

Aurora Borealis – The Complete Story

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Rated: PG-13.

Submitted: March, 2013

Summary: Lois and Clark have just been married and are preparing to leave on their honeymoon when they are interrupted and Lois is kidnapped. Who took her and where is a mystery that needs to be solved.

Comments are always welcomed at ken.janney@kjanney.com

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This story originated with a single scene that I had written as a suggested plot device for another author. It was rejected in favor of another one. I still liked the idea so I wrote a story around it. This is only loosely related to my Matchmaker series.

I wish to thank Artemis and Morgana for the beta on this.

<> denotes thoughts

Words in italics denote emphasis

Chapter 1

The place is Centennial Park in Metropolis and the time is the mid 2400's.

There is an individual sitting on a park bench as numerous people, some of them couples, are passing by. On his face is a sour expression as the couples holding hands, obviously very much in love, walk by and children on skates, hoverboards or simply running and playing nearby, shout with glee.

Looking over in the direction of the quad, there were even families picnicking on blankets and on the grass. As he watched he saw a child scream in delight as she found a four leaf clover and plucked it to show to her less fortunate siblings. Then, to his surprise, the child's siblings, all five of them, found four leaf clovers of their own in the same patch. In a disgusted tone he muttered to himself, "I bet there aren't even any ants." It was an annoyingly pleasant scene.

There was the occasional Peacekeeper, but usually all they did was stroll around, smiling and greeting those they passed. In this society there was little need of the Peacekeepers, what used to be called police, because in this society war and crimes of all kinds had virtually ceased to exist; the super family had seen to that.

It was an idyllic scene. The park was perfectly maintained and the grass almost looked manicured, it was so perfect. There wasn't even a single piece of litter on the ground. A few minutes ago he had seen a child miss the litter basket with a candy wrapper, but before he had even had time to smile, the child had realized what he had done and turned to pick it up and properly place it in the receptacle. All of this ... this ... utopian existence ... grated on the sensibilities of the person on the bench.

Wearing glasses partly as a disguise even though they had really not only gone out of style, but with advanced surgical techniques to correct faulty vision, had been rendered worse than

useless, Tempus fumed over the current state of the world. He had recently managed, through the use of a simulacrum to escape from his prison, a hospital for the criminally insane, and 'acquired' a time window device.

While sitting on the bench he was racking his brain for a new plan to prevent Utopia.

Whatever he came up with, it just had to have an element of irony. God how he loved irony! The more ironic it was the better as far as he was concerned.

As he was pondering he wondered, just what was the *key* event in the creation of Utopia? Suddenly it hit him, almost like a physical blow, of course, the *product* of the union of Lois Lane and Clark Kent! He had to disrupt that union. In the past he had tried to kill Clark Kent as a baby and had been foiled by Lois Lane and his old nemesis, Herb. He had tried trapping Superman in time. Again he had been rescued by Lois Lane and ... Herb. He had had a modicum of revenge, albeit short lived when he had abducted Lois from Prime, as Herb had dubbed it, and used her to create Superman in that alternate universe so that he could expose Clark Kent for the alien that he was. That time, not only had Lois and Herb interfered but his idiot underlings had let him down.

This time whatever he did, he needed to remove any possibility of Lois Lane interfering. That meant that she had to be totally removed, but in order for Herb not to be alerted to the problem she had to still remain in that universe. Ah, but when? That was the question. What if she was there, but ...

That led to the thought, what if he allowed the union, but prevented the consummation of that union. That would eliminate the possibility of offspring and therefore Utopia. How ironic it would be if ...

It had been a lovely and intimate ceremony. Their closest friends and their families had been there and Mike had officiated. After the ceremony they had returned to Metropolis and now they were back home, well, they were now in what used to be Clark's apartment. Just as they were finishing their preparations for their honeymoon, they had been interrupted by Herb. Of all things, there had been a curse put on them and if they consummated their union Lois would die from a mysterious illness.

Herb had taken them on a tour of their previous lives and they had succeeded in defeating the curse and returning the timeline to where it needed to be.

Now, they were back in Clark's, no their, apartment and it was time to follow through on what they had waited so long to do, consummate their marriage.

Lois was still in her orange dress laying on the bed kissing her new husband, who was still in his Superman Suit. They were making out when she made up her mind. It really hadn't taken too much thought for her to make this decision. Her juices were flowing and she could feel his growing excitement as he lay with her, so she decided that there was no way she was going to wait until they were in Hawaii. It was abundantly obvious that he wanted her, that she wanted him and she wanted him *NOW*.

She extricated herself from his arms and said in an alluring tone, "I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere." After standing she scurried into the living room, picked up the small bag that had her black teddy in it and then she scampered back through the bedroom, bag in hand, and headed for the bathroom. It was time to set the mood, she just hoped that she would have the self-control she would need to actually get dressed and not just run out of the bathroom naked, rip the Suit off of him and jump his bones.

Entering the bathroom she closed the door. As she kicked her shoes off and set the bag down, unnoticed, a time window opened behind her. She was only able to release a brief yelp of surprise as Tempus grabbed her from behind and pulled her through the

window. She didn't know it, but the window was closed before Clark could respond.

Not knowing just what had happened and only knowing that she had been grabbed, immediately she started struggling with her assailant and shouting for Clark, "Clark! Help! Clark!" Forgetting that she had kicked off her shoes she tried stomping down on his instep, to no avail. She tried to turn in his grasp so that she could get in a proper blow, but the way he was holding her prevented her from doing that. Undaunted she continued her struggles, calling out for Clark all the while. <Where is he?> She couldn't understand why he didn't respond and rescue her.

Clark was enjoying the fact that he was able to kiss his new bride without concern as to how far things might go. All the stops had been removed. Now they could be one, emotionally and physically.

He had been lying with Lois and his body had been responding to the intimate contact as they had been kissing. He thought to himself, <If we keep this up I may not want to wait until we get to Hawaii. I wonder if she feels the same way. There really is no reason to wait; after all, it's just another room in another state where we would be doing the same thing. It is what we do in the room that matters, not where the room is located.>

As he had finished thinking this Lois had broken their kiss and wiggled out of his arms. He was disappointed, but let her go just the same.

She stood next to the bed and he heard her say, "I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere."

He watched as she scampered into the living room and then back through the bedroom to the bathroom. He thought, <Oh well, if you gotta go, you gotta go. Wait a minute, didn't she take a bag in with her?> He was tempted to use his x-ray vision to see just what she was doing, but decided that he didn't need to start their married life by breaching her privacy, so he resisted the temptation. Undoubtedly she hadn't chosen this minute to take a cold shower, after all getting all hot and bothered and then satisfying those urges together was what a honeymoon was all about. He would just wait patiently and see what happened. He lay back on the bed to relax while he waited.

Suddenly he heard her yelp of surprise and then there was nothing but silence. Her heartbeat had disappeared.

At superspeed he crossed the floor to the bathroom and when he opened the door all that was there was her bag. He shouted, "Lois!" and the profound anguish in his voice was plain. He collapsed to the floor on his knees, overcome by his grief and loss.

It took several minutes for Clark to get himself together and start thinking coherently.

The first question that needed to be answered was why had Lois been kidnapped? The disturbing part of the answer to that question had to be that whoever it was knew his secret identity. That might narrow the field somewhat. Who knew his secret? That should be a rather short list.

Mom and Dad, rule them out.

Jason Mazik – he wouldn't have the means.

The New Kryptonians, they would possibly have the means but what would be their motive?

Herb, he had the means. That new device moved them through time and it didn't require his time sled to do it. He had always tried to help them and bring them together. Rule him out.

Thinking about Herb brought to mind – Tempus. Tempus had the motivation and if he had a device similar to the new one that Herb had used he might just have the means. Okay, so far the only one with motive and, possibly, the means that knew his secret was Tempus. That made him candidate number one.

What had actually happened? First, Lois had gone into the

bathroom, presumably to change clothes for their trip. He stopped right there and thought some more. No, wait, wasn't that the bag with ... Another wave of anguish washed over him at the thought of what she had been planning to put on. When he could think again he resumed his list. Second, no sooner had she closed the door than with his superhearing he had heard her surprised exclamation. Third, her heartbeat had disappeared.

There was only one possible explanation for losing her heartbeat. Somehow, she had been transported far enough away that he couldn't hear it any longer. How could that have happened and how could it have happened so quickly?

The New Kryptonians had a rudimentary teleportation system like they had on Star Trek, but did it work that quickly? Why would the New Kryptonians kidnap Lois? Did they want him to go to New Krypton again? That seemed unlikely. They wouldn't need to kidnap Lois. All they would need to do was make the request. He would have insisted that Lois accompany them anyhow, so that basically ruled out the New Kryptonians, that is, unless another faction similar to Nor's group wanted to actually prevent his interference. This seemed a highly unlikely scenario.

Let's rule that out for the time being. What else was there? What clues were there? How had it actually been done?

Had this enemy of theirs been in the bathroom waiting for her?

No, that was illogical. First, they would have had to have had no heartbeat of their own because he would have heard it. That could mean a robot of some sort. He concentrated on his memory of the moment. He played it back in his eidetic memory like a videotape in slow-mo mode. He had heard the door close and then there was the sound of her bag hitting the floor. Then her surprised yelp. No, wait a second. Go back. There was the sound of her bag hitting the floor and then suddenly there was a second heartbeat. It was rapid but he only heard a total of four beats. Two before Lois' yelp, two after and then silence. Someone materialized in the bathroom with Lois and took her away. She wasn't just snatched away by some sort of transporter beam. There had been human intervention. Someone or some ones had physically grabbed her and pulled her into something and took her somewhere. No, not some ones, someone. There had only been one other heartbeat.

That ruled out a robot.

Then the full reality hit him like a crushing blow. If it was Tempus it could be anywhere *and* any *when*! With the ability to travel through time he could have taken her anytime from the prehistoric past where she could be eaten by a dinosaur to the far distant future of a dead world devoid of humanity.

What other possibilities were there? None.

It all came back to ... Tempus?!?!?!?! But, how could it be him? Wasn't he incarcerated? They had left him in jail in the distant past. Didn't he have that bulky time sled that he had to use? That would seem to rule out Tempus. But, if he had acquired a device similar to the new one Herb had used it could be possible.

Okay, if not Tempus, then who?

Lacking any logical candidates from the past it could be some new enemy. If he didn't hear something, if no new enemy showed up that only left one possibility ... Tempus.

First thing to do would be to scour the city; a daunting task in itself, but the logical starting point. He would have to use all of his powers, sight, hearing, smell to try to locate her. Realizing just how big a job this was going to be he now knew that he was going to need help and a lot of it. There was no time to lose.

Chapter 2

He exited the apartment at superspeed and started combing the city, moving in an ever expanding circle with the apartment as the center. Once he actually got into the search he realized that he

would have to slow down because if he didn't he was liable to miss something.

As he flew he used his x-ray vision to examine every closed space. As he proceeded on this course he quickly realized, as first one then another and another room showed him couples together eating, cuddling, arguing and embarrassingly in intimate contact, that in his attempt to find Lois he would actually be having to breach the privacy of untold numbers of citizens. He had to steel himself to the effort. He thought to himself that locating Lois was more important than that petty concern. Suddenly he stopped in mid flight and came to a hover. Just what was he doing? Why was it that he would just toss his ethics aside when it was Lois who was missing? What would Lois think of him if he did that? His ethics were a big part of what made him Superman and to just throw them away because one person, even if it *was* Lois, was missing would compromise him. He would have to be selective of where he looked.

