

Time to Find Lois Lane

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Rated: PG

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Summary: With the help of H.G. Wells, Alt-Clark attempts to find his soul mate, the Lois Lane of his world.

Author's Note: After watching the episode "Lois and Clarks," it bothered me that alt-Clark ended the episode without his Lois. Perhaps the writers would have given us an episode about it if there had been a fifth season, but as we know, there was no fifth season, so alt-Clark remained alone. Here is my attempt at bringing the two soul mates together. This story takes place immediately following the episode "Lois and Clarks." Enjoy – feedback is welcomed and appreciated.

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Clark took one last look through the sheer curtains of the window at the couple embracing. He sighed and turned back to follow H.G. Wells. Clark had spent the past few days in this Metropolis trying to save it from the evil plans of Tempus and rescue Clark Kent, husband of Lois Lane. He had felt such a powerful connection to Lois, a chemistry he could not explain. He had experienced it the first time they met a year ago, and it had only grown stronger over the past few days. However, Lois had explained to him that despite the strength of his feelings, they were not for her but rather for his Lois, the Lois of his world. Clark wondered how that could be since he had never met the Lois of his world because she had disappeared on assignment over four years earlier. But Lois was convinced that somehow he and his Lois were meant to be together. Clark wished he could believe that. Her Clark was the luckiest man alive, and all of them knew it. He was glad that he had been able to help them, but the thought of going back to his world, where Lois did not exist, overwhelmed him with sadness, loneliness, and despair.

As Clark and Mr. Wells climbed into the time machine to return to his Metropolis, a thought lit up in Clark's mind. "Mr. Wells?" asked Clark.

"Yes, my boy," the old gentleman answered.

"It just occurred to me that we are in a time machine and can travel to any time we choose. Could we go back to my world, to a time before my Lois disappeared in the Congo, and stop her, or is that impossible?" asked Clark.

"I wondered if you would ever suggest that. I have given it some thought. It is possible, but if we attempt it, we must not disturb the timeline too greatly," explained Mr. Wells.

"What do you mean?" asked Clark.

"Well, if you stop your Lois from disappearing into the Congo, then she would still be in Metropolis. Tempus wouldn't be able to bring the Lois from this world over to your world like he did last year," Mr. Wells began.

"Wouldn't that be a good thing?" asked Clark in a confused tone.

"Both this world and your world are linked through the actions of Tempus. This Lois came to your world last year, and you've just spent a few days in her world. To change that could dramatically affect the future of both worlds," Mr. Wells explained.

"So there is nothing I can do?" asked Clark. "I must go back to a world without Lois? After being here and seeing what we could have together, that would be intolerable!"

"I didn't say we couldn't find your Lois," said Mr. Wells. "We just need to be careful not to upset the timeline of either world."

"How do we do that?" asked Clark.

"First, we need to go to the past in order to gather information – to find out what really happened to your Lois. This part will be hard for you," Mr. Wells continued, "because you must not do anything to interfere with the events that take place. You need to be an observer only."

"But what happens if she gets killed? I can't just let that happen!" protested Clark.

"You must," replied Mr. Wells, "so we can examine all aspects of the timeline."

"But Lois will be dead. How will that help?" Clark said, showing his dismay and confusion.

"You forget," answered Mr. Wells, "that once we have gathered our information, we can go back in time again and rescue her in such a way that Tempus will be unaware of our actions and the effects to the timeline will be minimal."

"That makes sense," Clark responded, finally understanding.

"Do you understand what you must do? You must promise not to interfere. I know you are a man who is true to his word. Will you give me your promise?" continued Mr. Wells.

"I understand, and I promise," answered Clark, knowing what a challenge it would be.

"All right, then," said Mr. Wells. "Give me a date, and off we'll go!"

Remembering the hours he had spent researching Lois' last days at the Planet, Clark said, "Lois left for the Congo on March 8, 1993, Flight 1256, leaving at 10:15 am from Metropolis."

H.G. Wells dialed the numbers 03-08-1993 in to the time circuits and pulled the lever, and in a flash, they left this world and traveled back four years in time to Clark's world – a world where Lois Lane still existed.

Clark and Mr. Wells arrived on the outskirts of Metropolis. Clark hid the time machine in an abandoned warehouse and then flew himself and Mr. Wells to Lois' apartment. Using his x-ray vision, Clark could see that Lois was inside zipping up her suitcase. Her hair was longer and her features not as soft, but Clark knew her immediately.

"She's here!" said Clark to Mr. Wells. "She's really here. I can't believe it! She is so beautiful!" Although every instinct inside of Clark demanded he stop Lois from leaving, he remembered his promise to Mr. Wells.

A cab pulled up in front of the building and beeped its horn. Lois came bounding down the steps dressed in a business suit with her suitcase in hand. The taxi pulled away, heading toward the Metropolis International Airport. Looking around to see if the coast was clear, Clark lifted Mr. Wells and flew straight up. Hopping from rooftop to rooftop, Clark followed the taxi.

At the airport, they watched Lois get her ticket, check her bag, and board flight 1256. Aside from the airport personnel, Lois did not interact with anyone. She sat in the plane, her head down studying her notes in preparation for her assignment. As the plane left the terminal, Mr. Wells said, "Clark, you follow the plane. I will get back to the time machine and meet you at the airport in Brazzaville. History doesn't report this plane crashing. It will arrive safely at its destination. You listen to see if Lois talks to

anyone or if anything suspicious happens. Gather information only,” explained Mr. Wells.

“Should I go as Clark or Superman?” asked Clark.

“Superman doesn’t exist yet in this world. He doesn’t arrive for another three years,” answered Mr. Wells.

“Let me fly you to the time machine. The plane won’t take off for another few minutes,” said Clark.

Clark took Mr. Wells back to the time machine and then waited in the skies above the Metropolis airport until Lois’ airplane took off. Matching the plane’s speed and altitude, Clark hovered above it, using his x-ray vision to see Lois and his super-hearing to eavesdrop on her conversations.

Lois was trying to sit and work but had a very talkative female seated next to her who chatted on and on like a magpie. She wouldn’t let Lois sit quietly.

“Hi! I’m Sally Strong,” said the woman in the seat next to Lois.

“Lois Lane,” said Lois without looking up from her notes.

“Whatcha workin on?” asked Sally, chomping on a piece of gum.

“I’m doing research for an assignment,” Lois answered evasively, wishing the woman would take the hint and leave her alone. No such luck!

“Cool! What kind of work do you do?” asked Sally persistently.

“I’m a reporter for the Daily Planet,” said Lois in an abrupt tone, hoping Sally would soon give up.

“That sounds exciting! What story are you working on? Is it airline safety? Are we in danger of crashing?” Sally asked, her voice rising with each question.

“No, it’s not about airline safety. I cannot give you details. It’s something I am investigating,” Lois said, trying to be patient.

“Oh, something mysterious,” whispered Sally. “You’re investigating something in the Congo. I’m going to the Congo to meet my fiancé. He’s been there for six months. I can’t wait to see him. Do you have a boyfriend?”

Lois didn’t respond.

“Of course, you must have a boyfriend,” Sally continued.

“Someone as successful and as pretty as you must fight off the men. Me, my Chuckie was my high school sweetheart. We’ve known each other since the fifth grade.” Sally continued chatting to an unresponsive Lois for the next several hours. Hovering above the plane, Clark chuckled to himself. Sally didn’t need any responses. She just wanted to talk. While Sally talked, Clark looked at Lois’ notes about the gunrunning situation in the Congo. She really didn’t have much to go on – just a name, Themba, a contact who she would call once she was established in Brazzaville.

The flight was uneventful. Sally chatted intermittently until she eventually fell asleep. Lois was grateful for the peace and quiet.

Upon arrival at the airport in Brazzaville, Lois quickly got off the plane, avoiding Sally, and went to the baggage claim area. Clark entered the building and observed the people in the crowd. Most were just busy passengers trying to get to their terminal or to their cars. Two men stood out, however, because they were following Lois’ every move with their eyes. One was tall and dark-skinned, with a goatee and short black hair. The other was shorter and bald, with round glasses. As Lois got her bag and headed out of the terminal, the two men followed her. To Clark, it looked as if they were getting ready to grab Lois. Just as they were close enough to touch her, Clark heard Sally cry out, “Lois, there you are! I want you to meet my fiancé.” The two men scowled and backed away, fading into the crowd as Lois turned to meet Sally and her fiancé.

“That was a close call,” said a voice right next to Clark. It was Mr. Wells, who had arrived at the airport. “Someone is

definitely after your Lois,” said Mr. Wells.

“Yes,” responded Clark, “and they almost got her.” He watched Lois get into a cab with Sally and her fiancé. The two men had disappeared into the crowd. Clark knew if he stayed with Lois, he would probably see them again.

“Are you sure you are up for this, Clark?” inquired Mr. Wells. “This will be the hardest part – observing and not interfering.”

“Yes, I am sure,” said Clark, leading Mr. Wells to a deserted section outside the building and then lifting off to follow the cab. As Clark listened to the conversation taking place in the cab, he smiled as once again Sally dominated the conversation, with only the occasional “Yes, dear” from her fiancé or “Mmm-hmm” from Lois providing any break in her monologue. Clark watched the cab pull up in front of the Cosmos Hotel in downtown Brazzaville.

