

Karaoke at the Red K Corral

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Summary: You thought Superman on red Kryptonite was bad, now Ultra Woman has been exposed to the stuff... Mayhem ensues in this dark, yet romantic, comedy.

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Ultra Woman peered into Dr. Klein's laboratory. "Dr. Klein?" she called. "You phoned Lois Lane with a message for Superman. He was unavailable, so I've come instead."

"Hi, Ultra Woman," Bernard Klein said, waving her inside. "I believe I finally have that video camera laser fixed for Superman. I was just about to do a test run. Would you like to watch?"

Ultra Woman shrugged.

Dr. Klein pointed the weapon that had turned Superman permanently into Clark Kent—and Lois forever into this woman in tights—towards a gun range target in a safe room next door to his laboratory and pulled the trigger. It shot a beam of white light through the window and caused the target to explode.

"Oh, darn!" Dr. Klein grumbled. "I was sure I had it working." The scientist removed the camera from its tripod and Lois not only heard his skin sizzle, but could smell the burnt flesh. He shook his hand in pain as she tried not to breath. "It just burned up again."

"Can you explain to me how this laser works, Dr. Klein?" Superman said it was powered by red Kryptonite," Ultra Woman said in confusion.

"Sure," he said, shaking his hand again as he set the camera down on a rack filled with equipment. "Well, it's like any other laser, except that all of its power seems to refract through that chunk of red Kryptonite in the casing." He opened the camera to show the Kryptonite to Ultra Woman.

Lois remembered seeing the red Kryptonite back in the spring when Bill Church, Jr. and Intergang kidnapped Perry. Just like the deadly variety of Kryptonite, it glowed from inside. Except instead of being green, it was red. She stared at the red light emitting from the camera. It was pretty and seemed to numb her senses. She felt better than she had since receiving Clark's powers the previous day.

"How's Superman doing?" Dr. Klein asked, lowering his voice. "Between you and me, he appeared a bit... edgy when he was here earlier."

"Edgy?" Ultra Woman snapped. "Of course, he's edgy, Dr. Klein. In one blast of that thing, his whole life changed, and so did mine. You better get that fixed because we can't live like this forever." She looked over her left shoulder, listening.

Down a floor, someone's easy-listening radio program was interrupted by a news bulletin about a plane to Paris being hijacked.

"Call the Daily Planet and tell Clark Kent to find Superman," Ultra Woman told Dr. Klein. "Inform him that I'm heading out over the Atlantic." Without a glance back to see if he understood her message, she took off.

"Clark, I'm not going to make it to dinner," Lois whispered.

She hated talking on a phone so publicly in her Ultra Woman costume. She despised having the weight of the world on her shoulders. She didn't want this. She didn't ask for this. *This* was supposed to be Clark's job, not hers! "I feel so... Oh, forget it. You wouldn't understand."

"No, believe me, I understand," Clark said, reassuring her.

His voice helped calm her. It was almost as if she had him here with her, removing all her worries.

"The hijackers won't listen to me or the authorities, Clark," Lois went on, hoping since he had lost his super hearing that he couldn't hear either her voice shaking or her indecision. She hated that without him there to guide her that she felt totally lost. She didn't have complete control over her powers yet. What if something went wrong? "There are over two hundred people on the plane. I don't know what to do. What would you do? Disarm them?"

"Absolutely," he agreed with her. "If the hijackers won't listen, you're going to have to take 'em out."

Clark was so wonderful at building up her confidence and telling her she was on the right track. She knew she could always rely on him.

"How am I going to do this?" she asked. "If I bust open the doors, the air pressure..."

"No! No, let me tell you about one time when I was in that exact same situation," Clark started.

"You haven't been in this *exact* same situation, Clark. These are different people, a different airplane, a different airline, different hijackers, and a different part of the world. You were in complete control of your powers, and I'm not," she shouted at him, interrupting. How could he compare his apples to her applesauce? "Do you think I have time to listen to your war stories?"

"No, you're... No, go! Go! But... be careful," he said, his voice getting softer and softer as he spoke.

Lois could tell that he wanted to be here in the thick of things. He didn't want to be at home, eating the delicious home-cooked meal his mom had made. The very meal Lois had been looking forward to all day. She could smell it cooking, stewing in the oven, as Martha had cut and sewed this costume for her all afternoon. Just thinking of those delicious smells made Lois's stomach rumble. She didn't want to be here, wherever here was, possibly killing all these people with one wrong move, and Clark didn't want to be there, missing all the excitement. It wasn't fair!

"I'm going to be late. Apologize to your parents, but I know I'm not going to be in any mood to be social after this, so I'm just going to head straight home," she said, wishing her voice wasn't grumbling.

"Okay," Clark murmured, dejection seeping out of the word. "I love you."

Lois hung up the phone and was halfway back to the plane when she realized that in her rush, she forgot to tell Clark that she loved him, or to thank him for his advice and support. Gosh, he was the greatest guy ever! She didn't deserve him.

All she wanted to do was hang up her cape and never put it on again. What if Dr. Klein was never able to fix the camera? What if Ultra Woman had to cover for Superman for the rest of her life? Sure, there were some fun aspects, like x-raying Clark's butt this afternoon.

Oh, man! Had she really done that? Of course she had and it was so worth it, catching him in that lie.

"I wear briefs."

Ha!

Clark wore the briefs attached to his uniform, he meant. He hadn't come to work without wearing his blue Suit as she had thought. He didn't have Superman's powers, so why wear the Suit under his business suit? He must really miss his abilities.

Clark had such a terrific bottom, super powers or not.

Had she ever caught him x-raying her rear end, what would she have done? She would have freaked, and rightly so. Actually, Lois knew that she privately would have been thrilled if Superman had checked her out. Even now she was a bit disappointed that Clark had never been tempted to check her out. Was there something un-alluring about her? Was she not sexy enough for him?

Ultra Woman took hold of the hijacked airplane's wing and started turning the plane back towards France. Or, at least, in the direction she thought France was.

Oh, God! Superman! If she remained Ultra Woman forever, did that mean that Clark could get hurt? She couldn't handle it if Clark was ever hurt. He was supposed to be the invulnerable one. That was *who* he was. What if someone hurt Clark while she was busy dealing with annoying hijackers and an out-of-control oil refinery fire? Her life would just end if he died. How could she go on? One of the reasons that she had been able to see a future with Clark was because she knew she would never have to experience him dying on her again. Once had been more than enough.

Would Clark want to stick around for her, though, while she flew off taking care of the world's problems and he was stuck back in Metropolis? Would he find someone else to take care of him as his mom had taken care of his dad? Because she would never be that type of woman, super powers or not. Would she lose Clark because of Ultra Woman?

As Ultra Woman approached the runway lights, she heard feedback from one of the news vans at the Charles de Gaulle Airport about a mudslide in Brazil.

Oh, come on! Ultra Woman was in the middle of *this*, right now. She didn't need another emergency. Should she remain here and deal with the hijackers once the plane was on the ground, or leave this situation for the French authorities to handle so that she could rush to Brazil? Which incident took priority? Which would have more victims, if she weren't there to help? Would Ultra Woman be blamed for losing the airplane's passengers if she abandoned them to rush off to Brazil? And vice-versa?

It wasn't her fault!

This was Superman's job!

Lois slowed down over Texas to make sure that the fire from the oil refinery had remained safely out. She had abandoned the hijacked plane and had rushed to Brazil, and still had been too late. Hundreds of people had died, because she had been too slow to make a decision, and one woman and the pilot died in France, because she'd left the hijackers to the French authorities.

The fire was still smoldering, but it was out. Thank goodness.

She had been muddy, dirty, and streaked with ashes and blood, so she had taken a quick dip in the Gulf of Mexico to clean off. The force of the wind was drying her, but all she really wanted to do was go home and soak in a hot tub.

With Clark.

Lois missed Clark. She wanted him to hold her in his strong arms and tell her everything would be all right. Only now, *she* was the super powered one. Would Clark no longer be able to hold her? Would she have to hold him from now on? She didn't want to hold Clark when they flew; she wanted him to do the holding. That was what Superman did. He caught, he held, and he rescued Lois Lane. Not the other way around.