There were some underground facilities that he couldn't see into because of lead shielding and also some areas that still had lead based paint. These, for the most part were old air raid shelters and older commercial enterprises or apartment houses. They would be the most likely since the person who did this must know his secret so they would also know his weaknesses. He would need police assistance to examine these.

It was still afternoon so he swung by the Planet. As he flew in through the large windows he spotted Jimmy at his desk. As he landed next to him he noted that Jimmy was concentrating on what was on his monitor and didn't realize that he was there. Quietly he said, "Jimmy?"

Surprised, Jimmy looked up at him. Seeing just who it was he quickly switched gears from the research he had been doing and, jumping to his feet, asked, "Superman! What can I do for you?"

Superman folded his arms across his chest and said, "Clark has told me many times just how good a researcher you are. I'd like to ask if you could do something for me."

"Sure Superman! Anything you want. I'll help anyway I can."

"Thanks Jimmy, I appreciate it. I need a city plan with all of the lead lined fallout shelters indicated."

Jimmy's eagerness to help the superhero was obvious as he said, "Sure Superman. How soon do you need it?"

With a sardonic smile Superman said, "Ten minutes ago."

"Wow, that quick, huh?" He sat back down at his desk and brought up his computer in a new search routine. "Let me see what I can find. Just give me a few minutes." He said that as he worked. A few minutes later a printer started spitting out page after page of a composite map of the city. It was broken down by quadrants. When Superman saw this he said, "Thanks, Jimmy! Breaking it down like that will be a big help."

With a satisfied smile he replied "I tried to anticipate what you needed. What's the project?"

Not wishing to reveal too much just yet he replied, "A search for a missing person."

Pleased that his guess had been correct he said, "That's kinda what I thought when you asked for lead lined bunkers. You can't see into them so what are you going to do, ask the MPD to check them out?"

"Yeah, something like that."

"Who's missing, if you don't mind my asking?"

"It would be a little premature to tell you that."

In a conspiratorial tone he said, "Okay, I understand. What if I promised to keep it off the record?"

"Still too early. I need to see what can be done first."

Defeated and yet hopeful, Jimmy replied, "Okay, Superman. If you need any more help, you know how to find me."

"Thanks for the offer, Jimmy. I'll be back." He took the printout and left through the windows the same way he had entered.

As he was leaving Perry came out of his office and shouted, "Olsen!"

Jimmy had been watching Superman fly away and when he heard Perry he looked in his direction. As soon as he made eye contact Perry shouted, "My office!"

"Right away, Chief!" He hustled to the Editor's office.

By the time he got there Perry was already seated behind his desk. He asked, "What'd Superman want?"

"He needed a city map with all the lead lined bomb shelters marked."

Scenting a possible story Perry pressed the issue, "What'd he want that for?"

"He said he was searching for a missing person."

With a knowing look at this confirmation that this could be a story of consequence he kept at it, "At least you got that much. Did you find out just who was missing?"

"Well, no, I didn't, Chief. I asked, but he said it would be too premature to release the name."

Disappointed, Perry challenged, "Why'd you let that stop you? You know, back in the day that would have been like waving a red flag in front of a bull to a good reporter. I would have kept pushing until I had a name."

Jimmy, trying to mitigate his perceived failure, said "I offered to keep it off the record and he still refused. Besides Chief, this is Superman you're talking about. You don't push him."

With a look of superiority he said, "Oh no? If he comes back you just let me handle it, son. The ol master'll show you how it's done. Now, you get outta here and get back to work."

Superman's next stop was the twelfth precinct and Inspector Bill Henderson.

As soon as he walked in, the sergeant on the desk sent him on back.

When he entered Bill's office he got right to the point, "Inspector, I need your help."

With a look of disbelief, Bill asked, "You need my help? I find that a little hard to believe. What can I do for you, Superman?"

"I'm conducting a search for a missing person and there are places that I can't look because they are lead lined."

With sudden understanding Bill asked, "Who are you looking for?"

"I'd rather not say at this point, if you don't mind."

"Can you at least give me a description?"

"Female, about thirty, approximately five-six, slender, weight about 120, brown hair cut short and brown eyes."

Bill gave him a quizzical look as he finished up and asked, "Is this a joke? That description sounds an awful lot like Lois Lane, uh, excuse me, Lois Kent, we just heard about the wedding. What is this? Kent beat you out and married Lois now you're looking for someone like just like her for yourself?"

"Not exactly Inspector. Can you go with me on this? This is actually a very urgent matter."

"Did Kent put you up to this? Are they playing a game?"

Totally serious now, Superman answered, "No inspector, this is no game. Yes, you're right. It is Lois."

Bill slammed both hands down on his desk.

Superman continued, ignoring that interruption. "You know how long it has taken for them to get married. You know all about Luthor and what he did, creating a clone of Lois and substituting it for her. That was only the tip of the iceberg. There were so many other things they were put through. This is another strange one. Lois has been kidnapped."

While Superman had been speaking Bill had been listening attentively. When Superman finished Bill jumped up and with a tone of incredulity Bill burst out, "Kidnapped?!?!? How did it happen and when? Did Clark witness it? Was there a ransom

note? Give me something to go on.”

Telling Bill as much of the truth as he could he said, “Clark told me that they were preparing to leave on their honeymoon. He was in one part of the apartment and Lois went into another room and person or persons unknown grabbed her and took her away.”

Bill interrupted, “Wait a minute. Are you telling me that Clark was in the same apartment and he didn’t see or do anything?”

“That’s correct Inspector. It all happened so fast there was nothing he saw or anything he could do to prevent it. Clark contacted me immediately. I’ve been searching the city. It seems inconceivable that they could have gotten out of the city this quickly, but that just might have been possible.”

He gave Bill a searching look as he continued, “If you recall a couple of years ago there was another Superman. We tried to downplay his presence as much as we could. He was another one of Luthor’s creations, a clone of me. He had all of my powers and he almost fooled Lois. He and I had a fight and believe me, it’s no fun fighting yourself. There was a problem with the process that created him though and he was dying even as we struggled. He only lived a very short time afterwards, but if there was another one then she could literally be anywhere in the world by this time.”

“But, Luthor’s gone. He shouldn’t be a threat any longer.”

Superman replied, “I know, but there could be others. We have to examine every possibility.”

Bill queried, “What about Clark? How sure are you that he didn’t do this himself?”

Superman was incredulous as he replied, “Come on Inspector. You know Clark and Lois almost as well as I do. Do you really think Clark would do anything to Lois with all they went through to finally get married?”

Properly chastened, Bill replied, “Well, no, I guess not. I bet he’s really broken up about this.”

“Inspector, that might just be the understatement of the century.”

With a sympathetic tone in his voice Bill said, “When you see Clark tell him we’ll do all that we can.”

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate it Inspector. Along that line, I stopped at the Daily Planet and Jimmy Olsen provided me with a printout of all of the locations that there are lead lined bomb shelters in the city. I can’t examine them because the lead blocks my x-ray vision. Could you have them examined?” He offered the printout.

Bill took the sheets of paper and said, “I’ll get some men on this right away. Don’t worry, if she’s in the city, we’ll find her.”

“Thanks Inspector. I’m going to continue my search and expand beyond the city. My fear is that she, in fact, is no longer in the city.”

Bill said, “You go ahead. We’ll do what we can here in the city. By the way, tell Clark, I’m sorry this happened and we’ll do everything we can. Also, I’ll be needing a statement from him and a missing person report.”

“I’ll pass that along to him Inspector. Thanks.” Superman turned and exited the building.

Chapter 3

The first stop Superman made was Smallville, Kansas. He landed in the front yard of the Kent farm and spun into jeans and a T-shirt. With a dejected tread, he ascended the steps to the porch and crossed to the door. When he opened the door he saw his parents in the living room.

Martha greeted him, “Clark! We didn’t expect to see you so soon. Are you on the way to your honeymoon? Where’s Lois?” She noted the expression on his face and immediately her happy mood was dispelled. Her tone changed to one of worry as she asked, “Clark, what’s happened? Where’s Lois?”

Clark was almost weeping as he replied, “Lois has been kidnapped.”

You would almost think that Martha was the one with the super powers as she almost literally flew to her son and threw her arms around him and said, “Oh, Honey! How did it happen? Have you looked for her? Did you get a ransom note? Who could have done it?”

Clark related the complete story including his assumption that Tempus was the perpetrator and told them what he had been doing.

As he had been telling the story, Martha had started weeping both for her loss of her special daughter-in-law but also for her boy because she knew just how devastated he was at the loss of the love of his life. Getting up out of his chair, Jonathan moved over and joined Martha in comforting their son. He also was weeping silently as he put an arm across Clark’s shoulder giving him support by the contact.

Finally, after Clark finished he asked, “What am I going to do? How am I going to handle this?” Unashamed, he reached up and wiped the tears away with the back of his hand.

Pulling a hanky out of her apron pocket, Martha dried her eyes too and asked, “You’re going to keep looking for her, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Mom, I’m not giving up. I’ll search the globe. I mean, if I *can’t* find her. How am I going to *survive* without her? She’s *everything* to me. I mean, I love you guys, but that’s different. Lois and I just recently found out that we are soul mates. We are fated to be together. I don’t want to be, I can’t be with anyone else.” Realizing just how big a task he had set for himself he started pacing the living room floor. He flung his arms out, as if to encompass the entire globe and said, “I’ll search everywhere as long as that takes.”

Martha watched in sympathy as her son paced. Knowing him as well as she did, she knew just how affected he really was. This behavior told her more than his words ever could. “If you were anyone else, I’d say that after a period of time, she would be declared dead and you would move on, but you’re not like anyone else. You’re special, unique, who knows how that would work with you? With your Kryptonian heritage you might not be able to do that. All these years, we watched as you dated Lana, Rachel and a few others, but you were never serious about any of them. You traveled the world because you couldn’t find anywhere that you felt you belonged. Then, you moved to Metropolis, met Lois and everything changed. Suddenly all you could talk about was Lois. We could see the handwriting on the wall from the very first. We were happy because we knew that you were happy with her.”

After a few seconds, her words calmed him somewhat. He stopped in front of Martha and gently grasping her shoulders, he said, “You’re right Mom. When I met Lois everything changed for me. Suddenly, I felt like I had come home. Anywhere she was, I wanted to be. Now, finally, after all of our problems, finally we were married and we were going to be starting a life together. We were going to be so happy, together and ... and now ... now she’s ... she’s gone. I ... I ... I need to go, I need to look for her some more.”

Silently, expressing his agreement lending his strength and encouragement to Clark, Jonathan patted his son’s shoulder.

Martha gave him a hug as she said, “I know you’ll do your best. Now, do whatever you can to see to it that you find her and bring her back.”

As Clark started to turn to go, Jonathan stopped him and said, “What are you going to tell the police? What about Sam, Ellen and Lucy? What about Perry White and everyone at the Planet?”

“I’ve been to the police and told them she was kidnapped.”

“I know, but that was as Superman. What is Clark going to tell them?”

Realizing that in his personal grief he had totally forgotten all of the others in Lois' life, he hung his head, "As much as I can without giving the secret away. You're right about the Lanes too. I need to talk to Sam, Ellen and Lucy. They should know, before they find out from reading the paper. Can I use your phone?"

Martha answered, "Sure you can. But, wouldn't it be better in person?"

"I don't know if I can face them."

Jonathan said, "Son, you really need to. Your mother is right. It would be better in person."

"Yeah, you're right. I guess I need to go and face them. Tell them that their daughter is missing. It's going to be devastating."

Encouragingly, Jonathan replied, "It will be better if you are there. It's the right thing to do."