“Lois,” asked Sally while they were getting out of the cab, “have dinner with Chuckie and me?”

“Oh, thanks,” said Lois, obviously trying to get out of the situation, “but I’m really tired and need to prepare some more for my investigation. I think I will just call room service.” And before Sally could argue, Lois said, “It was nice to meet you, Chuckie. Have fun, Sally. Bye!” Then she turned and walked into the hotel with determined steps. Clark scanned the area again and saw the same two men from the airport arrive in a dark vehicle and watch Lois enter the building. After parking their vehicle in front of the hotel, they casually entered the lobby, looking for Lois. They observed her at the front desk getting her room assignment and key and watched her get into the crowded elevator but did not follow her. Clark was torn between watching Lois and tracking the two men.

“You keep an eye on those two,” said Mr. Wells. “I will loiter in the hallway on Miss Lane’s floor.”

“Third floor,” said Clark with relief. “Room 307,” he continued, having overheard Lois’ room assignment. Mr. Wells entered into the elevator Lois had just been in a few moments before.

The two men did not stay in the hotel. They exited the building and walked a short distance down the street, deep in discussion. Using his super-hearing, Clark could hear them discussing how to drive Lois out of the hotel. While listening to the men, Clark turned his head and scanned inside the hotel for Lois. She was unpacking in her room with the phone to her ear, ordering dinner from room service.

After much arguing, the two men decided to start a fire in the hotel kitchen in an attempt to drive everyone out of the building. In the confusion, they would grab Lois with no one being the wiser. Clark watched them saunter back toward the hotel, get a gym bag from their car on the way, and head towards the employee entrance in the back of the building. The kitchen was bustling with activity. No one paid attention to the two men who walked into a supply closet at the back of the kitchen. Once inside, the men took a container from the gym bag.

“Some sort of accelerant,” Clark said to himself.

They poured it around the room and over the boxes that lined the shelves. Then they set another container on the floor. Clark could see it was an explosive that would go off when heated. Everything in Clark wanted to rush in and stop the men, but he remembered his promise to Mr. Wells and stayed put. He quickly switched his scan to Lois, who was upstairs in her room. She was there looking over her notes. Clark scanned into the hall and saw Mr. Wells standing in the hallway a few doors down the hall from Lois’ room.

“BOOM!” an explosion startled Clark and rocked the hotel. Clark turned his attention back to the supply closet, which was now empty of people and engulfed in flames, with the fire spreading quickly into the kitchen and hotel lobby. The fire alarm went off, and hotel patrons and employees started rushing toward

the exits. Lois hustled out as well, briefcase in hand and purse over her shoulder. Mr. Wells followed close behind her. As Lois hurried away from the building, Mr. Wells turned and walked in a different direction.

There was a lot of noise and confusion, people shouting, alarms blaring, and fire engine sirens screaming as they roared down the street. No one heard the cry of Lois Lane as the two men came alongside her, grabbed her, and forced her into their car. No one, that is, but Clark, who heard and saw it all. Mr. Wells appeared at Clark's side, ready to follow the car already speeding away.

Up Clark flew with Mr. Wells in tow. Clark could hear Lois yelling and see her fighting her captors inside the car before one of the men gave Lois an injection. Lois quickly passed out. They drove out of the city into the land of the rainforest, where the roads became windy and narrow and well hidden behind the dense undergrowth. Their final destination was a clearing near the Congo River where a man sitting in a lounge chair waited on a dock. The man had his back to Clark, but as the car approached, he turned around. Clark gasped and said to Mr. Wells, "It's Tempus!"

"I am not surprised," Mr. Wells responded. "Be careful, Clark, not to get too close. We don't want Tempus to even suspect that someone might be watching him."

Clark scanned the area and saw a grove of trees far off to the right of the clearing where he and Mr. Wells could observe the situation secretly. Clark watched the two men put something that looked like a straightjacket on the still-unconscious Lois before dragging her out of the car and dumping her into the lounge chair that Tempus had just abandoned. They turned to Tempus and said, "Where's our payment?"

"Not so fast! Not so fast," Tempus answered, putting his hands up. "Since you bungled the job and didn't grab Miss Lane and her luggage at the airport, you need to go back to the hotel and take everything out of her room. I don't want a trace of her found in this town. Understand?"

The men looked at each other and then back at Tempus, and they nodded.

"When you get back with Miss Lane's personal effects, then you will be paid," Tempus said.

The men grumbled under their breath but begrudgingly got back into the car and drove towards the city. Clark heard Tempus laugh as he sat back in another lounge chair, staring at Lois and waiting for her to revive.

It took about fifteen minutes for Lois to stir. She moaned, lifted her head, and slowly opened her eyes, saying, "What's going on? Why can't I move my arms?" When her eyes cleared and she could focus, she saw Tempus and asked, "Who are you? Are you Themba?"

"The people around here call me Themba, but my name is really Tempus. I've been waiting for you. It's nice to see you again, Lois," Tempus said with a smirk on his face.

"Do I know you?" Lois asked.

"Actually, you aren't supposed to meet me for another few years, but why wait?" he answered with a grin on his face.

"What?" said Lois, confused and still trying to clear her head from the drug she had been given. "What do you want from me?"

"It's like this, Lois," said Tempus, rising from the chair. "The only thing I really want from you is your absence."

"I don't understand. Why did you bring me here if you don't want me here?" said a confused Lois.

"It's simple," answered Tempus. "If you are not here, then you will never meet him, and he will never exist."

"Meet who? You aren't making any sense!" said Lois, starting to get angry.

"Why, Superman, of course," said Tempus playfully.

"Superman? I've never heard of him," said Lois.

"Of course you haven't. You haven't met him yet. He is still in Kansas – a quiet man being browbeaten by his assertive girlfriend – a timid man who has never gotten over the death of his parents – a man who is anything but super – a pathetic shell of a man who needs Lois Lane to help him become a superhero," said Tempus sarcastically.

"You are talking in riddles. I don't know this man. You say *he* needs me and *you* don't. Can't you make up your mind, or are you as crazy as you seem?" demanded Lois.

"You have a lot of spunk for someone tied up and at my mercy," said Tempus, pulling Lois to her feet. "It's a shame you don't know who Superman is right now. I would love to hear you call his name to save you and then see your face when you realize that he's not coming, but that won't happen. So it's time to say, 'Goodbye, Lois.'" With that, he pushed Lois back off the dock and into the water. The straightjacket she wore was weighted down so that she sank quickly, uselessly screaming and struggling all the way. Lois Lane drowned at the bottom of the Congo River while Tempus stood above on the dock laughing and laughing before he said, "Just as easy as killing the Kents."

Clark gasped as he heard the terrible news about his parents. He had watched in horror, tears streaming down his face and anger filling his heart, as Tempus callously killed Lois. No wonder he had never been able to find her when he searched for her before. She was dead in a watery grave. To know what Tempus had done to Lois and to his parents filled Clark with righteous anger. He wanted to fly over to Tempus and ...

"The hardest part is over now, Clark," said Mr. Wells, putting his hand on Clark's shoulder. Clark had almost forgotten that he was there. "Now we need to watch and see what Tempus does. The more we know, the better we can plan to make sure that we can keep Lois alive despite the evilness of Tempus," Mr. Wells continued.

Tempus sat back in the chair and waited for the kidnappers to return. After a while, they drove up and got out of the car with Lois' luggage.

"Good! Good!" said Tempus, pointing to the far side of the dock. "Set them over there."

As the two men walked by Tempus and set the suitcase and other bags down, Tempus pulled out a gun and shot each of them in the back. One fell directly into the river. The other fell on the dock. Tempus walked up to the body, pushed it into the water with his foot, and said, "Nice doing business with you." Then he pulled a small box from his pocket and opened a time portal. Taking Lois' luggage, he set all the pieces inside the portal. He double-checked to ensure that the car was empty of any incriminating evidence. Tempus got into the driver's seat, started the engine, and maneuvered the car to face the river. With the driver's door open, he pressed on the gas, jumped out of the moving car, and watched its momentum carry the car over the bank and into the river, where it slowly sank to the bottom. Clapping his hands together to rid them of dirt, Tempus headed toward the time portal and stepped into it. The portal closed with a flash of light and a crashing sound. Tempus was gone. The only things left on the dock were the lounge chairs and a puddle of blood.

Clark couldn't bring himself to scan below the surface of the water where Lois lay dead. He hoped Mr. Wells wouldn't ask it of him.

"Let's wait a little longer to be sure all is settled before we leave," suggested Mr. Wells.

"Fine," answered Clark, turning his back on the gruesome scene.

"Now that we know what happened, we can plan a counter strategy," said Mr. Wells. "Let me tell you what I have in mind." And with that, Clark and Mr. Wells began to plot how to rescue Lois Lane.

Later, back in Clark's farmhouse in Kansas in March of 1997, Clark and Mr. Wells went over their plan – step by step, detail by detail. Clark knew they had all the time in the world to execute their plan, but he felt the urge to rush and get Lois to safety.

"It's all set," said Mr. Wells. "Tomorrow, we'll take a trip in the time machine to get everything prepared; then we'll come back here for you to go shopping."

"Shopping?" asked Clark.