She hadn't known how lonely this hero business could be, flitting off from one emergency to another, never knowing what was happening back home. How did Clark handle the responsibility? All that death resting on his shoulders? He was so self-sacrificing.

Lois had gotten a little tiny bit banged up due to Bob Fences and Clark had broken up with her, blaming himself. No, he hadn't broken up with her. He had *crushed* her. With one flick of his

cape, she had been done for. It wasn't even his fault that she had been hurt. He had told her to 'stay'. She had always hated to stay while others were allowed to go, so she never did.

Oh, sure, Clark had claimed it was only a momentary lapse of insanity, but what if it happened again now that he no longer had powers? What if she was stuck with these powers and didn't have Clark to come home to? How could she cope with that rejection? How could she cope with all the death and with the responsibility that those people would still be alive if Clark had been there instead of her? She wasn't even going to come home to Clark that night because she'd told him she would head straight to her apartment. She knew she wouldn't be able to face him if she had failed.

Lois pressed her lips together. She *had* failed. She had failed those people on the plane. She had failed that town in Brazil; a flashflood and the subsequent mudslide had wiped it away, because *she* wasn't fast enough. Superman would have been fast enough. She recalled all those gifts he had brought her in a fraction of a minute from all over the world. She couldn't even get to Brazil in time to save one person, not one single person, from that village.

She heard music and realized she couldn't face Metropolis or Clark just yet. She couldn't admit that, at this one thing, Clark was better than she was and he always would be. In his eyes, she was this perfect person who could do no wrong. Well, that was Lois Lane. Ultra Woman, it seemed, could do nothing right. Oh, sure, Clark would be understanding and sympathetic, but she didn't want his pity right now. She wanted him to take these damn powers back, so she could return to being the best she could be. She wasn't hero material. She had proven that, and a failure was something she never wanted to be. When Ultra Woman failed, the cost was too high. She didn't want to be burdened with the responsibility that came with these abilities any longer.

But she knew she couldn't do that. She was stuck with these powers just as he was stuck without them.

Lois landed outside what looked like a hellhole, who knew where in East Texas — or was she in Oklahoma? She glanced at the license plates of the trucks surrounding this watering hole. Oklahoma it was. She looked at the flashing red neon lights of the bar's name. The sign reminded her of the red Kryptonite that Dr. Klein had shown her in that video camera. Had that been only that afternoon? For all she knew, it could have been yesterday. She had been flitting this way and that so much that she had no idea what day it was.

The 'K Corral', the red round neon sign proclaimed. Was that right? That couldn't be correct, but she didn't care. For the first time in her life, she understood why her mother drank. Lois wanted to forget the blood, the bodies, the wailing mothers, and the still, grey faces.

She would never forget.

Like elephants, Superman never forgot. The same was probably true of Ultra Woman.

Lois pushed open the door of the bar and went inside. She hoped a part of her was human enough to let her get drunk. Her eyes instantly went to the stage where some overly large man was attempting to sing. He was awful, horrendously awful. Mostly, it was due to the fact that he was plastered drunk and could only slur the words coming out of his mouth. It was also because he was singing 'Like a Virgin' by Madonna. Should she just turn the man to ashes with her heat vision and put the whole corral out of their misery?

She sidled up to the bar, because that was what people did in saloons, they sidled. "What's with the noise?" she asked the bartender, her thumb pointing behind her towards the stage.

"Karaoke night," the bartender said with a heavy Texan accent, wiping down the bar. Then he glanced up, and his jaw hit

the bar. Literally. Okay, maybe not *literally*, but close enough. He did almost drop his glass. “That’s some costume you have there,” he said, clearly attempting to sound casual.

Lois shrugged. “Superman’s mother made it for me,” she replied. A part of her knew that was the wrong thing to say, but who would ever believe some bartender in Oklahoma? Another part of her knew that a reporter such as her would.

The music stopped and the large man stumbled to the side of the stage and fell off. Lois turned back to the bartender, shaking her head. “I could sing better than that with my hands tied behind my back.”

He leaned towards her. “I wouldn’t say that in here, lady; some man might think you’re serious.”

“I’d like to see him try and hogtie me,” she retorted, earning a smile from the man.

“What’ll it be?” he said as the next person got on stage.

“Whiskey,” she replied. Wasn’t that what one ordered in a saloon?

The mic generated some feedback, which Lois felt down to her bones. Man, was noise always this bad for Clark? Had this been what it was like when he was dealing with Stoke and his sound machine?

This new man started to sing ‘Blowing in the Wind’ and wasn’t half-bad. Lois turned back to the bar, leaning her elbows on it and probably messing up her nice new uniform more than the blood and mud had.

“What’ll it be?” it sounded as if the bartender asked again.

Lois should have been able to hear him, super hearing and all, but the feedback from the microphone screamed, blocking out all other noise. “Brandy,” she said, changing her drink order to something more her style. “Does he have to be so loud?”

“Yo, Steve!” the bartender called to the man on stage. “Take a step back from the mic, man.”

The singer took a step back, and Lois’s vision cleared up, now that her teeth weren’t rattling. A clear, bronze beverage on the rocks sat in front of her on the bar. She raised her glass to the bartender and took a sip. Smooth. It usually burned. It probably had something to do with her newfound invulnerability. Then she raised her glass to Superman. And one more to her mother, who had taught her how to drink. If her mom could only see her now, Ellen would be so proud, Lois thought wryly.

She nursed her drink throughout Steve blowin’ in the wind. The bartender refilled her drink at some point, so maybe it was longer than that. As the rocks rolled around in her empty glass, the bartender called to her. “Yo, lady, you’re up.”

“Up for what?” Lois asked, raising her gaze.

“The stage. Your song’s up next,” he told her.

Lois glanced up to the now empty stage. How long had she been there? Had she requested a karaoke song? That wasn’t like her. She shrugged. Why in the hell not? Maybe the alcohol was working. These rodeo yahoos needed to hear what a real singer sounded like.

She walked to the stage to catcalls and whistles. Lovely. She wondered what song she had chosen. Glancing at the monitor, she saw the name “‘Brandy (You’re a Fine Girl)’ by Looking Glass” on the screen.

Brandy?

Lois now knew when she had ordered the song. The tune started playing, and she smiled. This certainly was *her* song. She recalled hearing it after Clark had broken up with her and how well it fit them.

“There’s a town... on an *eastern* bay,” she started singing, altering the words slightly to fit her situation. “And it serves... a hundred *saves* a day. Lonely *heroes*... pass the time away, and talk about their homes.”

Images of the mudslides streaked across the inside of her eyelids as she blinked. “And there’s a girl... in this harbor town.

And she works... layin’ *bodies* down. They say ‘*Ultra*, fetch another round’. She *hates to fly ‘cross that line*.” She poured herself into the chorus. “The *heroes* say, ‘*Ultra*, you’re a fine girl’.”

The karaoke box back-up singers echoed with “You’re a fine girl.”

“What a good wife... *for Superman*,” she sang, wondering if it were true. Would she be a good wife? What was a ‘good wife’, anyway?

“Such a fine girl,” the singers echoed.

“Yeah, your eyes could steal *the hero of the land*,” Lois went on.

‘*Yeah, right*’, she scoffed inside her head. Then she recalled Clark looking at the engagement ring he had bought for her and setting it back inside his top desk drawer.

“*Ultra*... wears a braided *ring*, made of finest *metal*... *created for a king*. An *engagement ring*... *that makes her sing*, of the man that *Ultra* loves,” Lois crooned, gazing down at the mesmerized crowd, some of whom had dazed expressions on their faces. Then again, they were mostly all drunk. “He came... on a summer’s day. Comin’ *from*... *oh so far* away. But he made it clear... he couldn’t stay. No *city*... was his home.”

She broke back into the chorus, “The *heroes* say ‘*Ultra*, you’re a fine girl’.”

“You’re a fine girl,” echoed the backup singers.

“What a good wife... *for Superman*.”

“Such a fine girl.”

“Yeah, your eyes could steal *the hero of the land*,” Lois sang, wishing it was true. Could she steal Clark away from being Superman? She doubted it, nor would she, but she had stolen being Superman from Clark. “Yeah, *Ultra* used to watch his eyes, when he told his *rescue* stories. She could feel the *storms winds* rise, she saw the *fire’s* ragin’ glory, but he had always told the truth.”

