

She rushed over to the phone and dialed.

“Hello, Martha — Lois. Yeah, he just left. It was so cute watching him squirm. Not sure I’m too wild about the facial hair, but I guess I can get used to it. No, I’m sure he doesn’t suspect a thing.”

Lois sat down in a kitchen chair near the phone, twirling the phone cord around her finger. “I know this was mostly my idea when I called you a few weeks back after putting it all together. But do you really think this will work?”

Lois listened to the older woman on the other end of the line. “I admit that I was really hurt when I called you. I just couldn’t believe that he wouldn’t have told me the truth. After talking it over with you I grudgingly saw some of what he tried to do, and accepted some of his reasoning. But only some.”

She got up from the chair and paced. “For crying out loud, I actually went out on several dates with that tool, Scardino, and it still didn’t make Clark jealous enough to talk to me. I don’t know how many times I had to put myself in need of rescue and he still just held onto that stoic Superman persona. I was beginning to think that maybe he didn’t care.”

Lois sat back down in the chair. “Okay, I believe you. He did miss me, and I can’t begin to tell you how much I missed him.”

She listened intently for several moments. “You’re right, Martha, this will work out because it has to. But be warned, I don’t think I can be expected to stay too patient with this. I’m not going to wait around for another year and a half for him to come

clean with me.”

A determined Lois stared at her phone. “I don’t care if he calls himself Joe, Clark, or Superman, he’d better realize that he is mine and I don’t intend to allow that misplaced sense of nobility of his to keep us apart any longer.”

Lois listened to Martha’s response and smiled. She really loved that woman. “You too, Martha. Have a good night. I’ll call you in a couple of days.”

Lois hung up the phone and started to move toward her bedroom. She might as well get some sleep. Tomorrow was going to be an interesting day.

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THE END