"Yes, my boy," answered Mr. Wells. "If you plan to bring Miss Lane here, she will need food and clothing. All you have in your cupboards are stale crackers and outdated canned goods."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Wells," said Clark. "Since becoming Superman, I haven't had extra time to spend here. Are you sure we can't execute our plan now?"

"We could," said Mr. Wells, "but we are both tired and hungry. It would make us careless and sloppy. We'll only have one chance to do this right. A good night's sleep and full stomachs will help us tremendously. Now, shall we go get something for dinner? The last time I was in Kansas, it was 1966, and Tempus held me captive in the woods. I am curious to see your town."

Accepting the wisdom of Mr. Wells' recommendations, Clark took him into Smallville, where they ate at the local diner. Then they stopped at the grocer to pick up food and basic supplies. Back at the house, Clark set up Mr. Wells in his parent's old bedroom and then wandered aimlessly around. Clark's brain was going a mile a minute – thinking about their plan, reliving Lois' gruesome death, remembering the other Lois and Clark in their world, and dreaming of the possibility of a life with his Lois in this world. Clark knew he should sleep, so he lay down on the old sofa. Eventually, he dozed off, thinking of his hopes for the future.

The next day after breakfast, Mr. Wells asked Clark, "Are you ready?"

"More than ready," Clark answered. Clark took his glasses off, setting them on the side table, and picked up a backpack filled with the supplies they would need; then both he and Mr. Wells went to the time machine hidden in the barn. A few turns of the dial, a pull of a lever, and they were gone. Only a few seconds later, they were back. Clark was soaking wet and covered with mud but had a smile on his face.

"Step one complete," said Mr. Wells.

After a quick shower, Clark and Mr. Wells went into town to purchase clothes for Lois. Neither one knew exactly what they were doing, so there was a lot of laughter. The humor broke the tension that kept rising up inside of them as they anticipated implementing step two of their plan.

When they had returned home, Clark heard for the second time that day, "Are you ready?"

Clark responded, "Let's do it!"

They climbed into the time machine and went back to the Congo to a time about an hour before Lois Lane would drown in the Congo River. Clark deposited Mr. Wells near the same group of trees where they had hidden before. As Clark was getting ready to go to his position, Mr. Wells encouraged him, "Good luck, my boy."

Clark went upstream from the dock to a place where he could see and hear but would not be seen by Tempus. Then he waited. After what seemed like hours to Clark, a time portal appeared with a crash and opened. Out stepped Tempus. He closed the portal and put the portal box in his pocket. Then Tempus sat in one of the chairs on the dock. Just like before, the car pulled up, and Clark watched the two men strap the unconscious Lois in a straightjacket and dump her body into the chair before driving away again.

When Lois asked, "What's going on?" and "Why can't I move my arms?" Clark dove into the river, swimming downstream to the spot below the dock where Tempus was standing. He was deep enough under the water not to be seen. When Tempus said, "Good-bye, Lois," and pushed her in, Clark was ready. He grabbed his struggling love, covered her mouth with his hand, and soared downstream, being careful not to disturb the water above. Quite a ways downstream, Clark veered to the right into a tunnel he had dug in the bank earlier that day for him, but three months earlier Congo time.

Clark pulled Lois quickly through the tunnel that was filled with water. It angled upwards until at last they broke the surface and were in a large underground chamber. Lois was struggling, twisting and turning, yelling at him through the hand that still covered her mouth.

Setting her carefully on the dry floor, Clark leaned over and turned on a lantern while still keeping his hand on Lois' mouth. As they both adjusted to the sudden brightness, Clark could see the fear in Lois' eyes.

"Lois," he said looking straight into those fearful yet beautiful eyes. Lois was so surprised to hear her name that she momentarily stopped struggling and yelling.

"Lois," Clark said again. "I am a friend, and I am here to help you. It is imperative that you remain quiet. If I remove my hand, will you promise not to scream? We can talk quietly."

Lois looked back at Clark, staring at him intently, and then nodded. Clark removed his hand from her mouth. Questions immediately started to pour forth from Lois' lips. "Who are you? Are you in this with Tempus? Where are we? Do you know who Superman is?"

"Lois," Clark tried to answer.

"How did you know where I was? What is this place? Get me out of this straightjacket!" Lois continued without even hearing Clark.

"Lois," Clark tried again.

"What about my story? Why don't we get out of here and stop that Tempus guy?" Lois kept asking questions in a panicked voice, hardly pausing to take a breath.

Finally, in an effort to quiet her, Clark grabbed Lois by the shoulders and kissed her.

"Lois," said Clark, pulling back slightly from the now-silent Lois but not releasing her arms. "I know you are frightened and have a lot of questions, but you need to calm down. I promised I will answer all your questions. Please trust me."

Again, Lois looked at this stranger who had rescued her. She looked deep into his eyes, and though it was not in her nature, she gave him her trust. She said, "Could you please get me out of this straightjacket?" Clark smiled at her quick change in attitude and turned her around slightly to undo the straightjacket. Then he helped Lois take it off and tossed it aside.

"Who are you?" Lois asked, rubbing her arms.

"My name is Clark Kent," Clark answered.

"Have we met?" Lois asked.

Clark responded, "We haven't officially met, but I know who you are."

Lois sneezed in reply.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Here," said Clark, reaching for the backpack full of supplies he had left there earlier and pulling out a blanket. He wrapped it around Lois' shoulders.

"Better?" he inquired.

"Yes, thanks," Lois answered. "Where did all this stuff come from? It's almost like you planned it."

"I did plan it," agreed Clark.

"Then you are an associate of Tempus," Lois accused.

"I know Tempus, and I knew of his plans to drown you, but we are not working together – if that is what you mean," Clark answered.

"If you knew he was going to drown me, why didn't you stop him?" Lois said, confused.

"It is important that Tempus believes that he was successful in getting rid of you," said Clark.

"So he'll totally leave me alone from now on?" Lois guessed.

Clark answered, "Something like that."

Lois looked around the damp chamber they were in and asked, "How long do we need to stay in here?"

"Until Tempus leaves," answered Clark. "He is still on the dock above."

"How will you know when he leaves since we are stuck in this hole?" Lois wondered.

"I'll know," Clark answered cryptically.

Lois guessed, "You must have a partner or something above ground who will notify you."

"Yes, I have a partner," Clark admitted.

"Is it that Superman guy that Tempus kept talking about?" Lois asked.

"No, it is not Superman," Clark answered. They sat quietly for a while as Lois tried to gather her wits and organize her thoughts. She was just getting ready to ask another question when Clark gestured with his hand for her to be quiet.

"What is it?" Lois asked.

Clark just shook his head and put his finger to his lips to show Lois that he needed silence.

Listening with his super-hearing, Clark heard the two gunshots from above as Tempus shot the kidnappers. He heard the splashes and then the crash of the time portal opening and closing.

Standing up, Clark said, "Now we can go. Please do not move." Clark then walked to the far side of the chamber.

"What are you doing?" asked Lois.

"Getting us out of here," Clark answered as he punched a hole in the dirt ceiling, making an opening large enough to push Lois through. Taking her hand, Clark walked Lois to the opening and lifted her up. Lois did not notice Clark's feet leaving the ground as she went through the opening. She was more surprised at the refined gentleman taking her hand and helping her out of the hole.

"Are you Clark's partner?" she asked.

"Yes, I am. Herbert George Wells at your service, Miss Lane," he said, doffing his hat and bowing slightly.

"Herbert Geor ... you mean H.G. Wells the science-fiction writer? Right?" said Lois, doubtfully backing away and muttering to herself. "I must be dreaming. How else can you explain being kidnapped, drugged, drowned, and rescued by a mysterious man and H.G. Wells? That's it! I'm dreaming!"

"You're not dreaming, Lois," said Clark, climbing out of the underground chamber with the backpack on his back. He had packed up everything so as not to leave any evidence of their presence there. He walked up to Lois, took her hand, and said, "Let's get you safe, and then we'll answer all your questions. I promise."

"OK, take me back to my hotel," Lois demanded.

"You can't go back there, Lois. You're supposed to be dead. Remember?" Clark explained patiently.

"Right," Lois replied in frustration. "Where do you suggest we go?"

"I'm taking you to my place," said Clark.

Lois looked around and said, "Your place? Right. Are we walking, or do you have an alternate form of transportation available in the bushes?"

Clark smiled to hear Lois' feisty reply. He knew that meant she was recovering from her shock. Since he was unsure as to how to answer her question about transportation, Clark simply put one arm around Lois and the other around Mr. Wells and said, "Ready?"

"Ready for whaaaaat?" Lois screamed as Clark flew up into the sky, heading back towards the time machine. When the scream faded out abruptly, Clark looked at Lois' bent head and said to Mr. Wells, "She fainted!"

"That may be for the best," Mr. Wells answered, "at least until we get safely back to 1997."

Upon their arrival at the time machine, Clark set Mr. Wells down and then sat in the passenger seat with the unconscious Lois cradled in his arms. In a flash, they were back inside Clark's barn in Smallville, Kansas.

Clark carried Lois into the house and laid her gently on the sofa.

"She's still wet," he observed. Using his heat vision, Clark dried Lois' clothing and covered her with a blanket.