That was her man. Mr. Truth N. Justice.

“*Damn*, he was an honest man,” Lois grumbled more than sang. “And *Ultra* does her best to understand.” She did a little dance, shaking her hips. Only now was she starting to understand everything Clark went through on a daily basis being who he was. “At night... when the *rescues wind* down, *Ultra* walks through... a silent town, and loves a man... who’s not around.”

Wasn’t that the truth?

“She still can hear him say,” she sang, breaking into the chorus. “She hears him say, ‘*Ultra*, you’re a fine girl’.”

“Such a fine girl,” sang the background karaoke singers.

“*Be a good wife... for me, oh my*.”

Clark really did love her and did want to marry her.

“Such a fine girl.”

“But my life, my love, my lady is the *sky*,” she sang, tears soaking into her mask. It was so true. Clark had chosen Superman over her, back when she had gotten hurt. Well, buster, she couldn’t get hurt anymore. “She hears him say...”

From the dark reaches of her mind, she heard Clark groaning and calling to her. “I could really use some *HELP* getting out of this.”

Before Lois knew what was happening, she was in Metropolis and floating down from the sky to where Clark was sitting on a bus bench, bloody and tied up.

He gazed up her with an amazed and relieved smile. “It worked.”

But all Lois could think was, ‘*What have I done?*’

Ultra Woman landed on her fire escape and nudged the window to her apartment open. Her second trip to S.T.A.R. Labs had been a bust. Literally. The red Kryptonite video camera laser had actually exploded this time. She’d barely had time to grab Dr. Klein and duck and cover behind the Plexiglas shield before the

debris rained down upon them. It was just the cherry she didn't need upon the top of her sundae of a day.

Seven seconds later, she was sitting in her Superman nightshirt and schlumpy robe on her sofa, digging into a half-gallon of triple chocolate ripple with chocolate chunks ice cream.

She was just finishing the last bite when someone banged on her apartment door. "Lois! Lois! Open up," Clark called.

"It's not going to work, Clark. I'm no good for you anymore. You were hurt because of me," she replied. The Newtrich sisters had tried to use Clark to get to her. They knew that Lois was Ultra Woman and had almost blown Clark up to get her to come rescue him. "Until you figure out how to get your powers back," she went on. "I'm staying right here. Everyone will be safer that way."

"Lois, can we please talk about this without a door between us?" Clark asked.

With a groan, she set her ice cream carton down on the coffee table and went to unlock all five locks. She opened the door a crack and returned to the couch. "I'm not changing my mind."

Clark entered the apartment and shut the door behind him. "Lois, earlier this evening I was kidnapped by aliens and they performed these weird experiments on me, which gave my girlfriend temporary insanity."

"You think that's funny?" Lois asked through pressed lips.

He smiled sheepishly. "A little funny."

She scowled at him.

"Too soon?"

She gave him such an intense look that it made his shirt steam.

Clark started fanning himself. "Okay! Okay! Too soon. You don't have to incinerate me!"

Lois closed her eyes and buried her face in her hands. "The only person who should have these powers is you, Clark," she admitted. Her voice was rough as she held back her tears. "You know how to control them, how to control yourself."

He sat down next to her and took her in his arms. "It's okay. I'm okay, Lois. You're still getting used to them, and I'm getting used to not having them."

"I'm no superhero, Clark," she said, taking hold of his still-warm shirt and burying her face in his neck with her eyes still tightly closed. "If I find the Newtrich sisters, I'm going to end up on a killing spree for what they did to you."

"No, you aren't," Clark whispered. She felt him kiss the top of her head. The soft kiss was so intense she could swear she could feel it radiating over her body.

"Oh, yes, I will. You don't know how mad I was when I saw you sitting on that bench, tied up, and covered in sweat and blood. I just wanted to rip off their arms and hit them with 'em," Lois growled.

"You'd be surprised how often I feel that way," he said.

"Actually..." He paused and she heard him tap his watch. "Hey, look! It's Tuesday."

She would have glared at him if she weren't afraid that he'd burst into flames. So, she kept her face pressed against him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Clark ran his fingers down her cheek and tilted up her chin so that she was looking him in the eye. Or she would have been had she allowed herself to open her eyes. He set his glasses down upon her nose and she slowly, hesitantly lifted her lids.

"I pretty much feel that way every week, Lois. Sometimes every day of every week."

"How do you stand it, Clark? How do you stand me?" she asked, letting her true fears slip off her tongue. Why would anyone want experience that day-in and day-out for her? It didn't make any sense.

He shrugged. "You're worth it."

"Claaaark. I'm serious."

He sat up straighter. "And so am I. I'm not this perfect being, Lois. I get angry, too."

"Yes, but when I'm mad the allied nations should be called... and that's without superpowers," she countered.

Clark smiled. "I love that you're passionate."

"This much passion shouldn't have superpowers; someone could get hurt," she reminded him. Her gaze darted to that scratch on his forehead he had gotten from flying debris when she had broken the table in the Newtrich sisters' workshop. She ran her thumb over the scratch. "Someone did get hurt. Lots of people got hurt. All those people in... in Brazil died because of me," she said, tapping her chest. She continued, her voice softer, "They didn't have a chance, Clark, because Ultra Woman wasn't good enough. Why couldn't I have been faster?"

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "A wise woman once told me that Superman can't save everyone. Every little bit that he can do, though, is enough. He gives people hope where they didn't have any before."

"Ultra Woman is no Superman," she grumbled, refusing to yield to his soft chest.

"No. No, she's not," he agreed. "In some ways, she's better."

"Ha!"

"You're giving a whole generation of women a new role model to look up to. You're proving not only to them, but also to a bunch of stuffy old men out there, that you don't have to be male to be a hero. *And* you're doing it without wearing a bikini," he reminded her.

Well, she couldn't argue with that logic. So, she returned to a topic she could debate. "Oh, Clark, if something worse ever happened to you... if there was ever some time I couldn't save you... I would never be able to live with myself. Who knows what I'd end up doing to the world?"

"I love you, too, honey," he replied.

All this unconditional support and love was getting annoying. "Clark, what I'm trying to say is that I can't live like this. It isn't safe for anyone," Lois said, standing up. "If we can't reverse this... if I'm stuck like this for the rest of my life, I want you to move on. Find a nice girl who won't hurt you, settle down, and get married. Clark, have a bucket load of those kids you want. You deserve that. I want you to be happy."

"Lois, I *am* happy with you."

"You say that now, but can you imagine me PMSing with these powers? There won't be enough chocolate in the world to calm me down. I'd be a danger to you *and* Metropolis. I should just leave now while I still can, and become a hermit somewhere," Lois said. She rushed into her room, put back on her Ultra Woman suit, and returned to Clark, who had barely time to blink while she was gone. She held out his glasses.

Clark took her hands in his. "Lois, I love *you*, and I'll love only you for the rest of my life. There'll never be anyone else. So, you might as well stay here. We'll work through this together. If you can learn to love me without any powers..." His voice faltered.

Lois could see the sadness in his eyes as he misunderstood what she was saying. "Oh, Clark! No!" she interrupted, zipping out her window in a gust of wind.

When she returned two minutes later, Clark was sitting on her sofa. He appeared as if Cupid's arrow had punctured his heart, instead of filling it with love. He glanced up in dazed surprise as she landed softly on the floor next to him.

"So, that's what that's like?" he said, his voice rough. "I'm sorry if I've ever flown off on you."

Lois knelt down beside him, taking his hands in hers. "Clark, of course I still love you. If anything, I love you more now that I understand everything that you've taken upon your shoulders due to your powers. I've realized that it isn't your abilities or the Suit that make you Superman, it's you," she said. She reached under

her cape and brought forward the engagement ring he had offered her several months and thousands of tears earlier. She had just removed it from his desk drawer at work. “Clark Kent, will you please do me the honor of asking me to marry you?”

Clark looked down at the ring and then back up to Lois’s face. “Who’s asking? Ultra Woman or...” He lifted up her mask. “Or Lois Lane?”

“I am.” She pulled off the mask, tossing it aside. “There is no Ultra Woman without Superman.”

They both stared at the fallen mask. The truth lay before them. There would be no Superman without Ultra Woman.