Acknowledging the correctness of the decision, he nodded his head "Okay, I guess I'd better go do that now."

After giving and receiving a final hug from both his Mom and Dad he exited and spinning into the Suit took off for Metropolis.

Reaching his apartment he entered from the balcony and was just in time to spin back into his casual clothes before there was a knock on the door.

He moved through the bedroom and living room to answer the door. When he opened it Bill Henderson was on the other side. In a dispirited voice he said, "Hi Bill, come on in."

True to his training as a detective, Bill looked around and saw their luggage piled up, obviously ready for them to go on their honeymoon. He filed this clue away for future reference. He said, "Superman stopped by and asked if we could help find Lois. We have teams out canvassing the city. I came by to see how you are holding up."

As Bill had been entering Clark had retreated to his sofa and dropped onto it. He sat there with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. There was so much grief in his voice that Bill almost couldn't make out what he was saying as Clark replied, "I guess I'm doing as well as can be expected, under the circumstances. I just told my parents. They encouraged me to keep searching. I just don't know where to start."

"From what Superman told me there isn't much chance of you finding her by yourself. That's why I came over. I want you to stay here. The kidnappers may try to contact you to give you their demands, ransom, some demand about Superman, a story in the paper, I don't know, whatever they want. They may slide a note under your door or they may try to call you. If they do, you are to let me know immediately, you got that? I don't want you going off like a loose cannon on your own. You stay put."

Clark lifted his head and looked at Bill. Seeing his expression he realized he was serious and said, "Okay Bill. I'll stay here, but I would have thought that they would have left a note when they grabbed her."

"Mind if I look around some?"

Clark flung his hand out indicating the apartment and said, "Help yourself."

Bill also noted his response, the response of someone with nothing to hide. As he moved into the bedroom he noticed the rumpled character of the bed clothes and thought, <That was to be expected. After all the time they waited. They are newlyweds after all.>

He moved into the attached bathroom. When he did he spotted her shoes and the bag on the floor. Noting that it was a cloth covered bag, including the handles, Bill knew that there would be no recoverable fingerprints, so he stooped and opened the bag. When he did he pinched the edges of the zipper tab rather than the flats. As he did he noted the contents; cosmetics, toiletries and one sexy black teddy. With a knowing look Bill thought, <The bed wasn't rumpled from what I thought. She

wasn't coming in here to change into travel clothes; she was coming in here to change so that they could get an early start on the honeymoon. Poor guy. I really feel sorry for him.> Bill zipped the bag closed and left it lying where he had found it. There would be a forensics team going through the entire apartment and the least he disturbed any possible evidence the better it would be for Clark. He looked around the bathroom and noted that there was nothing out of order and no evidence of a struggle; also there was no ransom note. That all fit with what Superman had said. It had happened so quickly that Clark couldn't have seen anything or been able to do anything.

The perp had to have had Superman's powers or some other means of subduing Lane so quickly that struggle was impossible. Was Superman's story about a clone Superman true? Didn't he have a thing for Lois too? Could he be the perpetrator after all and just be pretending to help locate her? <I suppose anything is possible. There is that old saying, 'All's fair in love and war.' Did he love her that much that he'd turn on his friend and break the law to have her? He'll have to be treated as a suspect.>

Bill moved back out to the living area of the apartment and stood there looking around, taking it all in. Moving into the kitchenette he looked toward the bedroom and decided that if Clark had been in the kitchenette and Lois had gone into the bathroom, which was off the bedroom as evidenced by the presence of the bag, it would be possible for her to be snatched without Clark seeing anything or being able to do anything to prevent it.

Bill addressed Clark with a question, "Do you think it could have been Superman himself?"

Clark's reply was immediate, "No,!! That would be impossible!" As soon as it was out of his mouth he realized that he had perhaps been too vehement in his denial.

If Bill noticed, he didn't let on; after all, it could simply be loyalty to a long time friend. Someone that you really want to think the best of. Still, the question needed to be asked, "But, didn't he have a thing for Lois?"

"No Bill, he didn't." He knew he had to think of a logical reason to keep Superman from being a real suspect. He answered, "It would be impossible. You see, he is highly ethical and it would be outside of his character, now that Lois and I are married, for him to pursue a relationship with her. Besides, I trust him, implicitly."

Bill started rolling Clark's statements around in his mind testing their validity when suddenly Bill's analysis was interrupted by Clark, "Bill, I have to go out, just for a short time."

"I said you were to stay here."

"I have to see Lois' parents. I have to tell them. They need to hear it from me, not the police, not the papers. I owe them that much."

Bill relented, "Oh, okay, but get back here as quickly as you can. Do you need a lift? My car's just outside."

"Thanks, Bill. Yes, that would help."

They exited Clark's building and moved to Henderson's car. Clark was brooding and uncommunicative as Henderson drove.

When Henderson pulled up in front of the building that Sam had an apartment in, Bill asked, "Do you want me to come up with you or wait?"

"No, Bill. Thanks anyhow. I need to do this by myself and the walk back will do me good."

"Okay, but, get back to your apartment as quickly as you can. We don't want to miss any communications from the kidnappers."

"I will Bill. Thanks for the lift." He reached over and shook Bill's hand before he opened the door to exit.

Bill was surprised to find a tear rolling down his cheek while he watched as his friend trudged up the steps to the doors of the apartment building. He hastily wiped it away with the back of his

hand. Observing Clark's demeanor he thought, <How could I have ever considered him a suspect? If I ever saw a beaten man, that's him. His whole life has been wrapped up in her. It's almost like with her disappearance he's lost the will to live. You can see the worry and despair written all over his face. We need to find her. Even if we can't, we have to do everything we can. Much as I hate to admit it, I have started to like Lane. Ever since she hooked up with Kent she's mellowed, well, at least a little.> He started the car and pulled away from the curb.

Chapter 4

Clark slowly mounted the stairs rather than take the elevator in order to give himself some time to compose himself and prepare for the confrontation. When he reached the correct floor he paused just inside the door until he had his emotions basically under control. Exiting the stairwell and moving down the corridor until he was in front of the door to Sam Lane's apartment where he prepared to knock. Then his superhearing picked up three distinct heartbeats. He thought, <Just as well. This way I can do it all at once.> He reached up and knocked on the door.

After a few seconds Sam Lane answered the door. When he saw Clark he looked around for Lois and not seeing her he looked again at Clark. The expression on Clark's face told Sam a story that Sam didn't want to hear. He asked, "Clark, what's happened? Where's Lois?"

Ellen heard part of Sam's question and jumped out of her seat on the couch and hurried to the door. As she approached she asked, "Sam? What about Lois? Clark, what are you doing here? Where's Lois? Why aren't you two on the way to your honeymoon?" Seeing his countenance Ellen realized that something was wrong. She almost screamed at him, "CLARK! Where's Lois???" Her voice had been rising in octaves and volume, taking on a note of hysteria as she had been speaking.

Clark finally broke his silence and said, "I'm sorry, ."

Before he could even complete his statement Ellen Lane screamed, "NO!" and then wailed, "Lois, what has happened to Lois? Where is she?"

Clark started again, "I'm sorry, she's missing. She's been kidnapped. We don't know where she is."

Lucy finally had moved over close to the door and heard the final couple of statements. In a frenzied tone she asked, "Did you say that Lois had been kidnapped? How could you let something like that happen?"

"Lucy, it isn't that I let it happen; there was no way I could prevent it from happening. It all happened so quickly. We had no warning. One minute she was there and the next she was ... gone." his voice broke on that last word and all could see just how much he was affected by her loss.

Sam finally realizing that they were still standing in the doorway said, "Come on in Clark. Let's talk inside instead of in the hallway."

Clark stepped in and Sam closed the door. Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Sam said, "Now, tell us what happened."

"I really don't know, it all happened so fast. We ... We were preparing to leave for Hawaii. Lois went into another part of the apartment, I think she was going to change clothes, and suddenly she was gone. I didn't see her leave. I didn't see who took her. Just suddenly, she was gone."

In a fatalistic tone, Ellen said, "I need a drink."

Addressing Ellen, Sam said, "Don't start that again. We need clear heads if we are going to deal with this."

Ellen replied, "You deal with it with a clear head if you want. Me, I need a drink."

Lucy almost shouted, "Mom, don't! Dad's right! Now is not the time."

"It might not be the time for you, but it's past time for me. Sam, where's your liquor?"

Sam tried to prevent or at least delay the inevitable, "I don't keep any here."

"Don't lie to me Sam. I know you have a bottle or two around here ... somewhere. Just get it for me."

"No Ellen, I won't. Not this time."

Clark Interrupted, "I'm really sorry. Maybe I should go."

While Clark talked some more with Sam, Lucy was remonstrating with her mother about the drinking. In a huff now at being denied what she felt she needed Ellen flounced down onto the couch. Lucy sat next to her and tried, unsuccessfully to calm her down.

Finally, Sam said, "No Clark, I'm sorry you had to go through this. I'm sure Lois' disappearance has upset you enough without having to witness this scene. What is being done to find her?"

"The police are scouring the city and Superman has also been searching. I ... I really need to get back to my apartment. The police want me to be there in case the kidnappers try to contact me with their demands."

"Yes, that makes sense. You should be there, not here."

"I felt that it was my duty to be the one to tell you."

"You were right Clark and we appreciate it. Even Ellen, though it doesn't look like it. But you should go. You need to be there in case they try to contact you. Please, keep us informed."

"I will. As soon as I hear something I'll let you know." Clark turned and headed out the door.

He had only gotten a few steps down the hall when the door opened and Lucy came out after him, "Clark?"

Turning at the sound of her voice Clark said, "I'm sorry Lucy. You kinda got left out in there. What can I do for you?"

She moved up close to him before saying, "For one thing you can tell me what happened. Mom kinda interrupted and I never heard any details."

"There really isn't that much to tell. We were getting ready to leave for our honeymoon. I was in one part of the apartment and she was in another when someone grabbed her and took her away. It happened so fast I didn't even know about it until it was over. I've been to the police, well, actually Superman went to the police and Inspector Henderson came and saw me at the apartment."

"What's being done to find her?"

"Squads of police are scouring the city. Superman is out looking. Everything that can be done is being done." At this point he nearly broke down, but wanting to put up a brave front for Lucy, he barely managed to control himself.

Lucy, seeing this reached out a hand and placed it tenderly on his arm and said, "Don't worry, brother-in-law. Somehow, I just know everything will turn out okay."

"I hope you're right Lucy. I don't know what I'd do if she were lost to me forever. I don't know if I'd even want to continue living." He stood there for a few seconds, feeling her hand on his arm. The personal contact was oddly comforting. He was fighting with his emotions and finally said, "I need to get back, in case the kidnappers try to contact me with their demands."

Lucy slid her hand up and down his arm in a comforting way as she said, "You go ahead. I'll tell Mother and Daddy the details, that is, if we can keep Mother from crawling into a bottle long enough. You take care."

Clark reached up and covered her hand with his as he said, "You too, Lucy and thanks." Clark turned and headed for the stairwell.

They had been standing quite close to the stairwell door and Lucy followed him with her eyes until the door closed behind him and then she heard the unmistakable sounds of weeping. She was tempted to go to him but refrained, allowing him to grieve in private. She turned and headed back into the lion's den knowing that she was going to have to fight with her mother in order to

keep her on the wagon and not happy at the prospect.