Mr. Wells went into the kitchen to busy himself. Clark sat back in his mother's old recliner and stared at the unconscious Lois. Tears ran down his cheeks. They were tears of joy and relief brought on because he had saved her. They were also tears of anxiety because the hardest part (explaining to Lois where and when she was) was yet to come.

For the second time that day, Lois stirred and woke up in a strange place. She gasped, sat up quickly, and saw Clark sitting in the recliner close by.

"Oh, it's you," she said. "What happened?"

"You fainted," Clark answered.

"I did?" Lois queried, swinging her legs to the floor. "How long was I out?"

Clark responded, "A couple of hours."

Lois looked around the living room of the old farmhouse and asked, "Where am I?"

"You are in my house," Clark said, getting up from the chair and coming to sit beside Lois.

"Your house? In the Congo?" Lois asked, confused.

"No, we are in Smallville, Kansas," he answered.

"Kansas? And we got here from the Congo in the two hours I was passed out? You must think I am an idiot or something!" Lois sputtered. Rising to her feet, she tossed the blanket that had been covering her aside and said, "Look, Clark, I appreciate what you've done for me, but I need to leave now." The trust she had placed in this stranger was fading fast.

Clark stood and reached for Lois' hand to stop her movement. "Lois," he said calmly, "I am not going to keep you here permanently. I will take you wherever you want to go, but there are things you should know, *must* know, before you can leave."

"Like how I got to Kansas from the Congo in two hours!" she demanded.

"That and so much more," Clark answered.

Lois was torn between bolting out the door away from this crazy situation and heeding the instincts that were telling her to trust this stranger. As she stood there trying to decide, Mr. Wells bustled in from the kitchen carrying a tea tray.

"Ah, Miss Lane," he said cheerfully. "Glad to see you are awake. Please sit down and have a small repast. You must be starving since you did not receive your order from room service."

"See, that's another thing," Lois said, looking at Clark accusingly. "How do you know that?"

"It is a long and complicated story, my dear," Mr. Wells answered for Clark. "Clark and I are here to answer all your questions, but first let us have tea, and then I will tell you my story."

As Lois hesitated, Clark simply said, "Please, Lois."

Lois sat back down on the sofa and took the cup of tea Mr. Wells handed her. Clark sat down next to her, holding his own cup of tea, while Mr. Wells took the recliner.

"Now, I am H.G. Wells," he explained to Lois.

As Lois opened her mouth to protest, Mr. Wells continued

saying, “I know that this will all seem hard to believe, Miss Lane, but it is the truth. You are an excellent reporter. Pretend you are investigating a far-fetched story. Please keep an open mind until you have all the facts.”

Lois closed her mouth and took a sip of her tea.

“As I said before, I am H.G. Wells, and I invented a time machine. I was curious to see what the future held, so I traveled several hundred years into the future, to a place called Utopia. It was created by the descendants of Superman.”

“Superman again!” Lois interrupted. “Who is this Superman?”

“He is a man from another planet, the planet Krypton to be exact,” Mr. Wells explained. “He was sent here to Earth as a baby to escape the destruction of his home world. Our yellow sun gives him tremendous powers here on Earth, and he uses them to protect the people and the planet.”

“How come I have never heard of him?” Lois asked.

“He had not made his public appearance before you left for the Congo,” Mr. Wells answered.

“But you said he came to Earth as a baby. What has he been doing all that time?” Lois’ reporter skills took over.

Mr. Wells answered, “He was living here on Earth – living a regular life – without anyone knowing of the powers he has.”

“What kind of powers does he have?” Lois asked.

“He has super-strength and speed. He has x-ray vision, heat vision, super-hearing, and ...” Mr. Wells paused before adding, “he can fly.”

With a start, Lois remembered their departure from the Congo – Clark lifting them up and flying away. She whipped her head to look at him. “You?” she said incredulously. “You are Superman?”

Clark just looked at Lois and nodded.

Lois stood up and started pacing. The memories of her conversation with Tempus were quickly returning. “Wait a minute,” she finally said, looking at Clark. “Tempus said that you needed me to become a superhero – that you were a pathetic shell of a man living in Kansas, browbeaten by your girlfriend.”

Clark answered, “That was true a couple of years ago, but not anymore. I don’t live here in Kansas now. I live in Metropolis.”

“Metropolis?” Lois was surprised to hear.

“Yes, Metropolis. I don’t have a girlfriend anymore. We broke up when I decided to become Superman,” Clark answered.

“And what does Superman do?” Lois asked.

“Anything that is needed to keep the world safe,” Clark answered simply.

“Miss Lane,” Mr. Wells interrupted, “if you let me continue my story, things will become clearer to you.”

“All right,” Lois agreed, sitting back down again.

“As I was saying, I went into the future to Utopia. Utopia is a wonderful place, a place of peace. Crime and war are gone. People work together for the betterment of mankind.” Mr. Wells stopped his explanation for a moment as he remembered Utopia. “When I was there, I met a man, a very personable and friendly man, who wanted to travel in my time machine with me and explore history. He was so convincing that I took him with me, only to discover that he hated Superman and everything Utopia stood for. He wanted to stop it from being created. That man was Tempus.”

“How was he going to stop Utopia from being created?” Lois asked.

“By going back into the past and killing Superman when he was a baby,” Mr. Wells explained.

Lois turned her head and looked at Clark, “Tempus tried to kill you?”

Clark looked helplessly at Mr. Wells. How could he explain that it wasn’t him that Tempus tried to kill but the other Clark in the other world?

“That’s all right, Clark,” Mr. Wells said. “Lois, have you ever had a story with so many layers that you couldn’t fully comprehend it until you had unraveled every layer?”

“Yes, many times,” she answered.

“This story has many layers. Please give us time to explain them all to you,” Mr. Wells pleaded.

“So did Tempus try to kill Clark as a baby or not?” Lois demanded impatiently.

“He did,” Clark answered, “but it wasn’t me.”

“It wasn’t you,” Lois said skeptically. “Then who was it?”

Knowing there was no other way around it, Clark answered, “It was a Clark Kent from another dimension.”

“Another dimension?” Lois repeated quietly. Jumping up and heading for the door, Lois declared, “OK, that’s it. I’m out of here. It’s been interesting. Bye!”

“Lois!” Clark said, rushing after her. “Lois, please!” Gently, he grabbed her arms. Lois struggled and beat her fists against him, but it was no use. Clark put his arms around her and flew straight up into the Kansas sky above the farm. Afraid of falling, Lois stopped struggling.

“You must be absolutely mad,” Lois said. “Or think I am mad to believe you!”

“Lois, you are the smartest person I know,” Clark said. “I do not think you are mad. You just don’t have all the facts you need to have this make sense to you.”

“We’ve never met before, so how can you know me? See? All your ‘facts’ are just too hard to believe!” Lois answered.

“I know, believe me, I know,” Clark admitted, “but they are the truth anyway.”

Looking down, they saw Mr. Wells exit the house and head to the barn.

“Where is he going?” Lois asked.

“To bring help and proof,” Clark answered.

“Proof?” she asked.

“Yes, proof that what we are telling you is the truth,” Clark answered. “Lois, this is not going to be easy. I have to be honest and tell you there is a lot more to take in. It’s a lot for me to take in, and I lived through it, but I promise you we will tell you everything you want to know until you understand all of it. It will take time. Please trust me.”

Lois stayed still and quiet in Clark’s arms. She was aware that the fact she was with a flying “super” man gave credence to the rest of Clark’s story. Her reporter’s instincts took over as she realized she did need to know all the facts. What was it about this man that made her trust him? Why was she so drawn to him?

She looked him in the eyes and said, “I’m trying, Clark, but this is all so incredibly unbelievable.”

“I know, Lois, and I’m sorry,” Clark said empathetically. After a pause, he continued, “Lois, if I take you back down to the ground, will you stay and listen until you have all the facts? There is still so much that you don’t know – things you need to know if you are going to go back to Metropolis.”

Again, Lois looked into Clark’s eyes. She didn’t fully understand it, but something about those eyes caused her to trust him. “Do you think you could feed me while we wait?” Lois asked.

Clark burst out laughing. Lois joined in as he floated back down to the ground, and they walked together into the house. Once inside, Clark said, “Lois, I want to show you something.” He led her to his old bedroom, now the guest room. “Mr. Wells and I bought some clothes and personal items for you if you would like to freshen up while I am getting lunch ready. The bathroom is through that door,” Clark said, pointing to another door in the hallway.

“Thank you, Clark. It would be nice to get out of these clothes,” Lois said, pointing to her wrinkled and water-stained business suit. Clark only nodded in reply, stepped out of the

room, and quietly shut the door. Lois looked around the room and stopped in front of the full-length mirror.

“Was it only this morning that I first put this outfit on?” she wondered to herself. Lois was sure that this was the strangest day she had ever experienced, and in her work as a reporter, she had encountered many strange things. Still not fully convinced that she wasn’t dreaming, Lois changed into the clothing Clark had provided for her. They were simple items – jeans, shirt, and sneakers – yet they fit her. Another odd coincidence in this strange situation she was in.

Lois heard voices from the other room. “Mr. Wells must have returned,” she said aloud to herself, wondering what “proof” he had brought with him. When Lois heard a woman’s voice, she was surprised. Curious, she walked out of the bedroom and down the hallway towards the kitchen.