He swallowed before taking a deep breath. “Lois, would you be willing to marry this ordinary man with no powers and just an ordinary suit?” he asked, holding out the open ring box.

Lois stared at him and saw a slight shake to his hand. Her gaze traveled down to the ring. “I can’t,” she said, setting her hands over his and watched as his face fell at her words. “Because even without powers, Clark, you’re no ordinary man.” She took the ring out of the box and held it up. “But if you’re asking me to marry the most extraordinary man in the world with or without powers, my answer is ‘yes’.”

Clark eyes sparkled with unshed tears.

Lois held out her hand and he slipped the ring on her finger. “If you don’t mind a few super powers in your wife.” She hovered off the floor, took his jaw in her hands, and pressed her lips to his.

He slid his arms around her, pulling her out of the air and to his chest. She opened her mouth and he deepened the kiss.

Every intake of breath, every murmur of pleasure, every whiff of his soap mixed with his sweat, every touch of his tongue on her tongue and on her teeth and gums and...

He pulled his face away, breathless and panting. “Wow! I’m not minding in the least.”

She growled and brought him back against her. She wasn’t finished.

Every one of her nerve endings was singing in pleasure. Never before had she felt more alive or more out of control. She *wanted* Clark... all of him.

She stood up and grabbed his hand. “Come on!”

His brow furrowed. “Where?”

“I heard a news report about a thunderstorm outside of Raleigh. If we hurry, we just might make it,” Lois said, scooping Clark up so that he was cradled in her arms.

“Uh... Lois, I’m not too comfortable about this,” he said, as she stepped up to the windowsill.

“It’s dark. Nobody will see you,” she replied, floating them out the window.

“I thought that you didn’t mind me being an ordinary man,” he said as they zoomed into the clouds.

“I don’t.”

“I’m not sure I want to be struck by lightning,” Clark admitted. “On purpose.”

“It’s just a temporary fix until we can capture the Newtrich sisters, and take their red Kryptonite away from them. They must have figured out that your powers are transferable with the red Kryptonite laser and have made another one. That’s the only reason to lure me into a trap,” Lois said. “We can use their new laser to beam your powers back from my body.”

“How are we going to do that exactly?” he asked, as they left Metropolis behind them.

“You’ll distract them. I’ll take the Kryptonite.”

“Are you sure it won’t affect you?” Clark wondered. “It made me pretty apathetic last spring.”

“It doesn’t affect me. Dr. Klein showed me the Kryptonite in the video camera this afternoon and then again a few minutes ago. I haven’t been apathetic all day. The opposite in fact,” Lois announced. “I’ve been *ultra* moody all day.”

Clark’s eyes widened. “Uh... Lois, do you think we could stop somewhere and discuss this?”

“We’re almost to Raleigh.”

“Lois, Dr. Friskin and I discovered that the red Kryptonite doesn’t make me apathetic; it amplifies my emotions. Maybe you’ve been ultra moody today because you were exposed to red Kryptonite and not because...”

Lois stopped and hovered just outside the storm clouds. “Are you sure you want to finish that sentence, Mr. Kent?”

Clark glanced down at the ground far below them.

“Are you saying that I’m not in *control* of my emotions, Clark?” Lois roared.

“No. Never!” he exclaimed, raising his hands in self-defense before quickly taking hold of her again.

For some reason, she didn’t believe him. It was probably that extra shake to his voice when he spoke or the fact that his heart was racing a mile a minute. “Are you frightened of me, Clark? Do I scare you?”

“Lois, you’re flying us into a storm cloud in order to strike me with lightning. If this doesn’t work, you’ll be Ultra Woman forever, and I’ll be dead,” Clark reminded her.

“I trusted you with my life once. Trust me and know that I love you,” Lois said, zooming them into the clouds and over to where the lightning spiked the air. She held up her right hand with the engagement ring on it.

“Lois, no!” Clark screamed, holding more tightly onto her.

A flash of light struck her hand, passed through her body, and into his. “Payback’s a bitch, isn’t it, Kent?”

Lois awoke to a blaring horn. She blinked her eyes and saw the headlights of a semi truck bearing down on her. A quick glance told her that she was lying in the dark on a wet road in the middle of... somewhere. She jumped to her feet and took a split second to make sure that Clark wasn’t lying in the street with her. He wasn’t.

She leaped backward off the road and landed in a field, in a mud puddle to be more precise. It was still raining, but it was easing up.

“Clark?” she gasped, her hand rising to her mouth.

Where was he?

Was he okay?

Was he Superman?

If so, had he flown off on her?

Was he... *dead*?

Lois focused her vision to the surrounding half-mile... or was it a mile, since she was looking a half-mile in every direction? Twenty some-odd yards down the field, she saw a body. Less than a second later, she was kneeling down next to him.

What had she done?

Her hand hovered above his arm afraid to touch him, afraid what she might find. She tried to listen for his heartbeat, but her heart was beating so loud and fast all she could hear was her own blood rushing through her body.

“Clark?” she whispered. “Honey?”

He groaned and raised a hand to his head.

“Oh, thank God, you’re alive,” Lois said, pulling him into her arms and squeezing him tight. “I was... I thought... you...”

“Lois?” Clark mumbled. “Ow!”

She dropped him and took a step back. She was now standing ten feet away and started pacing. “It didn’t work. I hurt you. I could’ve killed you. I can’t believe I risked your life. I...”

“Lois...”

“You’re lucky to be alive. I told you I couldn’t handle these powers. I can’t even hug you without hurting you. Oh, gosh, did I break your arm or a rib or are you burned? Do you need medical attention?” she rambled.

“Lois, I’m fine,” Clark groaned. His tone proved that he was

lying to her.

“No, you’re not fine.”

Clark stared at her before answering, and wryly at that, “You’re right. I’m not fine. My fiancée got high on red Kryptonite and shot me with a bolt of lightning.”

“Don’t be smart with me, buster,” Lois snapped, still pacing. “I could’ve killed you.”

“Yes, you could have,” he replied. “But you didn’t.”

“Only by the grace of...” She stopped and stared at him.

“Why aren’t you dead?”

“Lucky, I guess,” he said as he stiffly rose to his feet.

Lois looked up into the clouds and rain dripped into her eyes. “You fell from the sky because of me...” She collapsed to her knees. “Forgive me, Clark. I know I don’t deserve you. You’re a good man. Kind, sweet, gentle, patient. You have the largest heart of anyone I know. We’ll figure out some way to make this work, Clark, I promise you. I’ll practice my control. With you teaching me, I know I’ll master it. Someday. I don’t want to hurt you again, but I can’t live without you either. I can’t go back to the way it was after you left me, Clark. The thought of living in some icy fortress in the Antarctic sounds awful and lonely.”

“I’ll agree with you there,” he replied, taking a step towards her. “Well, on that last part. Did you ever think that maybe *I* was the lucky one in this relationship?”

“Don’t be silly, Clark,” she said, waving away his argument.

“I’m serious, Lois. I stupidly broke up with you, causing both of us untold pain, because I was too thickheaded to give you the opportunity to convince me I was wrong,” he went on. “I don’t want to go back to that either. Before that, I froze the woman that I love more than anything, just because she said it was the only thing to do.”

“That was my fault, too. I leapt in without thinking. I do that.”

“Yes, which is why *I* should have known better and stopped you. Instead, I went along with your foolhardy plan,” Clark said, taking another step forward.

“It worked, didn’t it?” Lois retorted, watching his feet. She held up her hand. “Don’t come any closer.”

“I could have killed you. I *did* kill you,” he said, both reminding her and ignoring her as he took another step towards her. “And, yet, only later on when you got knocked in the head and suffered a slight concussion did I see the danger of us spending so much time together. Why didn’t I see it *before* I proposed?”

“But you didn’t. You saved your folks and me. Win-win! See, I’m brilliant.” She threw him one of her triumphant smiles. Could he see how fake it was?

“That’s never been in doubt,” Clark replied.

Lois frowned. “Only this plan didn’t work. Why didn’t the lightning share my powers with you like it did with you and Resplendent Man? I’m still ultra powered, and you’re still...” She gestured to him. “You.”

“I’ll always be me, Lois, whether or not I have super powers,” he said softly, taking another step towards her. “Either you love me as I am, or this relationship will never work.”