Clark had not as yet told the staff at the Planet about what had happened to Lois. He had waited until he could do it in person so a few days later, to everyone's surprise, Clark returned to the Planet. Perry was out on the floor when the ding of the elevator chime sounded and he turned to see who had arrived. When Clark exited the elevator a startled look overtook Perry's features. Perry asked, "Clark, what are you doin' here? I thought y'all were on your honeymoon." Seeing Clark there was one thing but when the elevator doors closed behind him and Lois failed to emerge he asked, "The two o' you didn't have a fight, did you?" Seeing the look on Clark's face he realized that there was a lot more to it than a spat. He dropped the papers he had in his hand as in a strained tone asked, "Where's Lois?"

His crushed demeanor being evident Clark asked, "Can I talk to you in your office?"

Perry was really becoming concerned and asked again and in a higher tone, "Clark, *where's Lois?*"

By this time the conversation had the attention of everyone in the bullpen and looking around Clark saw that all eyes were on him. He even sensed that collectively all but a few of his co-workers were holding their breath waiting to hear his response. In a defeated tone he replied, "She's been kidnapped and neither the police nor Superman have been able to find the slightest trace of her."

As everyone in the bullpen gasped and shouted their disbelief, Perry sagged into a nearby chair.

Looking up from where he had stooped down to recover Perry's papers Jimmy shouted, "Is that who Superman was searching for?"

"Yes, Jimmy and I thank you for helping him."

"Why wouldn't he tell me? He knows how close we are."

"He didn't want to upset everyone in case he was able to find her. The police have been looking as well as Superman, but she hasn't been found as yet."

Turning to Perry he asked, "Perry, can I see you in your office now?"

Perry roused himself. Jimmy handed him the papers he had dropped and Perry led the way to his office. Once he was seated he put the papers down on his desk and collected himself before asking, "How are you holding up Clark?"

"About like you'd expect. I haven't been sleeping well. I keep thinking I hear her, but she's not there."

"What's being done to find her?"

"Superman and the MPD are all looking for her. Superman reports back to me frequently. He has scoured the country, in fact the entire North American continent. He will be starting south of the border shortly. He has promised that he won't stop searching until she's found. Perry, I need to work. If I stay home I'll go crazy. Can you give me something to do?"

Just then over a police scanner came an announcement of a problem at Metropolis prison. Perry looked at Clark. Clark nodded and headed out.

When he hit the stairwell he spun into the Suit and headed for the prison. He landed as some guards coughing from some gas inhalation stumbled away from a gaping hole in the wall.

The guard informed him that it had been a prison break and that only one prisoner had escaped, Conner Schenk, a man who had been in prison so long it was like the prison had been built around him. At this point he had to be in his seventies or eighties. Superman quickly repaired the breach in the wall to prevent any additional escapes and then flew off.

Later that day an old man entered the bullpen. He was in an agitated state calling out for Jimmy Olsen. Jimmy didn't recognize him, but after he died of old age they checked his ID and found out that he was actually a twenty-something that had

been a friend of Jimmy's.

Jimmy was teamed up with Clark for the investigation but Jimmy went off on his own and was made a victim of the same machine as his friend. After he escaped he started to age rapidly, but before senility set in he was able to lead Superman to the location where it had all been done to him.

Superman intervened and saved Jimmy's life by giving up some of his life force. He hadn't been able to find Lois, but he got some modicum of comfort from helping Jimmy live a full life.

With Conner Schenk back in prison and Veeda Doodsen brought up on charges, that case was wrapped up.

Two week after Lois' disappearance Clark walked into police headquarters and surrendered himself to Inspector Bill Henderson.

When he was in Bill's office Bill said, "This is only a formality Clark. In cases of unexplained disappearance, family or spouses are the main persons of interest. If we had gotten a ransom note or a call or something, anything but silence, we wouldn't be going through this."

"I understand Bill. Procedures. Do you think this could possibly go to trial? Should I hire a lawyer?"

Somewhat apologetically Bill replied, "Go to trial? I don't think so. Should you hire a lawyer? I don't know. That's entirely up to you. Without a corpus delicti first they have to prove that a crime actually has been committed and that is difficult. The fact that the person is not physically here to look at isn't sufficient grounds to prove a crime has in fact been committed. You know, if Ellen Lane hadn't pushed this you wouldn't even be here. She insisted on a coroner's inquest. Of course that was a no-go. If there's no *body* there is no way to determine the cause of death which is where a coroner's inquest comes in. When she was turned down for that she pushed for a Grand Jury. That's why we are here. Why is she so mad at you?"

In a rather sad tone Clark replied, "I don't really think she's mad at me Bill. I think she is just plain mad that she lost her daughter and is striking out at anyone and everyone. If she hadn't been with Sam when it happened she might have tried to blame him. I'm just a convenient target."

"Personally, I'll do all that I can to squash any charges."

"Thanks Bill. I appreciate it."

After Clark was fingerprinted and booked he was released on his own recognizance.

Two weeks later, the Grand Jury was empanelled and the disappearance examined. As Bill had predicted lacking a body a crime could not be proven so there were no charges lodged.

Remembering when Superman had been booked and fingerprinted, as soon as the Grand Jury handed down its verdict, Clark applied for expungement to have his fingerprints removed from the record. It wouldn't do to have Clark Kent's fingerprints match up with Superman's.

Later that same day, carrying a small paper bag, Clark entered STAR Labs and asked to meet with Dr. Klein. He was sent on back and after greeting him said, "Doc, I've got an unusual request to make." He put the bag on his desk.

Bernie looked at it and asked, "What do we have here?"

"I brought Lois' hair brush. Assuming that there are some hair follicles it will be a sample of her DNA. I'd like you to map her DNA."

"Why? Do you want to try and create a clone or something?"

"No, that's just it Bernie. If she were to suddenly show up I need a way to verify that it *is* her and *not* a clone."

"Ahhhh, I see. A wise precaution. I'll get right on it. I'll run triplicate samples just so there will be no question. It will take

some time.”

“Let it Bernie. Accuracy is more important than speed. Thank you. I really appreciate it. By the way, do you have a mapping of Superman’s DNA on file?”

“No, we don’t. Should we?”

“Why don’t I talk to him? Maybe it would be a good thing. He should come in and give you a sample so that it can be mapped. You never can tell what might happen or when something like that would come in handy. Thanks, Doc. I’ll be in touch.”

Two months later Clark was served with papers for a civil suit; Ellen Lane vs. Clark Kent suing him in the disappearance of one Lois Lane-Kent.

However, this suit never came to trial because before a court date could be set, the Plaintiff died of alcohol poisoning.

A week later Clark stood with Sam and Lucy Lane at the funeral.

Chapter 5

After Ellen Lane’s funeral, Clark returned to his apartment. He had taken off his black suit jacket and placed it over the back of a chair before sitting on the sofa with his head in his hands trying to decide where he should search next or if it was even worth the effort to continue searching. He was wracked with sadness, fear and doubts as he continued brooding.

After a while there was a knock on his door. His head came up and he listened with his superhearing. He recognized the heartbeat as that of Lucy Lane. He composed himself and moved to the door to let her in.

She was still wearing her black outfit from the funeral. She asked, “Do you mind if I come in for a while?”

Clark replied, “No, not at all. You know you’re always welcome here.”

“In that case can I stay with you a while? I just ... I just don’t want to be alone right now.”

“I can understand that feeling. Take off your coat and relax. Would you like a cup of tea?”

“That’d be nice. Thanks.”

While he was in the kitchenette making the tea, Lucy took off her coat and draped it over a chair back on top of his jacket, unknowingly, a prophetic action, and then settled herself on the sofa near the middle. Calling into the kitchenette she asked, “Have you heard anything about Lois yet? She’s been gone for months now. It almost seems like she might not be coming back at all.”

Clark brought the tea in on a tray and placed it on the coffee table before he sat down on the end of the sofa. They both fixed their tea and started sipping it. Clark sighed before he replied, “I haven’t given up hope that she will return.”

Lucy looked at him over the rim of her tea cup and asked, “What will you do if she doesn’t?”

Staring into his cup, wishing it would turn into a crystal ball and tell him where Lois was, he said, “I’ll keep looking for her and hoping for a miracle.”

“Wouldn’t you give up at some point and move on?”

“With who? Lucy, your sister, was ... is ... the love of my life. There’s no one like her. There’s no one else for me.”

Lucy edged closer to Clark on the sofa. He was so preoccupied with his thoughts of Lois that he didn’t notice that she was closing the distance between them.

When she was so close that their thighs were touching he realized what was happening and he jumped up. She also stood and approached him like a cat stalking its prey. “What’s the problem? Are you afraid she will catch us? Clark, she’s not here. She’s gone, perhaps for good. We’re both adults. We don’t have to ask anyone’s permission ...” As she was speaking she backed

him toward the sofa reaching to put her hands on his shoulders.

In his attempt to avoid her, Clark retreated before her and he actually fell backwards over the arm of the sofa. He found himself on his back laying on the couch. Before he was able to scoot more than a foot or so backwards, Lucy was literally on him.

She had pulled her skirt up so that she could straddle his hips. Despite his verbal protests the stimulation had the reaction on him that she had desired.

Clark was so shocked into immobility that he simply lay there. He could feel himself responding because the stimulation felt so good. His reaction was automatic. He started arguing with himself, <I need to make her stop. Oh, that feels so good. Oh, yes. NO! This is Lucy, not Lois! Why is she doing this? Have to make her stop. Make her stop making it feel so good. Lois! Help me Lois. Help me make her stop.> He could feel his resolve strengthen. He was wondering how he could extricate himself from this situation without damaging his relationship with her.

Clark continued to lay there, unmoving as she continued her assault seeking the strength of will to stop her.

Clark roused himself enough to ask, “Lucy, what was that all about? I’m a married man? I’m married to your sister!”

Still having something of a dreamy tone in her voice she replied, “What was that about? It was about you and me. Lois wasn’t the only Lane woman attracted to you. The only reason I didn’t say anything before was because of Lois. She’s not around now. We Lane women go after what we want and I want you.” She levered herself up by placing her hands on his chest and pushing. As soon as she was upright she reached for and started unbuttoning her blouse.

Seeing this prompted him to act. He rolled out from under her and she tried to grab him, not wanting to lose the close contact. He stood and pulled her skirt back down to return her modesty. He asked, “Lucy, what was that really about?”

“Like I said, that was all about us, you and me. Don’t deny it! You were enjoying that almost as much as me.” With a sexy pout she patted the sofa next to herself and said, “Come back here to me.”

“Lucy, look, you’re a sweet girl and I love you ... like a sister, but that is as far as it will ever go. You’re Lois’ sister, but I’m married to Lois.”

Now she was getting exasperated and it was evident in her voice. “Can’t you get it through your head, she’s gone,” she almost shouted and then in a sweet, coquettish voice she finished, “I’m here! I’ll take care of you.”

He tried to be stern with her, but it still came out a little weaker than he had intended, “I’m sorry, Lucy. It’d never work. I still believe that Lois will return. I have to believe that she will. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost that hope.”

Seeing his expression and hearing the tone in his voice, she realized that, at least for the time being, she wasn’t going to get her way, but that wouldn’t keep her from trying some more. Eventually Lucy left with a promise that she would be seeing him, frequently. She was determined that she would have a relationship with Clark.

After she walked out the door Clark released a relieved sigh.

For the next five years Clark had to fend off Lucy’s continued attempts to ensnare him in a relationship.

As he was seeking a way to deflect her he finally hit upon a plan. Most of the time he knew when she was coming over and each time she did he asked Jimmy to show up as well.

Eventually he was able to fade into the background and let Jimmy take the lead. It was unclear whether or not Lucy was really attracted to Jimmy or if she finally saw the writing on the wall and realized that no matter how much she tried, Clark would not be available and accepted the second best. The consolation,

for Clark, was the fact that they did at least seem to be happy together.