“Clark? Mr. Wells?” she said, hesitantly entering the room. Lois stopped short when she saw not only Clark and Mr. Wells but also another Clark and herself, another Lois – only this Lois had shorter hair and was fashionably dressed.

They stared at each other for a moment; then Mr. Wells broke the silence and said, “Miss Lane, I would like you to meet your counterpart from the other dimension, Lois Lane, and her husband, Clark Kent.”

Seeing the confused and shocked look on Lois’ face, the short-haired Lois came forward, grabbed her hands, and said, “Welcome, Lois. Mr. Wells has told us all about your horrible encounter with Tempus and your rescue by Clark. You must be feeling totally overwhelmed by all this. Please come and sit down. Clark tells us that you haven’t eaten. Let’s have lunch.”

“Yes, Lois,” said the Clark she knew. “Come and eat. Lois and Clark are here to help answer your questions.”

As Lois sat in a chair, Clark placed a plate of food in front of her. Everyone else sat down around the table. It was a simple lunch of sandwiches and soup eaten in silence as they all gave Lois time to think and adjust. Lois ate mindlessly, looking at the faces of the people sitting around the table. The two Clarks were identical except for the way they wore their hair and the fact that the other one wore glasses. The other Lois and her husband sat close together, communicating silently through their glances. The Clark she knew, her Clark, looked nervous, keeping his head down and hardly eating a thing. Only Mr. Wells seemed comfortable at this odd table.

The other Lois looked at her husband and said, “Clark, what is it?”

Lois swung her eyes back to Lois’ husband. He did indeed look disturbed by something.

“It’s just that I’ve never been in this kitchen without my parents being around. I mean, I’ve eaten in the kitchen by myself – but never with the knowledge that they are gone. I’m sorry, Clark,” he said, looking at his double. “I’m sorry that you’ve had to live so much of your life without them.”

“Your parents are dead?” Lois asked her Clark. He nodded in reply.

She looked at the other Clark. “And your parents are still alive?” He nodded in response as well.

Mr. Wells explained, “There are many subtle differences like that between the two worlds, Miss Lane.”

“Oh,” was her only response. She looked at her Clark and asked, “What happened to your parents?”

He looked at her and answered, “They were killed in a car crash when I was ten, but ...” and with this, he turned his gaze to include the other Lois and Clark, “I found out that it was Tempus who killed them.”

“What?” said all the occupants at the table.

“Yes, after I watched him get rid of Lois in the river, he said that it was as easy as getting rid of the Kents,” Clark explained.

“I can’t believe that,” said the other Clark.

“Well, I can!” said his wife. “Think about it, Clark. Think about how your parents have helped you to become the person you are – honest, confident, good.” She looked at the Clark who was not her husband and said, “Tempus wanted to eradicate their influence from your life. Remember how timid and insecure you were when we first met?”

Clark nodded in response. Then the other Lois continued, “You see? He succeeded somewhat.”

They all sat quietly, lost in their individual thoughts. Lois was still unsure of everything that was being said, but she was intuitive enough to know when there needed to be a change of subject. So she attempted to make such a change of subject by saying to the other Lois and Clark, “So, Mr. Wells tells me that you have had dealings with this Tempus guy as well.”

The other Lois looked at her with a grateful expression and answered, “We sure have, and each experience with him has gotten worse and worse.”

Lois looked at the other Clark and asked, “He tried to kill you as a baby? Is that right?”

“Yes,” Clark answered. “When Mr. Wells realized what Tempus was up to, he came to our Metropolis to enlist my help in stopping him. Lois and I ended up in Smallville in 1866 and 1966 before we were able to do that.”

“What happened?” Lois asked.

Mr. Wells answered, “After meeting with Lois and Clark, I took Tempus to 1866 to give them here time to build another time machine. It only delayed us for a short time, so when Tempus forced us to go to the year 1966, he was able to take the baby Clark from the space capsule along with some Kryptonite that was lying nearby.”

“Kryptonite? What is that?” Lois asked.

Her Clark answered, “It is a piece of the planet Krypton that crashed here on Earth along with my space capsule. It is the only substance known that can harm me.”

“What does it do?” Lois asked.

Her Clark answered again, “I’ve only encountered it one time, but it caused extreme pain and weakness, affecting my powers. Continued exposure would lead to my death.”

The other Clark jumped in, “That is what the green Kryptonite does. The red Kryptonite has other effects.”

“Red Kryptonite?” asked Clark. “I’ve never heard of that. What does it do?”

“The first time I was exposed, it made me apathetic. Another time, it made my powers go into overdrive. I couldn’t control them,” explained the other Clark.

“And don’t forget the time red Kryptonite was used in a laser beam and transferred your powers to other people,” the other Lois added.

“Amazing!” answered Clark. “Are there any other kinds of Kryptonite?”

“Not that we know of,” answered the other Lois. “At least Lex Luthor isn’t around to discover more if there is.”

Lois asked, “Lex Luthor? What does he have to do with it?”

The other Lois and her husband looked at each other and then back at her. “He was our worst nightmare,” the other Lois answered.

“What did he do?” Lois wondered.

“He sabotaged the space program and allowed his nuclear reactor to leak into the water supply,” the other Clark began. “He also blew up the Daily Planet in order to get Lois to agree to marry him.”

That Lois interrupted, “He tried to kill Superman in a Kryptonite cage and then committed suicide when he failed.”

“But that wasn’t the end of him,” the other Clark continued. “He came back from the dead and tried to capture Lois again, but he was caught and finally jailed for his many crimes. From his prison cell, he replaced the President of the United States with a

clone who authorized his release. Then he kidnapped Lois on our wedding day and replaced her with a clone.”

“His ultimate plan was to transfer his soul and my soul into other bodies so that Superman would never be able to find us,” the other Lois finished.

“Where is he now?” asked Lois.

“He is dead,” the other Clark stated simply.

Lois looked confused. “What is it?” her counterpart asked.

“I just don’t understand why a former tennis pro would want to do that,” Lois said.

“Tennis pro?” the other Lois and her husband said together.

“Yes,” replied Lois. “Lex Luthor was a world-class tennis player in the ‘80s when he injured himself and had to stop playing.”

Her Clark continued, “He was quite a playboy but went bankrupt. Now he does infomercials for hair products and exercise equipment.”

The other Lois looked again at her husband, and they both sputtered before bursting into uncontrollable laughter.

“What’s so funny?” asked Lois, who always hated being left out of a joke. “Who was Lex Luthor in your world?”

The other Lois sobered and answered, “He was the third richest man in the world and owned more than half of Metropolis. He was rich and powerful.”

“And evil,” the other Clark continued. “They say absolute power corrupts absolutely, and in Luthor’s case, it certainly did.”

They were all silent for a moment; then Clark said, “Well, we certainly got off topic. Where were we?”

Mr. Wells jumped in, “We were explaining to Lois how Tempus was going to kill baby Clark with Kryptonite.”

“That’s right,” answered Lois. She looked at the other Clark. “Obviously, you stopped him. How did you do it?”

He answered, “I didn’t do it. Lois did.”

“You did?” asked Lois, incredulously looking at the other Lois.

Slightly abashed, Lois nodded and said, “Clark was in no shape to do anything. He was virtually vanishing before my eyes – as if his life was being erased. I did what I had to.”

“She was marvelous. Tempus didn’t stand a chance,” the other Clark said, looking with pride and admiration at his wife’s face. Unembarrassed by their show of affection, the other Lois turned to Lois and said, “Superman took baby Clark back to the space capsule so the Kents could find him, and Mr. Wells wiped our memories and then took us home.”

“Wiped your memories? Why?” asked Lois, trying to figure out all the amazing facets of this story.

“Because,” answered Mr. Wells, “Lois wasn’t supposed to know that Clark was Superman at that time. Tempus had rushed the process.”

“That is something I still do not understand. I know you two are Superman, but what is Superman? Who is he?” Lois looked at the other Lois and asked, “How could you know Clark and not this Superman person?”

“You’ve never seen Superman?” the other Lois asked, looking accusingly at the Clark of this world. He shook his head. “Show her,” the other Lois demanded. When Clark hesitated, she demanded, “Show her!” She turned to her husband and said, “You, too!”

The two Clarks looked at each other and then stood. While Lois’ husband spun in a whirl of blue to reveal Superman, Clark walked into the closet, closed the door, and came immediately out again dressed as Superman.

Lois couldn’t help but smile. It wasn’t every day she saw two men dressed in capes and tights.

“So, that’s Superman,” she said slowly. Her Clark sat down at the table still dressed as Superman. The other Clark spun around and was back in his regular clothes.

“And you didn’t know that he was Superman?” Lois asked her counterpart, not believing that she could have been so blind.

“Hard to believe, but embarrassingly true,” the other Lois answered.

“My parents and Lois are the only ones who know that I am Superman,” her husband explained. “I wanted to use my powers for good, but I didn’t want to give up my life as Clark to do it. That’s when I decided to create a disguise, another persona, to use the powers while I lived my life as Clark.”

“And no one recognized you. Not even you,” she said, looking at her counterpart. “I find that amazing.”

“At first, I was worried that someone would recognize me,” the other Clark said.

“But,” his wife interrupted, “he is so mild-mannered and lives such a quiet life that no one puts it together that Superman is Clark. We like it that way. It allows us to live normal lives.”

“Normal?” doubted Lois.