She put her hands on her hips. “You know what I mean, and I do love you.”

“Me?” he asked before clarifying, “Clark Kent me?”

“Did you forget that I dumped Superman for you?” she snapped. “For just Clark Kent you.”

“No, but since you discovered that I’m also Superman...”

“Was Superman,” she corrected with a snuffle.

He disregarded her interruption. “You’ve been acting as if you’re a bit invulnerable because of me.”

Lois held out her arms so he could get a good look at her Ultra Woman costume.

Clark pressed his lips together, tilting his head slightly to the

side with annoyance. “You know what I mean. Before...” He waved at her uniform. “— *this* happened.”

“Well, this conversation is moot, now, isn’t it?” she said, her voice getting rough. “Because now the only one of us who can die is you!”

“Did you think I liked it better when you could die?” he asked.

“No,” she mumbled. Tears rushed to her eyes as she began to sob. “But I liked it better.”

Clark encircled her with his arms, pulling her to her feet. She rested her head on his shoulder. “Becoming invulnerable is an adjustment,” he whispered.

She slugged his shoulder.

“Ow,” he groaned. “Lois, please remember your strength.”

She ran her hand softly over the area she had hit. “Oh, Clark. I’m sorry. I keep forgetting to rein in my strength with you, because I... I’ve... never had to before.”

Clark set his hand over hers, halting her action. “I know. It’ll take practice. Please forgive me for ever putting you in harm’s way.”

“You didn’t.”

“I froze you,” he murmured, lifting her hand off his arm and kissing her knuckles. “And in those moments when I thought I couldn’t wake you...” He swallowed. “They were some of the worst...”

“Clark, it’s okay,” she reassured him, “water under the bridge.”

He shook his head. “Then what was all that about ‘payback’?” he asked.

Lois gulped. “Red Kryptonite talking?” she said weakly. She had hoped he wouldn’t bring that up.

“It can’t make you feel things you weren’t before, only amplify them,” he replied.

“Okay,” she admitted, taking a step away so she wouldn’t have to look him in the eye as she spoke. “A part of me thinks that you should have disclosed to me that I’d be saving Superman’s folks before Superman froze me. It felt as if he... *you* took advantage of my selfless deed, that you *used* me to save your parents. You should have recused yourself somehow from the act...”

“You’re absolutely right,” he granted, with a bowed head.

“But you didn’t,” she continued, steamrolling over his admission of guilt. “— and then you had the nerve to propose to me *still* without telling me everything...” Lois threw out her hand. “despite the fact that I had been willing to risk dying to save your parents; something I can guarantee you I wouldn’t have volunteered to do had it been anyone else’s parents, including my own. If that doesn’t prove to you how much I love *you*, Clark Kent, how can anything else?” She turned back around in time to catch the wince on his face.

“Good thing this issue is water under the bridge,” he grumbled to himself, obviously forgetting that she had his sensitive hearing now. ever seen. les, thtenance and repairs. disagreements or concerns with tenants. ntenance and repairs, tr. Clark raised his voice as soon as he saw that Lois was glaring at him. “I believe you’re willing to risk yourself to save a stranger’s life, Lois... or even your parents.”

She opened her mouth to debate the likelihood of that happening, but he placed a finger to her lips.

“How about a truce? I’ll forgive you for striking me with lightning, against my will I might add, if you’ll forgive me for being an idiotic, selfish jerk, who can’t see straight when his family is threatened.” He reached out and took hold of her hand. “Oh, good. The ring wasn’t damaged. I was worried that...”

She raised an eyebrow. “Can I quote you on that?”

“I won’t hold your past transactions over your head, if you don’t hold mine over my head,” he countered.

“You promise to stop being a lunkhead?”
Clark looked skeptical. “No guarantees on that one. Sorry.”
He smiled sheepishly.

Lois could never resist that smile. “Marry me, and I’ll promise never to try to hurt you on purpose... again.”

“No more proposals though. They seem a bit hazardous to our health.” Clark let go of her hand and ran it up her arm, past her shoulder, up her neck, until he was cradling her jaw in the palm of his hand.

How had she never noticed that gesture before that moment when he had frozen her?

“I love you, Ultra Woman,” he murmured, resting his lips against hers.

“I love you, too, Clark Kent,” she replied, accepting the kiss. She didn’t deepen the kiss, still fearing that she would hurt Clark if she lost control, and nothing seemed to make her lose control faster than kissing Clark. Well, Red Kryptonite aside.

He added a little pressure to his side of the kiss before drawing slowly back and resting his forehead against hers. “Do you mind if we finish this conversation out of the rain?”

“Oh, Clark! You’re soaked to the bone. You’ll catch your death of cold. Here, let me...”

“No!” he pleaded, stepping out of her embrace and holding up a hand to stop her. “I’m fine. Really.”

“I’m not going to turn you to ashes, Clark. I promise,” she said.

“I know you won’t, Lois,” he replied, taking her hand in his and floating up into the air. “But it really isn’t necessary.”

Lois stared at him until she felt her own feet leave the field—and not on their own power. “You sneak!”

Clark grinned.

“My plan *did* work!”

He shrugged. “I never said it didn’t.”

She caught up with his height and nudged his arm. “Then what was all that caterwauling for?”

“I was not caterwauling,” he exclaimed. “Apparently, it hurts when someone with your own strength slugs you, whether you have powers or not. It’s a new experience for me.”

“I’ll try to be extra gentle then,” Lois said, before body slamming him.

He spun out of control for a few seconds before catching himself. “Lois, please remember that I’m not dressed in my uniform. It’s probably best not to draw unnecessary attention to us.”

“Uh-huh,” she said wryly, not believing his excuses. They were in the middle of a dark thunderstorm, in the middle of the night, somewhere over the middle of nowhere in the Carolinas.

Clark zipped up to her, pulled her into his embrace, and wiped her smirk off her face with a kiss that for the first time didn’t feel as if he was holding anything back.

Before she knew it, they were out of the rain, over the clouds, and surrounded by stars.

“Oh, my,” she said when she came up for air. She took a couple of gulps of what was surrounding them, before saying, “If you’re going to take my breath away, Clark, you should do it at a lower altitude.”

He smiled. “I’ll try to remember that in the future.”

“Since we’re both super, we should put our heads together and come up with a plan to get the red Kryptonite away from the Newtrich sisters without either of us going loco in the process,” Lois suggested, dodging his kiss by turning her head to the side. “Two super heads have got to be better than one.”

“Lois,” Clark replied, his voice deepening to Superman’s timber. “It seems that whenever we put our heads together, all rational thought flies straight out of my head.”

She laughed, pulling him up to her chest once more. “Trust me, when I say that problem will only get worse.”

Clark whimpered under his breath and Lois could practically see what he was imagining as his face reflected his thoughts. He cleared his throat and let go of her waist but not her hand.

“Probably best to clear up that whole Newtrich sister mess first, before we delve into the unknown,” he said.

With mock seriousness, Lois nodded. “Yes, probably for the best,” she replied and then winked. She tugged his hand and headed towards Metropolis. “Should we tell your folks the good news?”

“I’d rather spend the night with you... I mean, *evening*—definitely evening... Although, it is pretty late... I wasn’t trying to... We’re not ready to... Although, I know your secret and you know mine—No! That’s no excuse. We can wait... Um... until after we deal with the Newtrich sisters. Yes, that’s the right thing to do... We can tell my folks about our engagement in the morning. I mean, *I* will over breakfast. Unless, of course, you want to be there for breakfast... for telling them—not that I’m inviting you to spend the night with me when my folks staying at my...” He covered his face with his hand, before mumbling to himself, “Oh, God, shut me up now.”

“And you say I ramble?” Lois said, laughing. She had meant announce the return of his powers, but she liked his answer better, so she didn’t correct him. “If you’d like me to come over for breakfast, come over tomorrow morning that is, so that *we* can break the news to them, I’d be delighted. But can we keep the part where I struck you with lightning out of the announcement?”

“You mean that you want it to remain our little secret?” he asked with a knowing look. “Not on your cute little chumpy. We’re even now, and we can honestly say we’re past the stage where we try to kill each other.”