Clark never gave up in his search. He would spend weeks canvassing a country from border to border, mostly at night so that he would have less chance of being observed. There were countries that his presence was accepted, however there were countries where their regimes were afraid of his abilities and the fact that he could compromise their plans, militaristically among others. Those countries he had to exercise added caution. It was important that he remain unobserved either by eye or radar.

Superman cut back on a lot of his personal appearances. This had required that he lay down the law to Murray, but after fighting it some, Murray accepted his decision.

The overweening sorrow took its toll on him. As Superman he was even more stoic and taciturn than he had been formerly. His aloofness caused people to be more standoffish than they had previously. In the past he would occasionally lighten up and perhaps even give a half smile. Even those disappeared.

As Clark Kent he threw himself into his job to take his mind off of his missing Lois. He refused, adamantly, to admit that she could be dead. Occasionally he still heard echoes of her heartbeat, mostly in the middle of the night. It would wake him out of a sound sleep and be gone before he could even begin to move anything other than his eyelids.

Occasionally he spent a sleepless night keeping a fruitless vigil in the bathroom just in case she would reappear.

Several times he was actually awake when he heard it and quickly focused his x-ray vision on the bathroom. All he caught was a shimmer as if something insubstantial had appeared momentarily.

Sometimes he was tempted to doubt his sanity. How could he be hearing Lois' heartbeat or voice? Yet, all of these ... manifestations, served to keep him hoping that someday ... someday she would in fact return to him.

As the decades passed he continued his search, never giving up hope.

The next blow that fell was when Perry White passed. He had only been retired for five short years. It seemed like when he left the Planet he didn't have any reason to continue living and he simply wasted away. Alice was really broken up when she lost him.

One of the hardest things he had ever done was prepare the obituary for Perry. He wouldn't allow anyone else to handle it. It was a work of love and respect for his boss and mentor.

The next year Jonathan Kent had a heart attack and was hospitalized for an extended period.

By this time Clark had managed to purchase his entire apartment building so he had his father transferred to MetGen. Then, after closing up the farm house, he moved his mother to the apartment next to his so that they could be together while Jonathan was in the hospital and he would have them both nearby after Jonathan was released.

After quadruple bypass surgery Jonathan began a long convalescence and was happy to have all of his family nearby.

The family grew closer together, closer than they had been before he had left on his world travels.

That was why it was such a blow when his mother unexpectedly collapsed one afternoon from a major stroke. She remained unconscious for two days before she finally passed. Her husband followed her in fairly short order, literally within weeks of Martha's funeral. Who would argue that it was from a broken heart at the loss of his wife and partner of almost sixty years? The funerals had been held in Smallville with interment in the old family plot in one corner of the farm.

Now, he was truly alone. He went to work and did his job. He did what he had to do as Superman, but his heart really wasn't in it. Without his family, without his Lois, why should he go on? If not for his invulnerability he might consider suicide, but between that and the fact that he was still needed as Superman he might have done it.

Chapter 6

Since Lois had disappeared ninety years had passed and Clark had never found Lois even though he had scoured the globe for decades. The years hadn't been kind to Clark. As a result of Veda Doodsen's machine and the transfer of a portion of his life force to Jimmy he had aged, perhaps not as rapidly as an Earth human but his age was very apparent. His hair was gray and he was balding and his head seemed to be slightly cocked to one side as if he was always listening for his Lois. His posture was somewhat stooped and his face etched with lines from years of worry and sorrow and his physique had suffered the ravages of time. He wasn't as robust as he had been formerly. He wasn't quite as fast as he had been and his legendary strength had started to wane.

As Clark Kent, he had retired from the Daily Planet a number of years ago and had lived as a recluse ever since. All of his close friends as well as his parents had passed away a number of years ago. Now completely alone and bereft, with the loss of his soul mate he had been unable to bring himself to form any close relationships and especially hadn't ever considered any intimate relationships. When he died there would be no super children to take his place. The world would lose its lone superhero.

It was, to him, rather ironic that his long life had enabled him to become rich. Careful investing even for normal people could be beneficial in retirement, but to someone with his lifespan it was more than beneficial. Clark still lived in the same apartment. Years ago he had purchased the entire building so that he could prevent it from being demolished. His mother and father had come to live in the next apartment, but they had passed long ago. Now he was in an empty building. It was the last place he had seen Lois and he was loathe to give it up in case she would reappear as suddenly as she had disappeared. That hope was the one thing that had kept him going all of these years.

Tonight was a special night. Every year on this date, their anniversary, he would make a dinner and after eating he'd simply sit on the bed and reminisce about that night. He would go over it again and again in his mind and wonder what he had missed and if he could have done anything differently.

Ever since Lois had disappeared, Clark had occasionally heard echoes of Lois' heartbeat and voice, always emanating from the bathroom. He knew that somehow Tempus had to be involved, but in the last ninety years he hadn't seen hide nor hair of him or Herb and he had no idea as to how to contact Herb to enlist his aid.

Clark ate his solitary dinner and then because that was what he had been wearing when she had disappeared, he put on the Suit and went into the bedroom to sit on the bed.

He was weary and finally after musing for a while he lay down to rest.

Suddenly his superhearing caught a sound he had never given up hope of hearing again. Over the years he had heard the ghost of her voice or her heartbeat periodically, but this was different. It was strong and regular and it didn't disappear again. He was instantly alert as he sat up on the bed and then slowly, forcing his weary bones and muscles to comply with his wishes, he stood.

A few seconds later a barefoot Lois came stumbling into the room. There was a cut on her forehead that hadn't been there when she had been kidnapped. She was still dressed in the burnt orange dress she had been wearing when she had gone into the

bathroom to change all those years ago. She was shaking her head as if she was dazed and he shouted, “Lois!” It came out as a wheezing croak.

She looked up and seeing the Suit she shouted, “Clark!” and launched herself in his direction. When she hit him he wasn’t able to continue standing. Between his surprise and his age, he was weak and she bowled him over.

In her exuberance she started kissing him. Suddenly she realized that he was moving more slowly that she expected and she pulled back to take a good look. When she did she asked, “Clark, what ... what has happened? Why do you look so ... old? While I was in the bathroom were you exposed to some red Kryptonite that did this to you?”

In reply Clark asked, “Lois, what happened to you? Where have you been all these years?”

“Huh? What do you mean ‘All these years’, I was only gone a couple of minutes!”

“No Lois, you disappeared ninety years ago today.”

Stunned by his statement, Lois replied, “Ninety years ago?!?! It was Tempus! He dragged me into a time window held me for a couple of minutes and then shoved me out again.”

“You went to change and that was the last I saw of you.” He reached up and gently touched her forehead where she was cut as he asked, “How did you cut your forehead?”

Waving her hand in the air as if to dismiss his concerns she said, “When he let me go I hit my head on the corner of the sink. I thought I was only gone a minute or two and couldn’t figure out why Tempus would do anything that silly. Now I see what he was up to. How can I get back?” she wailed.

“I don’t see how you can. This timeline is already fixed. You were missing from it for ninety years, there’s no going back.”

Frantically searching for a way to correct the situation she asked, “What about Herb? Maybe he could take me back and we could fix this timeline.”

“I don’t see how. I haven’t heard from Herb in almost a century.”

With a note of despair in her voice she said, “Well, this is a fine fix. It’s still my wedding night.” She had a questioning look as she added, “It is, isn’t it?”

“Well, it is our anniversary.”

“Okay, so it’s my wedding night, ninety years removed. Do you think we could still ...”

“I don’t know if that would be possible. It’s been years ...”

“Great, it’s my wedding night and my husband is too old for us to consummate our wedding.” At this point Lois broke down and started crying.

Clark put his arm around her shoulders and tried to console her.

There was just a touch of fear as to what his answers would be to her next questions, but she had to ask them. She looked at him and blurted out, “What did you do when I disappeared? Did you get married? How many kids do you have? How old are you? What gives?”

“Whoa, one thing at a time; what did I do when you disappeared? I searched for you. I scoured the globe, east, west, north and south, for decades I searched for you. I never gave up. I kept hearing your heartbeat and voice in my dreams. At times I started to question my sanity. I always heard you here in the apartment. That’s why I never gave it up. I heard you but you were never there. Sometimes I thought it was just my imagination or someone playing a trick on me.”

“I may have an answer for you. I remember, as I struggled with Tempus, something in front of me, it must have been the portal, kept flickering. It was like an old nickelodeon machine only the picture didn’t change. It was always the bathroom.

“He must have done that to torture me. I could hear your voice or a part of a heartbeat and then it would be gone. Ah,

well,” he sighed, “You asked if I got married. Yes, I got married, once, to you. You were missing but, you were my wife. The only woman I would ever marry and because I kept hearing you, I knew you would return, someday. I guess that answers your question about children. How old am I? Remember Veda Doodsen and her machine?”

He paused for her answer.

She asked, “Veeda ... Doodsen? Who’s Veeda Doodsen?”

“Oh, that’s right! That happened after Tempus kidnapped you. Jimmy and I were investigating a bank robbery and the death of a friend of his. Veeda Doodsen had invented a machine that transferred the life energy from one person to another. She had used it on Jimmy to make Conner Schenk young again. Jimmy led me to her. In order to save Jimmy, she had to transfer some of my life force to him. There was one good thing that came of that incident. Before that procedure Dr. Klein told me that I would live many lifetimes. When I gave up some of my life force for Conner Schenk and Jimmy it shortened my life span. I aged, maybe not as fast as an Earth human, but I aged. I’m over a hundred and twenty years old.”

Her relief was palpable as she threw her arms around his neck and started to cry. She blubbered, “You waited for me. All these years, you waited for me. Clark, I love you, I really do. You’re so special.”

After a time she calmed down and asked, “What are we going to do now?”

“When you disappeared we were just getting ready to go on our honeymoon. Would you still like to go to Hawaii?”

With a smile she said, “I’ll go anywhere with you, any time you want.”

“You won’t mind being seen in the company of a man that looks like he could be your great grandfather? Everyone will think I’m rich and you’re after my money.”

“Let them think what they want, you’re my husband and I love you.”

For the first time in almost a century he was genuinely happy and the smile on his face proved it. Lois had returned to him *and* she still loved him! His joy was unbounded. Suddenly a disappointing thought came to mind. He had to address this with Lois so he said, “You know, I’m not as strong as I used to be. I don’t know if I could fly you that far or that fast now. I can still fly people short hops, like out of a burning building, but six thousand miles may be a bit much.”

With a mischievous look Lois asked, “Do they still use airplanes or are flying saucers in vogue nowadays?”

He started laughing and she got a look of consternation on her face as he replied, “The flying saucers are reserved for flights up to the space station, the Moon and Mars Base. We do use SSTs for long trips like this. One consolation, we can afford to fly first class.”

She was shocked! Had technology progressed that far? With a stunned expression she asked, “You mean that flying saucers are real???”

With a serious expression he replied, “Yep, for about ten years now.”

With a look of wonder on her face she said, “I was kidding, but you’re serious, aren’t you?”

Not able to maintain a straight face any longer he started laughing and replied, “No. I was pulling your leg.”

With a pained look and chagrined at having fallen for his story, she said, “Okay for you Mr. New Prankster. Well, what are we waiting for? Let’s get packed.”

Becoming a little more serious he said, “We will, but we have a few things to do first.” Saying this he pulled her into his arms and started a kiss. It started somewhat tentatively but built in intensity as all of the frustration of missing her for ninety years was released to be replaced by joy. When they broke from the

kiss he put his forehead against hers and said, “I’ve waited ninety years for that.”