“Well, as normal as it can be when you are married to a man with superpowers,” the other Lois admitted with a grin.

Lois looked at her Clark and asked, “And do you have a secret identity as well?”

“No, everyone here knows that I am Superman,” he answered. “But I do wear glasses when I am Clark.” He picked his glasses up off the side table where he had dropped them earlier in the day and put them on. “See?”

“Well, if everyone knows you are Superman, why do you still need the suit? Can’t you just save people dressed as Clark?” Lois asked.

Clark thought for a moment and answered Lois. “It is kind of like what Clark here said – about living a normal life. My normal life is being Clark. My job is being Superman. The suit is like a uniform – you know, like a police officer or firefighter. They wear uniforms when they are performing their jobs but not in their lives at home.”

“And do people leave you alone when you are being Clark? They don’t mob you at every turn?” asked the other Clark, wondering how he lived with his identity known.

“At first, it was like that, but not so much anymore,” Clark answered. “People are grateful that I am here, but they do not bother me. Nor do they try to befriend me. In many ways, it is so much less complicated being Superman than being Clark.”

“That must be lonely, isolating,” said the other Lois.

Clark just shrugged his shoulders in response.

Lois brought the conversation back around to where they were before. She said to Lois and Clark, “OK, so you go back to your lives not remembering your encounter with Tempus, and then what happens?”

“Then I meet Tempus and Mr. Wells again, less than a year later for me, but sixteen years later for Mr. Wells,” the other Lois started.

“This time travel stuff just keeps getting weirder and weirder,” Lois muttered to herself.

The other occupants at the table smiled in agreement. Then her Clark said, “Do you need a break, Lois, before we continue? It is a lot to take in.”

“Thank you, Clark, for asking, but I am fine,” Lois said back to him with a smile. The other Lois and Clark looked at each other and also smiled. They knew what Lois and Clark were experiencing, as they remembered the early days of attraction from their relationship.

“Just give me a couple of seconds to clean up the kitchen,” Clark said. Lois watched with amazement as Clark moved around the kitchen in a blur. Within ten seconds, everything was cleaned and put away. She looked at the other Lois, her jaw hanging open. Her counterpart just smiled in return and said, “It comes in handy.” Then they both chuckled.

“OK, where were we?” said Clark, sitting back at the table.

"Tempus encounter Number 2," said the other Clark. "You three will have to tell this part of the story."

Lois looked at her double expectantly. The other Lois began, "It was about a week before our first wedding when a strange man accosted me. He kept talking to me like he knew me. He forced me into this strange contraption at gunpoint, and the next thing I knew I was in a cemetery looking at my grave. Mr. Wells appeared, an older Mr. Wells, and told me the story that you just heard about Tempus trying to kill Superman as a baby, and it all came back to me as if in a dream. Neither of us knew why Tempus had brought us to this place. It was here – your dimension. Similar to mine, but different, darker. Crime was rampant. Guns visible everywhere you looked. I knew I had to find the Clark of this dimension if I wanted to get home. So when I saw your Clark at the Planet, I thought all my problems were solved."

"The Daily Planet?" Lois interrupted. Then she directed a question at Clark. "Why were you at the Planet?"

"I work there," he answered.

"But I work at the Planet. How come I have never seen you there?" Lois asked in agitation.

"Because you disappeared in March of '93 and I didn't start working there until September of '93," Clark explained, not quite grasping Lois' confusion.

"What?" Lois jumped out of her chair. "What do you mean? Today is March 8, 1993. What do you mean you didn't start working at the Planet until September?"

Clark opened his mouth to answer, only to close it again, unsure what to say.

The other Lois had no difficulty in finding words to say. She looked at Clark and Mr. Wells and said, "You didn't tell her?"

Clark shook his head and then hung it in regret.

The other Lois looked at her husband and said, "I can't believe they didn't tell her."

"Tell me what?" Lois demanded.

The other Lois stood and walked over to her long-haired double. "Lois," she said, gently looking into her eyes. "It is not 1993 anymore. It is March of 1997."

"What?" said Lois, jerking her head back as if she had been slapped.

"Come sit down," pleaded the other Lois. "Let us talk about this calmly and rationally." She looked at Clark with a glare as Lois went back to her seat. Then she sat in her chair and reached for her husband's hand.

Mr. Wells, deciding these two couples needed privacy, quietly excused himself.

"Lois," said Clark humbly. "You need to understand that you disappeared in the Congo in March of 1993. No one knew what happened to you. Perry sent people to search for you. No trace of you was ever found. That was your grave Lois saw. A year after you went missing, you were pronounced dead. The Planet held a memorial service for you and placed the grave marker. You've been gone from Metropolis for four years."

Here, Clark paused, giving his words time to sink in. After looking at the other Lois and Clark for encouragement, he continued, "I just spent a few days with Lois in her dimension, and it made me realize that this world needed its Lois Lane. So Mr. Wells and I went back in time to discover what had happened to you. We watched Tempus kill you and your kidnappers before disappearing back into a time portal. Then we planned out step by step how to rescue you without Tempus knowing, so that we could we bring you here. I'm sorry if that was selfish of me."

"Why couldn't you rescue me and then leave me to live my life? Why did you rob me of four years?" Lois wondered.

"Because our world is connected with their world," Clark answered, gesturing to Lois and Clark. "I had to be careful that my actions didn't affect our timeline or their timeline. In our

timeline, you didn't exist after March of '93. Letting you live in it would change our history and possibly theirs. In bringing you here now, the past of both worlds is still intact. The future is whatever you make of it."

Lois sat in stunned silence, trying to absorb the fact that four years of her life had just vanished.

The other Clark said quietly, "Lois, I know what you are experiencing is overwhelming, but please do not look at it as losing four years of your life. Think of it as gaining the rest of your life. If Clark hadn't rescued you and brought you here, you would have no life to live at all."

Lois took a deep, shuddering breath, letting Clark's words sink in. He was right, and she knew it. No wonder her Clark didn't want her to go back to Metropolis without all the facts. She had to learn about her world all over again. "OK," she said to the other Lois, trying to restart the conversation, "so you saw Clark at the Planet, and then what?"

"I soon found out that he didn't know me or know about Superman," Lois answered. "I knew that to defeat Tempus and return to my world, Superman had to come into being. So, with the help of Mr. Wells, we told Clark everything – about Tempus, about the other dimension, about Superman. He looked like you've looked since Clark's and my arrival – slightly dazed."

Lois looked at her Clark. He smiled at her and said, "It's a bit overwhelming, isn't it?"

She nodded and asked him, "What did you do?"

"I let Lois convince me that I needed to become Superman. I felt silly in the suit – the tights and cape – but once I went and acted the part, I became Superman. For the first time in my life, I finally knew my purpose for being here. It felt really good," admitted Clark.

"Little did we know that it was all part of Tempus' plan," the other Lois said. "He wanted me to help Clark become Superman so he could destroy him with Kryptonite."

"It all turned out all right in the end," Clark said before Lois could go into how he ate the bomb and became a superhero. "Tempus was stopped, and Lois returned to her world."

"And Tempus was arrested and jailed in our world," the other Clark added. "Until he escaped and we encountered him again just this past week."

Before Lois could ask about this encounter, they all heard Mr. Wells calling from the other room. "Clark, you'd better come see this."

Mr. Wells had been watching the 24-hour news channel. The news report was showing pictures of a mudslide in California.

"I'm sorry, Lois. I've gotta go," Clark said.

"Let me go," his counterpart offered.

"No, this is my world, my responsibility. I will be back as soon as I can," Clark said, quickly removing his glasses before flying off in a flash.

"Superman in action," said Lois, finally understanding.

"Superman in action," the other Lois agreed.

They turned their attention to the television as the announcer spoke about an eight-nation summit that President Heston was attending.

"It still amazes me that Charlton Heston is your President," said Clark.

"Why? Who is the President in your world?" asked Lois.

Before Clark could answer, the news announcer broke in with a late-breaking story about a fire at the Mall of America in Minnesota. In a swirl of blue, Clark disappeared, and Superman stood in his place.

"Clark, are you sure that two Supermen should be out at the same time?" asked his worried wife.

"I don't know, Lois, but those people need help," Clark declared.

Lois reached up to kiss her husband. "Be careful," she

warned.

"Be good," he responded back with a smile. Then he was gone.

"I think I am starting to understand a little bit more about Superman," said Lois. "Is he always like that?"

"Ever since I met him," answered the other Lois. "He cannot sit by and do nothing. It used to get him in trouble when he would disappear in the middle of a conversation with only a flimsy excuse about returning a movie or getting his cheese-of-the-month order."

"Ladies," interrupted Mr. Wells, "if you will excuse me, I think I will go and rest." He bowed slightly, went into his bedroom, and shut the door.

"So," said Lois, turning off the television and sitting on the sofa. "Can I ask you some personal questions?"

"Sure," said the other Lois, taking the loveseat opposite.

"You look like me, except for the hair, of course, but ... " here, Lois paused, unsure how to tactfully ask her question.

"Go ahead," her double encouraged.

"But, the way you act, your mannerisms, your attitudes, I don't recognize myself. Ugh!" Lois groaned in frustration. "I cannot explain what I mean!"

"You mean that I look like you, but I do not act aggressively or controlling," the other Lois answered back.