“Ha-ha! Very funny,” she deadpanned, not in the least amused. “We’re not telling your folks.”

“Fine. I’ll tell them.”

“Clark Jerome Kent!” Lois growled.

“But not today,” he amended. “Maybe on our fifth anniversary. It’ll be a funny story, then.”

“They’ll never find it funny, Clark. You promised not to hold this over my head,” she reminded him.

“I’m not. It’s not just any superhero who would fly into a thunderstorm and risk killing herself and her fiancé only so she wouldn’t be the only super powered being on the Earth,” he said, leaning over to kiss her cheek. “Thank you for loving all of me.”

“You’re welcome.”

They flew along quietly enjoying each other’s company, or so she thought.

“Uh... Lois?” Clark said hesitantly, a minute later. “What was that you said about ‘dumping’ Superman for me? You didn’t dump Superman.”

“At the courtroom, after he... *you* won your lawsuit. I told you that I wasn’t going to chase after you anymore,” Lois explained.

“Um... Lois, you weren’t dating Superman.”

She scoffed. “Yeah, right.”

“He who does not exist cannot date.”

“He existed for me,” Lois corrected him. “I thought he was real, hence we *were* dating.”

“Fine. Superman doesn’t date,” Clark said.

Lois wrapped her arms tightly, but not too tightly, around his waist and super sped him into her apartment. “That’s right. He’s officially off the market.”

“Lois, that’s not what I meant.”

“Oh,” she said with a sly smile, letting go. “Does that mean that Ultra Woman is still available too? I did receive quite a few flowers bouquets at the office.”

“Ultra Woman is seeing Superman exclusively,” Clark said, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her towards him for a kiss.

"My, Clark Kent. Won't my boyfriend mind if you kiss me?" she replied, laughing. "He's quite big and strong."

"Lois," he grumbled, and then shrugged with a grin. "Nope." He pressed his lips to hers.

Mmmm. Lois sure did love how kissing Clark felt so amazingly different when they both had powers.

Clark broke the kiss first, panting. "And Lois didn't date Superman, so she couldn't have dumped him."

Lois groaned. "This again. Do you need me to prove it to you?"

He sat down on her sofa and rubbed his hands through his hair. "I'm going to regret saying this, aren't I? But yes."

With a giggle, she sat down next to him and patted his knee. She just loved it when he asked her to prove him wrong. She recounted all the public kisses between her and Superman, not to mention all the romantic things Superman had done for her, such as dance with her after the Cost Mart Ball, check up on her after her date with Clark to the Kerth Awards, and having dinner with her.

"When? When did Superman have dinner with you?" he asked.

"Oh, wait. That was your clone. Never mind," she said in a singsong voice. "Maybe it was *him* I dated, not Superman."

"Terrific," he grumbled. "So, all this time I thought I was doing well at keeping my... Superman's distance from you, everyone, including Stoke, Luthor, and Jace Mazic, knew Superman's crazy for you. When we write our Ultra Woman exclusive, make sure she announces that Superman's off the market."

"No more bachelor auctions, Clark?" she asked, batting her eyelashes innocently.

"And none for you either," he retorted.

"Won't that be a bit of a coincidence? Lois Lane and Clark Kent getting engaged at the same time that Ultra Woman and Superman become exclusive?" she asked.

"Okay. Maybe not a formal announcement, just yet," he grumbled. He lifted up a finger and pointed it to her. "But as soon as I put on my uniform, Superman is going to be seen kissing Ultra Woman!"

"I thought the Newtrich sisters figured out that Lois Lane is Ultra Woman. Wouldn't that just be revealing to them that Clark Kent is Superman, since everyone knows that we're back together?"

Clark groaned and dropped his head into his hands. "And I thought *one* secret identity to deal with was confusing enough." He raised his head and looked her over.

Lois set her hand on her hair. Had it dried funny on the flight back?

"I've decided that I'm going to take back my powers from you as soon as I can," he announced.

"Now, wait a gosh-darn minute!" she argued. She would have agreed with him an hour ago but he had just made another decision without consulting her.

"You're just too smart now. I mean, before I could kind of keep up, or fake it, but now... nope, sorry, Lois. The speed at which your analytical mind works, jumping to conclusions I'd never in my wildest dreams have realized... it just wouldn't be fair to the criminals of the world to allow you to keep these powers. Investigations would become boring," he said, leaning back on the couch and putting his hands behind his head.

Lois stared at him, wondering what his ulterior motive could be. Did he want her to choose to keep her powers because he told her to get rid of them? Did he want her to stay invulnerable because she took, according to him, unnecessary risks? He could just be flirting with her. No, he was painting on a thick coat of compliments. He wanted something, but she had no idea what it could be.

"It won't work, Clark," she said, standing up. "No matter how much flattery you throw my way, you're still not staying the night."

His jaw dropped. "I... I wasn't..." His face went an adorable shade of beet red. "I swear..."

She bent down so that they could see each other eye to eye. She saw his eyes dart a fraction lower before moving back up to her gaze. "Who knows if I'm still being affected by the red Kryptonite and I'd hate for you to think it might be boosting my..." She licked her lips. "— desire for you."

Clark made another guttural whimper noise.

"Then again," she continued, pausing long enough to bite her bottom lip. "They do say that intimacy after a fight can be quite enjoyable."

He gulped, scooted to the end of the couch away from her, and stood up. "Yes, I better go then. Too many variables..."

"So soon?" Lois pouted.

"Yes, I'd hate for my... *our* first time to be when you're possibly still under the influence of..."

A burst of ultra speed allowed Lois to interrupt him with a kiss. "You're rambling again, Clark."

"Uh-huh," he murmured. Either his eyes were still shut from the kiss or he was gazing at her lips through veiled lashes. He suddenly blinked his eyes, opening them wide. "It's been a long, eventful day," he said, with an exaggerated yawn before pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. "I should go... patrol. I haven't... in days."

"*Superman* doesn't have any powers, remember," Lois said him with a wink. "We'd hate for the Newtrich sisters to learn the truth and foil our sneak attack."

"We have a plan?" he sputtered.

She grinned. "I like the jump in with two feet approach, myself."

Clark ran a hand over his face. "Because *that* has served us well all those other times we've employed it."

Lois ignored his sarcasm. She would just employ her new way of torturing him. She ran her finger down his torso, drawing a large 'S' on his chest. "Perhaps you should stay and we could put our heads together some more."

He gulped. "Mom and...uh... um... *Dad* will wonder where I have disappeared."

"Clark, I get the strange feeling that there's something else that you're not telling me," she whispered. She hadn't let the 'delve into the unknown' and the 'first time' slip past her.

He cleared his throat. "I don't have any idea to what you could be referring. I'm Superman." He floated off the floor. "See. Flying. And though I hail from Krypton, I was raised in Kansas as Clark Kent. You know everything of..." His voice cracked as he took a step backwards. "— *any* importance about me. Open book, who should really be leaving now," he said with an enthusiastic nod. He pointed over his shoulder towards the door.

"Wait!" Lois said, pressing him up against her door. "I should probably change before you leave, just in case... open door and all." She zipped down the hall and threw on her schlumpy Superman sleep shirt again. She returned to find Clark still leaning against her door, now covering his eyes.

"Lois," he said weakly, lowering his hand. "You do know that I... I can... when you change super fast... I still can... now... um..." He pointed to his eyes.

Actually, she had forgotten about that. "Did you finally get your peep?" she asked. Nervously, she bit her top lip. "What did you think?"

Clark's lips were on hers so fast that she didn't have time to react before he flipped them around so that *she* was the one pinned against the door instead of him. "I can't wait until we wrap up this investigation and start planning our wedding."

"Who's wedding? Ours or Superman's?" she asked.

"Whichever. As long as we're both there." He lowered his mouth to hers again, murmuring, "And it leads directly to our honeymoon."

"We could do karaoke instead of hiring a band," she suggested between kisses.

"You're kidding, right?" he asked. "Have you met our boss?"

Lois shrugged. They would either iron out the details later or just jump in with two feet. Personally, she preferred the latter method. Planning was overrated.

Ultra Woman floated down from the historic building on the corner of Jordano and Adams with a blonde businesswoman in her arms. She wasn't cradling the woman as she had with Clark the night before, much to his chagrin, but flew side by side with the woman's head resting on her shoulder.