She captured his lips in another, this time, brief kiss before she said, “There’s plenty more where that came from. At least we can do that.”

Before they went on their much delayed honeymoon, they jumped through all of the hoops needed to reestablish her identity which included providing DNA samples to STAR Labs so that a genetic match could be made.

As soon as they left the apartment the next day, one of Lois’ concerns about the ninety year lapse was relieved. Looking at the other women on the streets and noting what they were wearing, she could see a number of different styles being worn. Her dresses might look a little retro but they wouldn’t really be out of place.

When they arrived at STAR Labs they explained the situation and the sample was taken for the mapping. Over the years the process had been improved and the sample processing only took half an hour to complete. The comparison confirmed that this was in fact the real Lois Lane and she was provided certificates attesting to that fact.

Since Clark had never discarded any of her things it was easier than it would have been to reestablish her identity. That, coupled with the fact that he had insisted that she never be declared legally dead, even though her father and sister had requested it, which also helped establish her bona fides. Between the DNA and all of her other documents it wasn’t long until she had a new driver’s license and other appropriate documents.

The rest of that summer they spent together on one long vacation getting to know each other all over again and the world that Lois had just stepped into.

Over the course of the vacation Lois caught up on what had happened over the last ninety years. Clark made sure she had the latest technology available for data-link access and she spent a lot of time on historical research. Slowly, with Clark’s assistance, she became re-acclimated to society. Things had changed and yet they had really stayed the same for the most part. Societal change, when it came, was a slow process unless there was a major influence exerted.

One significant item she noticed that had prevented societies descent into decay was Superman. He had remained a force for good throughout her time away.

Clark came into the room from a shower one afternoon to find her crying. Lois had put off reading about her own disappearance and the effects it had produced until she felt that she would be able to handle it better. Finally, she had read about her disappearance and the things that had happened as a result.

She had just finished reading the obituary on her mother. Clark moved over and sat next to her and put an arm around her shoulder in support. With vehemence she said, “Damn that Tempus! My mother died because of what he did. Clark, I read some other things that I need you to explain. You were arrested?”

“Well, yeah. It was just a formality.”

“But, why? Why would they even think you could have had anything to do with my disappearance?”

“Do you really need to know?”

“Yes, Clark, I want to know everything. Good and bad”

“Okay, well, that was your mother’s doing. She really wasn’t responsible. She was angry and needed someone to take that anger out on and I was an available target.”

“But, for her to suspect you, of all people.”

“I didn’t hold it against her. I think it was the drink talking.”

In a tone of misery, Lois said, “Yeah, the drink. I should have known she’d fall off the wagon. Oh, Mom, I’m so sorry. Forgive me,” as she started to cry again.

After a time she got her emotions back under control and asked, “What happened to Daddy?”

In a sad tone he replied, “About ten years after your mother passed he followed her to the grave. He never did strike it rich. He went from one scheme to the next. He made a little money here and there, but nothing major.”

Lois then asked, “What happened to Lucy?”

He hesitated for a few beats before answering, “Lucy was around. About five years after you disappeared, she finally started dating again and three years later she married Jimmy Olsen.”

“So, Jimmy Olsen became my brother-in-law. I guess I have some nieces and nephews.”

With a laugh he said, “You have some great grand nieces and nephews. I’ve lost track of them all.”

“I’m glad she found someone she would be happy with.”

His reply tripped her reporter’s instinct as he said, “Yeah, so am I,” in a relieved tone.

She challenged, “There’s more to it than that, isn’t there?”

He stuttered, “Huh, uh, wha . . . what do you mean by that?”

His response confirmed her suspicion and she challenged, “I mean that there’s more to the story about Lucy than the fact that she married Jimmy. Come on, give.”

“Can’t we just leave it at that and go on?” Remembering just what had passed between him and Lucy he started to blush.

Lois noticed his blush and Mad Dog took over as she challenged, “No, we can’t just leave it at that.” Jumping up she started to pace and then stopped in front of him and as if suddenly coming to a conclusion demanded, “She made a play for you, didn’t she? *Didn’t* she? Come on, tell me.”

Sheepishly, he answered, “Well, yes, kinda.”

With a note of triumph that she had been correct in her supposition she almost shouted, “I shoulda known. That little witch. As soon as my back was turned. What’d she do?”

Somewhat reluctantly and hoping that the answer would be no he asked, “You don’t really want details, do you?”

Half reluctantly, because of what she expected she would be hearing, she said, “Give me the whole gory mess. Don’t worry; she’s not here anymore so I can’t kill her.”

He gave her the details on how for five long years Lucy had pursued a relationship with him. He did edit the story somewhat not including all of the detail on the encounter after the funeral. Not so much to shield her from what her sister had done, but out of embarrassment at his failure to avoid the encounter.

When he had finished she said, “You know, it’s a good thing she isn’t here because I *would* disembowel her. Much as I loved her, she tried to poach *my* husband.”

“She tried to have you declared legally dead thinking that if that were done I’d move on and she’d be there for me. I filed a counter suit and prevented that from happening.”

She gave him a kiss on the cheek and said, “Thank you, my loyal husband and thank you for not giving in to her. She was a Lane woman and I know how persistent we can be.”

“Fifteen years after you disappeared, Perry retired, I was promoted into the editor’s office and Jimmy had the city desk. I retired twenty years later and Jimmy became Editor.”

“Thanks to investments I made early on, eventually I had accumulated enough finances to purchase my apartment building. I would have just moved but I had hopes that someday you would reappear. Push came to shove when they announced that they wanted to buy me out so that a new high rise could go up. I refused to sell and they delayed their plans. When we get back, maybe we should sell out and move. The latest offer was twenty times what the building is worth.”

As they had planned while on their vacation, when they returned to Metropolis they accepted the offer to sell the apartment building and as soon as the contract was signed they

looked for another place to live. They found a house out on Wisteria Lane for sale and made an offer which was accepted.

After they settled in Lois started getting anxious at all of the inactivity. She was happy to be spending time with the love of her life, but her constitution was not such that inactivity would satisfy her. She needed to be out there investigating, exposing the seedy underbelly of society and bringing corrupt officials to account. In a way she was gratified to see that society hadn't changed all that much in the ninety years she had been away.

Knowing that he wouldn't be able to be there for her all of the time, Clark reluctantly agreed to Lois going back to the Planet.

Chapter 7

They had been in the new house for about six months when one morning Lois woke up and found that his side of the bed was empty and the sheets were cold.

She thought, <I hope he wasn't called away on a dangerous mission. He really isn't up to those anymore.>

He had been in the habit of leaving her a note whenever he was being called away, letting her know what it was and about how long he expected to be away, but this time his bedside table was empty. Seeing this she thought that he must simply be downstairs, perhaps fixing the morning coffee. She took a sniff and didn't smell coffee. This started to concern her. What was going on? Where was Clark?

She went downstairs and started looking around. She found his note on the counter near the coffee maker.

"Lois,

I came down to get something to drink and I heard a broadcast asking for Superman's assistance.

Star Labs wanted a research packet delivered. It should still be within my reduced capabilities.

There have been some very strong and unusual solar flares which are creating a spectacular aurora borealis. They wanted to examine the phenomenon and wanted an electronics package flown through the effect to record the strength and composition of the anomaly.

It would appear that this is a once in a lifetime event. The last time the flares even approached this intensity was in 2013.

I expect to be back before you get up.

In case I'm not, I love you and will be back soon.

Your loving husband,

Clark"

Lois was relieved. This was a simple science mission. It was nothing that would tax his abilities. She just had to wait for him to get back so that she could get the details to write up for the paper. She went back upstairs to get dressed for work while she waited for him to return.

That had been six months ago and she hadn't seen Clark since. She couldn't get over the fear that somehow Tempus was involved.

For the first weeks she had been almost frantic in her efforts to locate him. She had been calling STAR Labs several times a day, but they were no help at all. Since she had returned to the Planet she had developed a new set of contacts within the MPD. She contacted Inspector Marlowe and asked him to use his contacts both in the US and Canada to initiate a search.

As time went on she became more and more discouraged, but she determined that if Clark could wait for her for ninety years she could do the same for him.

After six months had elapsed, one day Lois was at STAR Labs doing some follow-up on a story and was in the Solar Energy lab interviewing the head of the lab when a tech shouted from the other side of the room, "Dr. Branson, I'm sorry to

interrupt, but we just started receiving telemetry from that electronics package that we asked Superman to deploy six months ago."

"What? How can that be? That signal terminated unexpectedly when Superman flew into the aurora."

"All I know is that all of the sudden we are receiving a signal."

"Send the recall signal. Use the audio link to ask Superman to bring the module back here."

Lois was a very interested observer to all of this. She looked at Dr. Branson with a hopeful expression. Could it be possible? Could Clark be alive? She remembered his note and this fit. She asked, "What does this mean?"

"I don't know, but I intend to find out. Let's finish this interview while we wait."

When they finished the interview Lois said, "Dr. Branson, I'd like to be here when Superman returns. He's been gone for six months and if he's back, it's newsworthy."

As he was exiting the lab he replied, "I understand. Right place at the right time and all of that. Sure, you can wait here in the lab."

After a short wait the lab door opened and Dr. Branson hurried back in. He had a shocked expression on his face as he did. He sped across the room, picked up a radiation detector and started for the door again.

Seeing this, Lois was apprehensive and blurted out, "Dr. Branson, what's going on? What has happened? What have you heard about Superman?"

He said, "This is highly unusual. It will require a significant amount of study. I just hope he allows it."

Lois couldn't understand what was going on but his reference left little doubt that Superman had returned. Her heart was screaming for him and she had difficulty restraining herself. She clamped down her emotions and asked, "Would you please inform him that I'm here and ask if he would grant me an interview?"

He nodded in understanding and stepped to the door. Holding up the detector he said, "Just let me check a few things first." He stepped out for just a few seconds and then the door opened again. When Branson stepped back in he was standing directly between Lois and the door opening but Lois still caught a glimpse of a familiar blue leg and red boot as it came through the doorway.

Lois was instantly on her feet and almost running to the door but stopped abruptly when he stepped around Branson. This wasn't Clark, the Clark she knew. Not the Clark that had left her six months ago. This was a younger version of him. She found her voice and choked out, "Dr. Branson, is this a clone or what?"

Dr. Branson replied, "We'll know in half an hour. He provided a DNA sample. It's being mapped. We'll compare it to the stored record."

This apparition turned to Branson and said, "Please clear the room. I need to speak with Ms. Lane ... privately."

Nodding in understanding Branson turned to his support staff and said, "You heard the man. Clear out." When the last individual had moved out through the door Branson also left, closing the door behind himself.

When the door was closed Superman crossed to Lois, put his arms around her and said, "No, my love, I'm not a clone and I don't need a DNA mapping to prove it. When I left that night, I left you a note by the coffee maker explaining that I had to fly a science package into the aurora."

His expression became one of joy as he continued, "Something very strange and wonderful happened. As you know, my powers are derived from sunlight and the fact that these were unusually violent solar flares must be the reason they affected me so. The unusually intense solar flares hyper excited my body.

Since they are an intense form of solar radiation the flares rejuvenated me. I'm young again, just like you. We can now have a lifetime together. The life we were supposed to have had ninety years ago!"

Looking up into his young again face with a questioning look she asked, "Why did it take you so long to get back?"

"The reason I was gone was the electronics package they wanted flown through the aurora. The ionization of the solar flares interacted with the electronics I was carrying. That interaction opened a portal right in front of me and I couldn't avoid passing through. That portal sent me six months into the future."

With a wicked grin and a raised eyebrow he asked, "Do you think the Planet will let you have time off for your long delayed honeymoon?"