"Exactly!" said Lois, pointing to her counterpart. "Is it because your childhood was different from mine? Did you live with your parents and a sister, Lucy?"

"I do have a younger sister, Lucy, and our parents divorced when I was a young girl. It had quite a profound impact upon me," the other Lois explained.

"My parents never divorced, but I wished they had," Lois said.

"Why?"

"Because they were always fighting and arguing, which drove my mother to drink. She was not a happy drunk. It eventually killed her," said Lois with a frown.

"My mother became an alcoholic too," the other Lois admitted, "but she was able to beat it. She has been on the wagon for many years now. I am sorry that your mother died. Are you close to your dad?"

"Not really. He was always busy with his work. I don't know why he had a family when we were obviously an inconvenience to him," Lois said with a sigh.

"Now that sounds like my father," said the other Lois. "It has only been since Clark and I got engaged that I have had any relationship with him at all. He and my mother are even considering reconciliation – if you can believe that."

"I hope it works out for them. Being together was horrible for my parents – and for Lucy and me," Lois responded. Then she asked, "So, have you always been the laidback, easygoing person I see before me now?"

The other Lois laughed out loud. "Not at all! Clark would laugh to hear you call me easygoing."

"But to me you are!" Lois protested. "What made the change?"

"Clark," the other Lois answered simply. "If anyone would have told me back in 1993 that I would enjoy working with a partner and eventually fall in love and marry him, I would have laughed out loud. I was more interested in becoming the best reporter in Metropolis and winning a Pulitzer Prize."

"That sounds like me," Lois answered. "I am more interested in my career than men."

"The right man makes all the difference. Loving Clark and letting myself be loved in return has changed me. I've learned to trust someone wholeheartedly, and that changes a person from the inside out. I don't have to be totally focused on my career or be the best reporter in Metropolis to be considered valuable.

Because of Clark, I can relax and be my true self. That is something I never would have dreamed of in 1993."

"Ahh," Lois responded, not really understanding.

"But don't think that I am a marshmallow. I am tenacious, even reckless, when going after a story, and I am a formidable foe when an injustice has occurred. I still dream of winning a Pulitzer. In those ways, I have not changed," the other Lois continued.

"I guess I could see that," Lois agreed, "especially after watching you take on both Clarks when you found out I hadn't seen Superman yet or when you realized I didn't know what year it was." They both chuckled in remembrance.

"Did you do the gunrunning story in the Congo in '93?" Lois asked, changing the subject.

"I went to the Congo, but I did not get the story," the other Lois answered.

Lois asked, "How come?"

"I got food poisoning from eating the hotel food. I was trying to avoid this really annoying girl I met on the plane, so I stayed in and ordered room service. It was a huge mistake." Her explanation was interrupted by Lois giving a snort of laughter.

"What?" the other Lois inquired.

"Was it a woman named Sally Strong?" Lois asked.

"Heavens, I don't remember her name. All I remember is that she talked constantly on the plane, going on and on about her fiancé. When she invited me to join them for dinner, I was ready to escape," the other Lois said. "Only I got sicker than I have ever been in my life and spent the next few days in the hospital. By the time I was released, my leads had all dried up. My story was gone."

"I met that same woman and her fiancé," Lois said in amazement. "I ordered dinner from room service, too, only the hotel caught on fire before it was delivered. That's when I was captured." She stopped speaking, remembering the horror she had experienced. And as she sat thinking, she finally asked the one question that had been in her thoughts all day. "Why did he do it?"

"Why did who do what?" asked the other Lois in confusion.

"Why did Clark rescue me? Why did he give me my life back?" Lois asked.

"Because you are his soul mate," the other Lois said gently.

"His soul mate?" Lois queried.

"Yes. That is something else Clark and I learned from another encounter with Mr. Wells. He appeared on our wedding night, believe it or not, telling us that we could not consummate our marriage because there was a curse upon us," the other Lois began.

"A curse?" Lois said in disbelief.

"Yes, apparently Clark and my souls have been together again and again over time, and every time our marriage was consummated, I died. So we had to go back into the past to stop the curse," the other Lois answered.

"Who put the curse on you?" Lois asked, already suspecting the answer.

"Temps, of course," came the reply. "It took two attempts, to medieval England and to the old West, to break the curse completely."

Lois sat back on the sofa and looked up at the ceiling and said with a sigh, "This has been the weirdest day of my life." She stared off into space, deep in thought. The other Lois was quiet, giving her time to gather her thoughts.

"Lois," Lois said, "what do I do now? How do I act around a perfect stranger who is in love with me? Who thinks I am his soul mate? Do you know how awkward that is?"

Her counterpart smiled and said, "Actually, I do. My Clark fell in love with me first as well, but ... " She didn't finish her sentence, as her Superman flew back into the house. He spun

around and was back to being Clark.

"Is everything OK?" his wife asked.

"The fire is out. No one was seriously hurt. Thank goodness," he answered. Clark hesitated in walking toward them and said, "Should I leave? Am I interrupting something?"

"No, stay," his wife encouraged, patting the seat next to hers. "Lois here has asked a question, and I think you are the perfect person to answer it."

Clark sat on the love seat next to his wife, looked at Lois expectantly, and said, "What can I help you with?"

Embarrassed, Lois looked down at the floor. Her counterpart stepped in and said, "Lois wants to know how to act around a man who is in love with her when she hardly knows him. Sound familiar?"

Clark smiled at his wife and then turned his attention to the woman who was so much like her. "Lois," he said, "Please look at me." When Lois lifted her head, Clark said, "I've only met your Clark a couple of times, but I am fairly certain that I am telling you what he would tell you. Whatever relationship you choose to have with Clark, he will always be your friend. He will watch out for you, protect you, and always work for your good."

"That's a lot of pressure," Lois said.

"There is no pressure," said the other Clark. "Just make room for him in your life, in whatever capacity you are comfortable with. That is all he wants – to be part of your life and have you be a part of his."

"You mean I should trust him," Lois observed.

Her counterpart gave her a knowing look and said, "Lois, don't you trust him already?"

Lois sat for a moment lost in thought and then admitted, "Yes. Yes, I do trust Clark, which is unusual for me. I don't trust anyone this quickly."

"I know," her double answered. "I know. I don't either, but your trust is well placed. He is a good man. You just need time to get to know him. You are fortunate because you already know his greatest secret. You know Clark as Superman. I first knew them as two different individuals, which was hard on both of us."

"Let me guess," Lois said, looking at Clark. "You got tired of always having to lie." Then she turned to Lois and said, "And you eventually figured it out on your own and were hopping mad because he had deceived you."

The other Clark whistled in disbelief at Lois' astuteness and said to his wife, "She's good. Almost as good as you."

"Well," Lois said humbly, "I am an investigative reporter."

The other Lois laughed and said, "Your reporter's instincts are correct, and it took a lot of time and patience for us to work it out."

"But you did," Lois commented.

"Yes, we did, and it was worth it," said Clark, taking his wife's hand and kissing it.

Lois looked at the couple and admired their relationship. Perhaps she even envied them. Uncomfortable with the turn of her thoughts, Lois changed the subject.

"So, you first met Tempus when he tried to kill baby Clark. Then you met him here, Lois, when he tried to kill Superman and then again when you had to break the curse he put on your marriage. Right?" she said.

"You told her about the curse?" Clark asked his wife.

She shrugged her shoulders in reply and said to her double, "We encountered him one more time, last week in our world, and it was the worst experience yet."

"What happened?" Lois asked.

Clark began, "Tempus broke out of the psychiatric hospital he was in, but no one knew because he was able to replace himself with a double. Then he started calling himself John Doe. He had some sort of mind-controlling device and was able to get himself elected President."

"It was awful," the other Lois continued. "He hired thugs for his Cabinet and planned to execute people who did not obey his laws. Even Superman was targeted with new laws. It was terrifying."

"I can only imagine," Lois said sympathetically.

"But the worst part came when Tempus tricked Superman into a time portal which exploded, trapping him in eternity. I was devastated! Clark was gone, and the world had gone crazy. Then Mr. Wells showed up at my door with your Clark. At first, I didn't want him there, but he stayed and kept the peace and gave the country hope, gave me hope. Clark was finally able to help discover how Tempus was controlling everyone's minds and stopped him. He was wonderful! We couldn't have done it without him," the other Lois said in remembrance.

Just then, the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Superman. The room got quiet when he entered, leading him to realize that he had been the subject of conversation.

To break the awkward silence, Lois said what she heard her counterpart say to her Superman a little while before, "Is everything OK?"

"It is quite a mess, but I think everything is stable for now," Clark explained. "If you will excuse me, I need to get cleaned up," he said, gesturing to his filthy suit. As he walked toward the bathroom, he bumped into Mr. Wells coming out of his room. "Excuse me, Mr. Wells," Clark said politely.

"Certainly! Certainly!" he said to Clark's retreating back. Walking into the living room and seeing the other Clark and both Loises, Mr. Wells said, "I've been thinking! I am going to take the time machine into the future to talk with a man I know there. I want him to look at the timelines of both of your worlds to see if you will have any more dealings with Tempus."

"They can do that?" asked Lois.