The woman was acting strangely. Then again, the woman had wanted to kill herself just a minute ago and Lois... *Ultra Woman* had stopped her. Ultra Woman set her down on the street. She felt as if she should say something, but comforting people had never been her forte.

"Would you like to talk to someone? A doctor?" Ultra Woman suggested hesitantly.

"No," the woman replied. She looked at Ultra Woman almost with derision and snidely added, "But I would like a hug."

The last thing Lois wanted to do was embrace this woman. Actually, it sounded as if it was the last thing this woman wanted to do as well. "Um... well..." Ultra Woman sputtered, almost saying 'no'.

The woman had just embraced her coming down from the building, mostly because she didn't want to fall, but it felt stiff, weird, and not at all thankful. A part of her knew that Superman would've said 'yes' and she needed to talk to him about that policy. Any loony with Kryptonite might be asking, and this woman certainly was giving off those suspicious vibes. Lois hoped she wasn't obsessed with Ultra Woman like Jimmy was.

"O-kaaay," Ultra Woman agreed, not even a quarter-heartedly. She set her hands on the woman's shoulders and patted her more than hugged her.

As Ultra Woman went to step away, the woman grabbed her around the torso and squeezed Lois to her chest, not tight... well, not tightly for Ultra Woman, but undeniably too closely. Lois decided that this woman without a doubt fell into the creepy stalker category. This was the last hug Ultra Woman would ever give another adult, who wasn't...

"No! It's her!" she heard Clark cry from behind her.

Ultra Woman didn't even have time to turn and ask 'her who?' when she felt something hit her between the shoulder blades and drain out her life force. The world felt heavier and quieter. Clark seemed twice as far away. Her stomach rumbled with hunger and she felt bone-tired, as if she had been up all night flying.

She knew, even before the woman lifted her off the ground with a gloating grin, that the hug had been a terrible mistake. Lois wished she had stuck to her gut reaction with this woman. Now, Lois had given away her ultra powers to someone even less deserving of them than herself. Was one of Superman's abilities Super naïveté?

Lois glanced helplessly over her shoulder at Clark as the woman grabbed her around the throat, hoping he would help her. But what could Superman do against someone as powerful as himself?

Clark had stepped between her and the video camera of the journalist near him and stopped, gazing back at her equally helplessly as if he too were at a loss at what to do. At least, he had blocked her error from the evening news.

"I'm an empowered woman!" announced the woman who held Ultra Woman, and Lois realized that only seconds had

passed since she had lost her powers. The woman cackled with laughter as she bobbed Ultra Woman up and down beside her with one hand. If Lois had her ultra strength, she would have kicked her in the gut.

Lois guessed this woman was one of the Newtrich sisters who had kidnapped Clark. The woman was lucky that Lois hadn't realized this until after she lost her powers or she might have hung back and let the woman jump.

"Well, let's see just how strong I am," the woman who had stolen Ultra Woman's powers said, appearing as if she were about to toss Lois into the nearest building.

Suddenly, a whistle cut through the air. "Hey!" Lois heard Clark call out to them. "YOU! In the dime-store dress."

What is he doing? Lois wondered. *Trying to get me killed?*

"Over here," Clark said, waving towards them. "Remember me? I'm the man you abducted and tried to blow up last night for no good reason."

The triumphant grin disappeared from her captor's face. "I had a good reason," the woman replied. "Although, apparently you're not good enough bait for Ultra Woman."

The woman with the video camera joined Clark out on the street, vying to get a better shot.

"Is that *real* polyester?" Clark continued to taunt the woman. "Because it goes great with that cheap make-up and that bad wig."

Terrific, Lois groaned. Was this payback for taking him flying the night before? She had *apologized!* Well, okay, she hadn't, but she had meant to. He had said he wouldn't hold it against her. Apparently, she wasn't the only one who could hold grudges. She shook her head, telling him non-verbally to cut it out.

"Don't you talk about my sister's hair like that!" demanded the video camerawoman to Clark.

"Shut up, Nell," the woman, who must've been Lucille Newtrich, hissed at her sister. "I can fight my own battles." She dropped Lois to the ground.

"Yeah, but you're losing the one with taste," Clark said with a cocky grin.

Lucille started striding down the street towards him, announcing, "I'm going to ram you into next Thursday!" Clark laughed and motioned for her to try it.

Lois held her breath.

Lucille went into super speed mode just as Clark dived out of the way, grabbing the video camera out of Nell Newtrich's hands before landing on the street. Lucille hit her sister and the two of them flew around the corner and into what sounded like another building.

Ultra Woman pushed herself to her feet, just as Clark jogged over. He held up the video camera triumphantly in one arm. She scoffed and rolled her eyes. What good was that going to do them?

"That's the nasty thing about those super powers. They're hard to control with a bad temper," Lois said, as Clark gave her a winning grin.

"Well, then, let's get out of here before she calms down," he suggested.

Lois agreed as they headed through the collected crowd in the opposite direction from the one the Newtrich sisters had gone. "I guess I'm going to have to get used to being Earth bound again," she joked softly.

"Um...Not necessarily," he whispered once they were out of the crowd.

"Not necessarily *what?*"

"You're not Earth bound. I am," he said, giving her a sheepish smile.

Lois stopped and faced him. "What did you do?"

"I wanted to prove to you that you're just as much a hero as Superman," Clark replied.

She put her hands on her hips. “I’ve never doubted that for a moment, Kent. I’m just a different type of hero,” she said. “One who is mightier with the pen than the sword.”

“Well, now you’re mightier with the fist than me,” he said. “Than Superman, that is.”

He must have transferred his powers back into her when he had stepped in between Lois and Nell Newtrich. She stretched out with her senses and was able to hear and see further than Lois Lane should be able to.

“Why did you do that?” she hissed. “I’m not as good with these powers as you, Clark.”

“Lucille had her hand around your throat, Lo... *Ultra Woman*,” he reminded her. “One little squeeze and they would’ve had to clean you off the street with a mop.” He brushed back a lock of hair from her face. “And you’re more important to me than having my powers.”

Lois glanced down at the camera in his hand, and grinned. “But, now, *we* have all the power.”

He looked at the camera. “I think I damaged it when I crashed landed on the ground.”

She went to open the compartment holding the red Kryptonite to investigate, when Clark’s hand stilled hers. “That’s not a good idea.”

“Right,” Lois replied with a nod. She didn’t want to be drugged on crazy juice again. “So, what do we do now, Sherlock? It’s not much of a fight if both she and I are ultra powered. We’re liable to do more damage to Metropolis than to each other.”

He held up the camera. “Then we’ll have to even up the numbers a bit more.”

“Smack, punch, and grab!” Lucille said, giggling as she leafed through the handfuls of cash in her fists.

“We’re rich!” Nell agreed. “We’re rich! We’re...”

“Ladies!” Ultra Woman announced from outside the mail truck the Newtrich sisters had just robbed. She had her hands on her hips. “May I have a word?”

“Ultra Woman?” Lucille said, giving her sister a glare before moving to what was left of the door of the truck. “Excuse me, but don’t you qualify for protection under the endangered species act?”

Nell followed, standing right behind her sister.

“You’re the one up for early extinction. You see, I’ve still got all my powers.”

Nell rolled her eyes.

“You make me so mad my hair hurts,” Lucille grumbled at her sister.

“She’s lying,” Nell insisted.

“Let’s just see,” Ultra Woman returned.

Lucille jumped out of the truck and was standing behind Ultra Woman in a split second. “Why do I think you’re bluffing?”

Ultra Woman crossed her arms. “Well... I don’t know.”

Lucille stared at her. “I see fear in your eyes.”

Ultra Woman raised an eyebrow, but doubted that Lucille could see it under her mask. The only fear Lois had was if Clark’s plan didn’t work. Planning had never been his strong suit. “That’s just...” *Oh crap!* Her mind went blank. “Um... Extreme modesty.” *Really? Extreme modesty?* Could she have come up with a more lame answer?

Lucille scoffed, clearly not buying Ultra Woman’s excuse. “Oh, Nell,” she sang to her sister. “Let’s do a little test. Pick up the guard’s gun, there...”