With a wicked little grin of her own and an arched eyebrow matching his, Lois asked, "How can you be so sure I want to spend this lifetime with you?" At his look of shocked dismay she couldn't keep a straight face any longer. She started to giggle and said, "Come here, you lunkhead. There is no one else I'd want to spend every possible lifetime with," and throwing her arms around his neck she gave him a kiss like they hadn't been able to share for ninety years.

As her body melded to his she knew that they would finally be consummating their marriage the proper way. She couldn't wait. She still had that teddy that she hadn't been able to use.

She whispered in his ear, "I've got news for you buster. We're not waiting for Hawaii. How quickly can you get us home?"

"I think, for the sake of appearances I will need to meet you. We need to come up with a plausible explanation for a young Clark showing up."

"We'll deal with that second. We have something else to do that's more important. I'll type up this story later," she gave him a come-hither look, "after we consummate our wedding. I think we're overdue." With a final wink she put her Reporter's Assistant in her bag, threw the strap over her shoulder and headed for the door. She said over her shoulder, "I'll see you at home, Handsome. Don't keep me waiting any longer than necessary."

Chapter 8

It was several hours and twilight before Clark was able to get away from STAR Labs, but when he did, thanks to the DNA mapping that had been done previously, he had the necessary certificates attesting to the fact that he was indeed the real Superman.

He had undergone a whole battery of tests so that STAR Labs could try to determine just how the solar radiation had effected his rejuvenation. They had taken many readings with numerous instruments, most of which he had never seen before. Aside from the one DNA sample, however, he refused any other biological samples.

After doing a victory lap around the city he hastened to the Wisteria Lane house. By the time he arrived it was almost dark and he landed without being seen. He spun out of the Suit into casual clothes. His step was light and eager as he crossed the back yard to the door. As he crossed the yard he stopped at the arbor and plucked some roses. He removed the thorns so that she wouldn't be stuck and carried them in his hand as he completed the trip to the door.

With his superhearing he picked up Lois' heartbeat upstairs and headed in that direction. Not wanting to shock her by his sudden appearance he, by the strength of his will even though it was a struggle because his emotions wanted it otherwise, kept his feet on the stairs rather than float all the way to the second floor. He knew that the tread third from the top would squeak if he put weight on it and he made sure that he did. As soon as that squeak

was heard by her he heard her heartbeat speed up. She knew that he was home.

Lois had gone straight home. The first thing she did when she entered the house was check her appearance in a mirror. When she did she saw that she was flushed with excitement and anticipation. She hoped that it wouldn't be too evident over the video link when she placed her call. Thinking, <Oh, well, it is what it is,> she pulled out her Reporter's Assistant and used it to place the call to Frank Edwards, the Editor in Chief of the Daily Planet. As soon as she saw his face on the screen, with some trepidation she said, "Frank, Lois Lane, listen, uh, something, uh, something's come up. I know that it's rather short notice and I've only been back at the Planet for about a year, but, I think I have some vacation accrued by now and, well, I ... I need to take the next two weeks off. Can you let me have the time?"

She could see his surprised expression as Frank replied, "What?? Two weeks?!?!? Yeah, this is short notice." Realizing that he would need a good reason to deny her request he asked, "Well, let's see, what have you been working on?"

"Well, you see Frank, that's just it. I was doing the follow-up on that unexplained solar eclipse story and something unexpected happened at STAR Labs while I was there. I got a story that you are not going to believe because I hardly believe it myself and the best part is that I didn't even have to chase it. It came to me. Hold onto your hat! Would you believe that Superman has returned, and get this ... he's young again!"

"What??? Are you sure? He's been gone for six months! Young again?!?!? How could that be? Are you sure this isn't a clone somebody created? Did you get any pictures?"

Chagrined because she had been so taken up with what had happened to her husband that she had failed to think like a reporter, she replied, "Oh, no, no I didn't. Darn! I'll have to get some for a follow-up," Lois replied with confidence. "As to the other, they have mapped his DNA at STAR Labs and compared it to the mapping they had on file. He's the genuine article all right. That science mission STAR Labs sent him on six months ago was the cause of him being missing. Tell you what, I'll write the story up and e-mail it to you for tomorrow's edition along with the follow-up on the eclipse thing."

"This is a coup for sure. I just wish you had gotten at least one picture. Do you think he is still at STAR Labs? Where are you now? Could you go back and get a picture?"

This was taking longer than Lois wanted it to. She needed to get ready for Clark's arrival. She needed to terminate this call, but she didn't want Frank to think she was blowing him off. Lois replied, "I don't know, he might be, but I'm already at home and he'd probably be gone by the time I could get back there."

Frank replied, "Well, it would be better with pictures, but we'll have to go with what you have. File this story and scoop the STAR and you can have the two weeks off that you asked for."

She smiled as she replied, "You've got it, Frank. I'll send it off before the morning edition deadline. Thanks!"

"I'll look for your copy. Good job!" Suddenly something from her history came back to him and before she could break the connection Frank said, "Hey wait a minute. Weren't you and Superman really close, you know, back in the day? Is that why you're so excited? Is that why you need two weeks off? What about Clark?"

She knew that she had to deflect this somehow and she blurted out the first thing that came to mind, "Oh, well, we're both good friends of his. We will both be spending time with him."

"Won't that be kind of awkward, Clark being old and him being young again, like you?"

Lois decided that it was time to end this conversation so she decided to attack, "Just what are you implying, Frank? I love my

husband. Superman is an old friend and that's all. Clark is as happy for him as I am."

Frank, on the defensive now said, "Okay, okay, don't get upset. I didn't mean anything. I was just thinking of Clark."

Appearing somewhat mollified, Lois replied, "Okay, I'll pass on your concerns to Clark. Good night Frank."

"Good night Lois. I'll look for your copy." She broke the connection.

That being accomplished, she set her Reporter's Assistant aside. Now she would be able to concentrate on her young-again husband. She wanted to set the mood, but wary of what had happened before, she did everything she could think of to prevent a repeat of the last time. She was worried even though it was like worrying about lightning striking twice in the same spot. But, still, with Tempus you never could tell.

Trying to look in all directions at once, her head acted like it was on a swivel as she dug into her lingerie drawer and pulled out the black teddy. It was as good as the day she had purchased it. She held it up in front of her as she checked herself in the mirror. She decided that she was going to have to be extra careful. She needed to have eyes in the back of her head to prevent herself getting caught off guard. In order to do that she decided that she would have to keep at least one eye on a mirror the entire time she changed so that Tempus couldn't sneak up on her again.

First she retrieved some scented candles from a bathroom cabinet and placed them around the room. Then she turned down the bed and fluffed up the pillows.

She looked around the room and decided that the room was ready and since it could possibly be some time yet before Clark returned home, she picked up her Reporter's Assistant again and checked the time display. Deciding that she probably had sufficient time she used the dictation function to convert her spoken words into text, she spoke her story into the device. Once she was finished she keyed the Assistant to read back the stories using the text to speech function so that she could see how they sounded. Listening to it she found the inevitable typos and homonyms and corrected them before sending the stories to Frank's inbox.

Giving the time display a final check, she felt satisfied that that chore hadn't taken all that long so she shut down her Assistant and put it away in her bag. She couldn't afford to have a call come in and activating the camera, catch them in an intimate embrace. With a physical shudder she thought about what the sleaze rags wouldn't give for an image of Clark as a young-again Superman making love to Lois Lane.

It was time to prepare for her husband's arrival. She went into the bathroom carrying only the teddy. After hanging the teddy on the back of the door she started the shower. She hoped that Tempus, if he showed up again, would at least be gentleman enough that he wouldn't snatch her away, in the nude, from her shower. She normally took quick showers when she was preparing for work, but this evening she beat that record. She was very thankful that she had kept her hair short because it only took a few minutes with the hair dryer for her to finish up. She put the teddy on and moved into the bedroom.

Since she remained on the alert she felt comfortable that if Tempus showed up again, as long as he didn't have that chrome plated automatic he liked so much, she could take care of him; after all he did hit like a girl.

Crossing to her vanity she picked up a bottle of a lightly scented perfume and applied a few drops here and there. After the heat of the shower she was just the slightest bit cool so she grabbed a gauzy black shawl and watched herself in the mirror as she draped it over her shoulders fussing with it and rearranging it several times until she had it just right.

She looked around the room and at the clock then out the

window. She thought to herself, <Where is he? He'd better not have disappeared again!> Suddenly she heard that creaky stair tread. She thought, <He's here! Am I ready? Candles!> As she finished up she thought, <What if it isn't him! Could it be an intruder? Should I call for Superman?>

Then she heard his soft voice, "Lois? I'm home. Can I come in?"

At the sound of his voice she could feel a flock of butterflies take wing in her stomach. She choked out, "Just a minute!" She rushed around lighting the candles. As she finished up, she turned off the lights and thought, <Okay, everything looks ready.> Quickly moving over to the doorway to the bathroom she took a sexy pose in the doorway and said, in a sultry tone, "Come in."

The door slowly opened.

Once he placed his weight on that step he knew that she had heard him because her heart rate went into overdrive. He climbed the final steps and then moved over closer to the door and listened. He said, "Lois? I'm home. Can I come in?"

In response he heard her breathless reply, "Just a minute!"

Resisting the urge to use his x-ray vision to peek, he waited patiently. He heard the sharp rasp of a match and then he heard her scurrying around the room. A few seconds later his nose picked up the scent from the candles. There was the sharp click of the light switch and then he heard her cross the room.

Finally he heard, "Come in."

He reached for the door knob and turning it opened the door.

What greeted him from across the room was the vision of Lois wearing the teddy and shawl, looking very sexy in the doorway to the bathroom. He stepped into the room and brought the flowers out from behind his back.

She said, "Flowers? For me? You shouldn't have."

She started to move and he stopped her with a gesture and said, "Don't move. Not yet. I just want to drink in the sight of you, my beautiful wife, my bride."

Blushing under his gaze she watched as he moved over to the bureau and faster than the eye could follow he pulled out and spin changed into black sleep shorts and matching top. Suddenly her eyes were drawn to splashes of color on the bed and looking that way realized that he had strewn the rose petals atop the bed and also in a path from where she stood to the bed.

When she looked back he was in front of her with his hand outstretched. She took it and he led her over to the bed where she turned and sat on the edge. She kicked off her heels, threw her shawl over the end of the bed and gracefully sat on the edge of the bed, lifted her legs and spun around so that she could lie down on the pillow.

She watched as he slowly moved to the other side and lay down, moving over next to her. She looked into his eyes and saw reflected in them the smoldering fires of passion mirroring her own; a passion that had been long delayed in being fulfilled. He rolled on his side facing her and she reached for his hand. He allowed her to do with it what she willed and she willed that it cup her breast so she slowly brought his hand over and placed it on her right breast. She heaved a sigh as his hand actually came in contact. She turned her head to face him and he moved in and started a slow languid kiss as he gently massaged her breast. Once the kiss started she immediately wanted more and moved to deepen the kiss. Teasing his lips with her tongue until they parted and she was granted entry. Their tongues performed a dance of their own to a silent tune. She felt his hand move up and slide the right strap off of her shoulder and her breath started to come more rapidly in anticipation. She felt his hand as it slid the strap off of her shoulder and down her arm baring her right breast in the process. Then his hand was cupping her bare breast. Her breathing was becoming even more rapid and a little ragged as she was becoming more aroused.

While he had been doing this to her, her hands had not been idle. She had been exploring his chest and back, all of the planes and ridges. In a husky voice she said, “You don’t know how long I’ve waited for this.”