"In the future, yes, they can," Mr. Wells answered. "Let us be certain that we are done with Tempus once and for all. I will not be gone long; then I will take Lois and Clark back to their world." With that, he left the house on his errand to the future, and Clark cleaned up and dressed in his regular clothing, came into the living room, picked up his glasses, put them on, and sat in the recliner.

"Everything OK here?" he inquired.

"Fine," answered his counterpart. "We were just telling Lois about how you helped save our world from Tempus."

"Was it strange being in the other dimension?" Lois asked Clark.

"It was at first," Clark answered, "but Lois and her Metropolis needed help. Their Superman was gone, so I did what I thought he would want me to do. I stepped into his place until he could be rescued."

"How were they able to rescue you from being trapped in eternity?" Lois asked the other Clark.

He replied, "Lois was able to find the exact moment in time where I was trapped. She and Mr. Wells came in the time machine and rescued me."

"Just in the nick of time," said his wife in a voice still emotional with the memory of that rescue.

Clark looked at Lois and asked, "Do you have any more questions you would like answered before Lois and Clark leave?"

Lois sat in silence for a few minutes, thinking of all she had learned that day. Finally, she replied, "There is so much to take in, but I don't think I have any more questions right now." She looked at the other Lois and her husband and said, "I cannot tell you how much I appreciate you coming to talk with me. Clark will tell you how skeptical I was at first. I thought he was a raving lunatic. Your being here made the difference. Thank you."

Before they could respond back, Mr. Wells walked through the doorway. "I've spoken to my friend, Andrus. You remember him, don't you, Lois?" The other Lois nodded.

Mr. Wells continued, “First of all, Andrus stressed to me the importance of not giving you specific details about future events so as to keep the timelines unscathed. That said, Andrus checked the timelines of both your worlds from today until his time, and there are no further incursions of Tempus that affect both of your worlds simultaneously.”

“That’s good news,” Lois said with relief.

“Yes, it is good news. Tempus has been taken out of your world and a duplicate left behind.” Mr. Wells directed that comment to the other Clark. “Andrus showed me the prison portal in which they are holding the real Tempus. He also told me that they have found a way to offer Tempus some rehabilitation. I did not understand all the details, but they are hopeful that it will help Tempus.”

“Wait a minute, Mr. Wells,” Lois’ husband interrupted. “You said that there are no incursions that affect both our worlds simultaneously. Does that mean that Tempus can still come back to either of our worlds without his presence affecting the other? That we still need to be on our guard for him?”

Remembering his promise of secrecy to Andrus, Mr. Wells looked at Clark and answered evasively, “I cannot answer you specifically, Clark, but your reasoning is sound.”

Both Clarks looked at each other with grim expressions as they considered future encounters with Tempus.

Clark said, “I guess time will tell.”

“Yes, Clark,” answered Mr. Wells. “Time, in both your worlds, will tell.”

Mr. Wells then turned his attention to Lois, changing the subject, “Unless you have any questions, my dear, I think it is time for me to take our guests back to their world.”

They all stood, and Lois said, “No more questions.”

Her counterpart came and embraced her. Lois was a bit emotional. All she could say in a somewhat choked voice was, “Thank you.”

The other Lois squeezed her hard and whispered in her ear, “Follow your heart, Lois.”

The two Clarks shook hands, and Clark, the husband of Lois, said, “When you were in California, there was a fire in Minnesota that needed attention, so I took the liberty and went there. I hope it won’t cause you problems trying to explain how you were in two places at once.”

“No problem,” said Clark with a grin. “I’ll just let the press speculate. It’s what they do best. Thank you for watching out for my world.”

“I am glad I could return the favor after all you have done for us,” said the other Clark. Then he looked at Lois talking to his wife, leaned forward, and whispered to Clark, “Now we are both the luckiest men alive,” repeating what Clark had said to him in his world.

His double looked back with a grin and agreed, “Both of us!”

Lois shook hands with the husband of her counterpart.

“Thank you, Clark,” she said quietly.

“You are welcome,” he answered to the woman who looked so much like his wife did at the beginning of their relationship. “It was an honor to meet you. I wish you all the best.”

The other Lois gave Clark an embrace and emotionally said, “I am so glad you have found your Lois and won’t be alone anymore. Be patient with her.”

“I will, Lois. I will,” he said, hugging her back. “Thank you!”

“Lois, Clark,” said Mr. Wells to the two staying behind. “I will be taking my leave as well. I think it is time that I retired the time machine and enjoyed my own century for a while. But,” he continued with a wink, “if you ever need me, I will come.”

Lois and Clark embraced Mr. Wells at the same time and were surprised when they said in unison, “How can I ever thank you for all you have done?” Lois and Clark looked at each other and laughed self-consciously. Mr. Wells simply doffed his hat,

bowed, and said, “You are both most heartily welcome.” He turned to the other Lois and Clark and asked, “Ready?”

As Mr. Wells, Clark and Lois walked to the time machine in the fading light of that Kansas day, Lois and Clark stood on the front porch, watching them leave. They both overheard Lois asking her husband, “Clark, do you think I have turned into a big fat marshmallow?”

“What?” was the last they heard from a confused Clark as the group of three entered the barn. With a flash and a crash, they were gone. Then there was silence.

Clark and Lois stood on the porch and looked awkwardly at each other.

“Well,” Clark finally said, “would you like to go into town and get some dinner?”

“Not right now,” Lois answered. “Could we sit on the porch awhile and talk?”

“Sure, sure,” Clark replied, reaching inside the front door to grab a sweater off the rack. He gave it to Lois, saying, “It’s a little chilly out here.” Lois put the sweater on, and they both sat in the porch swing.

“So, where do we go from here?” Clark asked.

“Well, I need to contact my dad and my sister and work on getting my life back in order legally,” Lois answered. “Plus, I need to contact Perry about going back to work at the Planet.”

“Perry doesn’t work at the Planet anymore,” Clark explained.

“He doesn’t?” said Lois, amazed.

“No, he’s the mayor of Metropolis.”

“He is? Perry?” Lois said with a laugh. “Watch out, Metropolis!”

“Actually, he’s doing a great job,” noted Clark.

“I am sure he is,” said Lois. “So, who is the editor at the Planet now?”

“Cat Grant,” Clark answered.

“Cat!” exclaimed Lois. “She was my closest friend at the Planet before she took a job at the New York Times. I should have no problem getting her to rehire me.”

“I don’t think that was ever a problem,” said Clark. “Your reputation still lives on at the Planet, especially after the other Lois came and discovered Superman last year.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Lois. “I forgot. How did you explain her disappearing again? Do people know about the other dimension?”

“I just told people she had to go back with Mr. Wells and help him. I thought it best to keep the existence of another dimension to myself,” said Clark.

“That sounds wise,” Lois agreed. “So, what should we tell people now? How do we explain my missing four years?”

“I don’t think anybody else needs to know all the details. We’ll just tell them that Mr. Wells doesn’t need you anymore and Superman brought you back from the Congo and leave it at that,” Clark responded.

“All right,” Lois agreed. They sat in silence, rocking back and forth in the swing. Clark was alone with this Lois for the first time and was feeling a bit shy. While he was thrilled that Lois was finally in his life, he was wondering if he had been selfish in bringing her here. He had only thought of his needs, not hers. Her life was currently in turmoil because of his actions.

While Clark struggled with his thoughts, Lois, too, was engaged in her own mental battle. Her life had been turned upside down because of this man next to her. She should be angry or resentful at his interference, but when she thought about what he learned about Clark Kent, a.k.a. Superman – about the kindness he showed to her, Mr. Wells, and the Kents; about the personal sacrifices he made as Superman to make the world safer; about his efforts on her behalf to rescue her from Tempus, giving her a life to live – all she felt was gratitude.

“Clark,” Lois said hesitantly.

“Yes, Lois,” Clark answered, turning to face her.

“Thank you for saving my life.”

“You’re welcome,” he answered, turning away again, uncertain as to what else to say.

There was more silence and more swinging, and then Lois began again, “Clark?”

“Yes, Lois,” he answered, still looking into the night sky.

“I want you to know how much I appreciate everything you have done for me, but I think I am going to need time,” Lois began. “Time to think about all that I have experienced. Time to find an apartment. Time to learn all the things I’ve missed over the past four years. Time to get acclimated to a new life with a new boss at the Planet. Time to get to know you. Do you understand what I am saying?”

“Yes, Lois, I do,” Clark answered, turning his whole body towards her to answer. “Take all the time you need. My reasons for bringing you here might have been selfish, but now that I have gotten to know you a little bit, I am so glad that I can live in a world that you are a part of. This world needs you, Lois Lane. I will not make any demands of you or have outrageous expectations. As I said before, I am your friend, and I am so glad that you can now be a part of my life and I can be a part of yours.”

“So am I,” Lois agreed.

They sat in silence a little longer, lost in their thoughts. Finally, Lois got the courage to say, “Clark?”

Clark chuckled lightly and replied, “Yes, Lois,” turning towards her once again.

“The other Lois said that I should follow my heart,” she began, her voice trailing off in uncertainty.

Clark waited expectantly for Lois to complete her thought.

“I’m not totally sure what my heart is saying right now, but I do know this.” And with those words, Lois leaned forward and kissed her Clark. It was a sweet kiss of gratitude and friendship, with the promise of more.

Clark had found his Lois, and now they had all the time in their world.

THE END