Nell jumped out of the back of the postal truck and picked up the guard’s gun, aiming it at Ultra Woman.

Lucille looked back at Ultra Woman. “You’re familiar with the phrase ‘faster than a speeding bullet’.”

Ultra Woman glanced over her shoulder at Nell. It wasn’t that she feared the Newtrich sisters discovering that she had powers

again, but more that Lois really didn’t want to test the whole invulnerability to bullets thing.

“Lucille?” Nell said, the gun shaking in her hand. “I... I...”

“Nell! She knows who we are, what we did. Now, there isn’t a jail on Earth that could hold me, but you... *you’d* be in a lot of trouble if she talked to the police,” Lucille said to her sister.

Ultra Woman slowly started backing away from the crazy sisters, a hand raised. She glanced down the road and through the neighboring buildings, wondering where Clark was. He should have been here by now. She knew they should have switched roles. There hadn’t been time to do anything before the alarm about the postal truck had gone out over the police band and Clark had told her to go. ‘*I’ll be right behind you*,’ he had said.

“Soooo,” Lucille continued. “If you’re so sure that your little laser worked, finish the job.”

Nell pointed the gun directly at Lois, her eyes steeling with resolve. Unfortunately, her hands were still shaking. Lois was sure that Nell might manage to hit her with one of the bullets, but the others could ricochet and hit one of the guards still lying on the ground nearby. She didn’t have Clark’s experience with the powers. Could she stop a bullet in midflight?

A yellow 1950s taxicab screeched to a stop outside of the alley in which they were standing, and Superman stepped out with the red Kryptonite video camera, newly fixed by Dr. Klein... at least, Lois hoped it was fixed.

Nell’s attention and gun moved towards this new target. Lucille used her super breath to knock Superman back to the cab, but not before he tossed the camera high over Lucille’s head. Ultra Woman caught it and, while hovering in midair, she pointed it straight at Lucille and pressed the button.

A red light flashed through the air, striking Lucille in the center of her chest and knocking Clark’s powers back into him.

Superman grabbed Lucille’s hands, pulling them behind her back and holding them there, as he lifted her off the ground to prove to her that he once more had his powers.

“Oh, no! No! No!” Lucille whined.

Landing, Ultra Woman tucked the camera under her arm and took the pistol away from the stunned Nell.

“I don’t understand it. The blast should’ve left you powerless,” Nell grumbled.

Ultra Woman glanced over at Superman and smiled. “Your laser didn’t work as you thought. The transfer was only temporary. Superman had his powers restored last night. Just as I regained my powers after you struck me this morning.”

“You mean I would’ve lost my ultra powers in time?” Lucille asked, before turning to Superman. “But I knocked you over with my breath just now.”

“Anyone can be surprised, even Superman,” he replied as a couple of police cruisers pulled up to the mouth of the alley.

“That sucks,” Lucille mumbled. “So, you’re not Lois Lane?”

“Ms. Lane is just as powerless as her fiancé,” Ultra Woman explained, leaning towards the sisters. “She was extremely perturbed that you almost killed Clark Kent. Between you and me, I think you two will be safer behind bars.”

“If you’re not Lois Lane, then who are you?” Lucille asked.

“I’m just one of Superman’s friends from the league of super heroes called... um... The Justice League,” Ultra Woman said, floating into the air. “He calls on me for assistance from time to time.”

Superman passed Lucille and Nell over to the cops. “You need to get these two behind bars.”

Nell pulled away from her sister. “I’m not riding in the same car as *that* woman.”

“Nah nanny nah nah,” replied Lucille, sticking out her tongue at her sister.

Superman floated up above the crime scene and joined Ultra Woman. “Who or what is the Justice League?”

"Beats me," Lois shrugged. "Sounded good, though, didn't it?"

Clark chuckled and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to his chest. "Our investigation is over, the criminals caught, and our powers restored. How about a kiss?"

Ultra Woman gasped. "*Superman!* How many times do I have to tell you? I don't date my co-workers," Lois teased, wagging a finger at him. "Keep that up and I'll have to turn you over to Batman for censure." She flew up high over the city, where no one could hear her peals of laughter.

Superman followed. "What was that about?" he asked, crossing his arms and he floated sternly nearby.

Lois calmed her laughter. "I figure we have enough to deal with for a while without adding a super romance into the mix." She floated up to him and laid a hand on his chest, sliding it up to his shoulder, pulling him in for a kiss.

"So, Superman is a super dud in Ultra Woman's eyes only in public?" he whispered, turning his head slightly so she missed his mouth. "First Lois dumps him, and now Ultra Woman. The poor man can't catch a break."

She chuckled. "Perhaps I'll have Ultra Woman reconsider after Lois marries Clark," she countered. This time her super kiss hit its mark.

Perry marched out of his office and over to where Clark, Jimmy, and Lois stood at Lois's desk. "This is great stuff, kids, but we still don't know where this Ultra Woman came from and if we're ever going to see her again."

Clark looked at Lois and hesitated, "Um... Well..."

"She said that she's a really close friend of Superman's, and..." Lois replied, interrupting him. She gave Clark a knowing smile. "And that's about all that either of them would say."

Her fiancé returned her smile, taking her hand in his and raising her fingers to his lips for a kiss.

"All right. Let's slap this on the front page and head for home," Perry said, tossing them back their copy.

"Hold on a moment there, Chief. There's another headline you're missing," Jimmy said.

Lois's eyes widened as she glanced over at her boss. "That's right, Jimmy," she said, standing up and squeezing Clark's hand as she lowered hers out of sight. "I spoke to Ultra Woman before she flew off and, Jimmy, she said to tell you that you're 'cute'."

Jimmy jumped to his feet and started dancing through the newsroom to crowds of "I'm cute!"

Clark chuckled.

Perry merely shook his head and wandered back to his office.

Clark drew Lois to his chest, kissed her cheek and whispered in her ear, "Are you telling me that Ultra Woman turned down Superman for the likes of... *Jimmy Olsen?*"

"Only in Jimmy's dreams, Clark," she murmured back.

"At least, I don't have to spend every waking moment worrying about your safety now," Clark continued.

"Ha-ha. You and I both know you didn't do that before," Lois said, tapping his chest.

"Yeah. Sure, honey. Whatever you say," he replied, glancing away and towards the ceiling as if he were avoiding her gaze.

Her brow furrowed. "Clark, are you crossing your fingers?"

His cheeks reddened a little and he cleared his throat. "Of course not, Lois."

Uh-huh. "How about now?"

"Hey! Romeo and Juliet!" Perry's booming voice roared over the newsroom, causing Lois and Clark to jump apart. "The front page!"

"Right," Clark said, picking up their article. "Let me..."

"You do that," Lois said, flicking his tie as her fingers danced across his chest. "Meet you later."

He grinned and bounced his eyebrows, leaning towards her

for another kiss. "I've got some ideas about later..."

She pointed to the paper in his hand. "The article."

Clark nodded, starting to back up but keeping his eyes on Lois. "Right. Right. Article. Uh-huh."

Jimmy came dancing back into the newsroom at that moment, distracting Clark's gaze from Lois long enough to remember where he was supposed to be going.

"Lois!" Jimmy called as Clark zipped out of sight. "The other headline. I totally forgot to tell you."

"Tell *me?*" Lois echoed. She had thought he'd noticed her engagement ring was about to blab it all over the newsroom that she and Clark were engaged. "What headline?"

Jimmy grabbed a tabloid off his desk and held it up for her view. The grainy photo gracing its cover was from a security camera video and was of Ultra Woman standing at the microphone at the dive bar in Oklahoma. The headline blared: *Ultra Woman Sings the Blues for Superman.*

THE END

Disclaimer: Inspired by the characters Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster created as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. The characters do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros, DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). This story is all my own, although I've set it during and borrowed some dialogue from S3's episode "Ultra Woman" written by Gene O'Neill and Noreen Tobin.

"Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)" written by Elliot Lurie and performed by the band Looking Glass (1972). Like with LnC and/or Superman, I borrowed most of Ultra Woman's song from this ballad out of love for the original, not to earn any money.

"Like a Virgin" written by Billy Steinberg and Tom Kelly, performed by Madonna (1984)

"Blowin' in the Wind" written and performed by Bob Dylan. (1963)

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