“We’ve both waited, but we need wait no longer, my love. It has been too long. We have a lot of lost time to make up for.”

Lois shrugged out of the other strap and lay there as he slowly peeled the teddy from her body.

She was moving as one in a dream, a dream driven by her lust for her husband, a lust that had waited uncounted years to be satisfied. Her head was shaking from side to side as the tension built within her body. This fulfillment of her long delayed desires was almost more than she could handle. She was out of her mind with the pleasure created by their joining, the fulfillment of the act.

Her body was as tight as a violin string and vibrating like a tuning fork when suddenly it was like the fourth of July and an entire fireworks display went off behind her eyes. She started to scream her delight, giving voice to the ecstasy she felt.

Their lovemaking was complete and so thoroughly satisfying that she was totally spent and lay on his chest in contentment.

After a time she recovered enough to turn her head and start kissing the side of his face and neck.

It had been a little more rushed than she had wanted but totally enjoyable and there would be ample opportunity for slow. This was only the first time. There would be many, many more.

She was about to move when she first realized just what had happened. She had been on top of Clark and he had floated them up nearly to the ceiling. Looking down at the bed she giggled and asked, “Do I have this to look forward to all the time?”

Smiling he replied, “I don’t know. Maybe only when I’m this happy.” He slowly floated them back down to the bed.

As he did, she showered him with kisses and he gave as good as he got while she lay next to him. As they continued to kiss he was stroking and petting her in a very possessive yet gentle way which she loved. They both drifted off to sleep, arms and legs entwined.

After a while, when they both awoke they had a slow, sweet encounter. Lois knew fulfillment, total happiness and total love for the first time in her life.

Chapter 9

The next day Superman showed up at STAR Labs and asked to speak again with the head researcher, Dr. Branson.

After being shown back to his office, Superman didn’t waste any time, “Dr. Branson I have an unusual request to make.”

“What do you want Superman? If STAR Labs can help you in any way, we want to.”

“I appreciate that doctor. It is my understanding that the life force transfer machine that Veeda Doodsen used on me back in the 1990s is here in storage. Is that correct?”

“Ahhhhh yes, *that* machine. Yes, it is. That is a very strange machine. Some years ago we ran some trials on it. The concept was intriguing. We ran some animal studies with it and have found it to be promising, however it is very dangerous. We haven’t as yet been able to overcome the side effect, the rapid aging of the donor. We have even tried cross species experiments. The results were disheartening to say the least. The life force transferred; however the effect was not as great as had been hoped. We’ve decided that the device is too dangerous to use. We have halted all testing.”

“Doctor, I’ve been a donor and that was a successful operation. I would like to borrow the device. I have one final use for it.”

“Do you think that is wise Superman? You will lose a portion of your life force. Of course, with the way things are now that may no longer be an issue.”

“What do you mean doctor?”

“The data from the studies we performed when you returned has been analyzed and we have found some interesting facts. We have known for years that your powers originate with the Earth’s sun. We were able to compare that data with readings taken years ago. There have been some significant changes. The energy levels we read recently dwarf the previous readings. We checked the dates that the previous readings were taken and it appears as though they were done after the Veeda Doodsen incident. As a result of your exposure to the extreme solar flares we experienced a little over six months ago your body was not only recharged and rejuvenated, your body was super charged. Your body’s energy reserves are no longer in the depleted state they had been since the machine was used.”

“Can you explain that in simpler terms, doctor?”

“It means that you now have energy to spare. It’s like this. Imagine your body is a battery and your battery has been on half charge for years and not able to fully recharge because some of the cells were damaged. Well, now, those cells have been repaired and recharged, in fact they are carrying an overload. When we measured your aura, instead of extending only millimeters out from your skin it now extends out centimeters. It is much more intense. Still, you would be giving up a portion of that if you used that machine again and became the donor.”

Elated at what he was hearing, but managing to control himself he asked, “How long will this overload last?”

“We have no way to determine that. It may be depleted as you use your powers in the normal course of your activities. Then again you may remain in this state indefinitely, replenishing your energy from sunlight and maintaining these new levels which would then become your new norm.”

Superman replied, “Thank you for that information doctor. Still, I can see no other way to do what needs to be done. I will prepare a lab to which I can transport the device and set it up. If you have no objections I will pick it up tomorrow.”

“As long as you know what the risks are, I have no objections. When you come right down to it, we really don’t own that machine. We have just been the custodians. You actually have more of a claim to ownership because it was used on you.”

“Thank you, doctor. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

The next day Superman picked up the device and took it to the Wisteria Lane home and placed it in the basement.

Later that same day a young Clark Kent made his debut, claiming that Superman had used the device to rejuvenate him.

Lois and Clark finally departed for their long delayed honeymoon in Hawaii.

The years passed happily for Lois and Clark. After only a year Lois became pregnant. In 2089, their first child was born. It was a boy and they named him Clark Junior.

A year later, in 2090, Penelope (Penny) was born. In fairly rapid order there were six additional children which came as three sets of twins.

The first hint that there was a problem was with Penny’s birth. Clark Junior had been a week premature, but this was not unheard of, in fact it was still within the expected range for full term. Penny, however was another story entirely. Penny was four weeks premature, but when born was fully developed. Thinking there could have been an error in the timing they didn’t worry about this for very long.

With Sam and Ellen’s birth in 2091 questions were starting to be raised. They were born fully eight weeks premature. Initially this didn’t raise any eyebrows either because frequently in multiple births the babies are delivered early, but like their siblings they showed complete development unlike other eight week preemies. Their development was that of full term babies.

STAR Labs was consulted and they began studying Lois.

There was another unusual phenomena noticed. There was less and less time between pregnancies.

In 2092 the births of Sean and Celeste Kent were ten weeks premature and yet they showed full development as had all of their siblings. STAR Labs intensified their testing.

By the time Joel and Lara, their last children, were born the duration of the pregnancy was only twenty-four weeks. Because of the shortness of time between delivery and conception coupled with the shortened gestation this final set of twins were also delivered in 2092.

Physiologically, Lois in 2102, would have been forty-five years old, however, by 2102 Lois' hair had started graying and she had been developing laugh/worry lines which is to say age wrinkles and shortly after Joel and Lara's birth Lois experienced the early onset of menopause. Normally this would have occurred much later in her life. This became yet another data point for STAR Labs.

As time went on other strange things started happening. Lois experienced an early onset of arthritis and osteoporosis. These diseases are usually associated with advanced age. In 2112, when Lois would physiologically been fifty-five, her health started to deteriorate rapidly.

Lois returned to STAR Labs and after two days of testing Lois and Clark were called into Dr. Branson's office. After they were seated Dr. Branson looked up from the file he had spread out on his desk. He said, "There's no reason to beat about the bush and every reason not to do so. What we have found is very disturbing. We have found that Lois' body has been infused with an unknown form of energy. Because of the effect it is having on her body we have dubbed it, for want of a better term, Chrono-energy because it seems to be causing time to accelerate in her body. She is aging rapidly and earlier than she should. That explains the shortening of her pregnancies. The Chrono-energy was accelerating the development of the children in the womb. Our only conclusion is that it must have something to do with her disappearance. It is like her body is trying to move to the age she should be if not for the event of her kidnapping."

Not liking what they were hearing, Clark reached for and took Lois' hand in his, "Doctor, what is the prognosis?"

The doctor could see how they were taking this information. He was sorry that he didn't have a better way to tell them. He shook his head in dismay as he continued, "Not good. The deterioration is accelerating. Within a year Lois will die of old age if we can't find a way to drain off this Chrono-energy and even if that is done there is no guarantee that the effects will be reversed. In a worst case scenario Lois will be dead in less than twelve months. A better scenario has her stabilized at this point and living the rest of a normal, or as normal as is possible, life from this point. The best scenario would be complete recovery. The problem is that since we really don't know the nature of the energy itself we have no way of knowing how to drain it off."

In a weakened voice, Lois said, "Thank you doctor for being honest with us. At least this way we know."

Dr. Branson said, "We will continue to try to find an answer for you."

With a very determined tone, Clark said, "Thank you doctor for your diagnosis. I guess it's up to us now. We are going to try to find our own answer."

After they were home, Clark with anger and disgust evident in his voice spat out, "Tempus! It must be because he kept you in that active time portal for all of that time. The exposure to those energies is what has done this to you."

Lois put her hand on his arm and in her weakened, frail voice said, "We'll find a solution. We always do."

Clark looked at her and with sadness in his voice asked,

"How can we fix this when we can't even be sure how it happened?"

Lois tried to encourage him, "Somebody once said, 'Love will find a way.' And we have enough love for a hundred couples. We'll find a way. I believe in us."

For the next four months all Clark could do was watch the love of his life deteriorate. By this time Lois was wheelchair bound. The children, who were all in college at this time, spent as much time as they could with their mother because they couldn't be sure just how much time they would have.

Finally one day a few weeks later, Clark came to Lois and kneeling in front of her wheelchair said, "I think I have a possible solution. It's risky, but, what choice do we have?"

"Clark, if there's a chance, I think we need to take it. What is it?"

In a less than hopeful tone he said, "Come with me."

Chapter 10

He picked her up and carried her downstairs to the basement. After placing her in a chair he flipped on the lights.

Lois was amazed to see Veeda Doodsen's machine all set up. She goggled at it and vehemently shouted, it didn't come out quite as strongly as she had wished, but that was only because of her body's frailty, "No! No way. I'm not going to be the cause of that happening to you again. I don't care what happens to me. The world needs you. It doesn't need me."

"Lois, I spent ninety years without you by my side. I don't want to spend one more minute without you, besides; you've forgotten what I was told. I should be able to use it without it affecting me." He continued, with tears in his eyes, "Even if it did shorten my life, it is a sacrifice I would gladly make if it means I will have you with me longer."

He could see her shaking her head in the negative.

Deciding to continue to press his point he said, "You might not think that the world needs you, but I surely do. Look at it this way, the world needs me and I need you, QED the world needs Lois Lane. Please, let me do this."

With a feeble shake of her head but with a voice still filled with resolution she said, "I can't ask you to do that."

In a serious tone he said, "You don't need to ask. I'm telling you it's what I want to do."

That was when Penny came down the steps.

Lois asked, "Penny, what are you doing here?"

"Dad called and said he needed some help."

Lois looked at Clark with an accusatory expression and said, "You've had this planned, haven't you. You weren't really asking me if I wanted to do this, you were telling me that you were going to do it. Well, I won't have it. You can't force me to do this against my will."

Clark knelt in front of her and with tears in his eyes said, "Lois, please let me do this. You don't know how much it tears me up inside to see you like this. I ... I can't bear to watch you failing right in front of my eyes especially when there is something I can do to stop it and maybe make you better. I don't know what I'd do if I lost you — again."

Penny knew that she was Lois' favorite daughter and even though, normally she wouldn't have, in this instance was willing to use that knowledge to her advantage. She knelt in front of her mother and with tears in her eyes also said, "Mom, we all talked it over and Dad's right. We all volunteered to give you some of our life force, but, Dad said he was the one that could most afford it. As he put it, his batteries actually could stand to be drained a little."

Wiping a tear from her cheek, Penny continued, "Please, Mom, do this for all of us. We don't want to lose you."

Lois put her hand on Penny's wet cheek and was moved.

With tears in her own eyes, she relented. She said, “Okay, if you all feel this strongly about it, how can I say no?”

Penny burst out in a new flood of tears, this time tears of joy as she said in a hushed tone, “Thanks Mom, from all of us.” Once she had settled down she turned to Clark and said, “Okay Pop, let’s do this.”

Clark picked up Lois and placed her into the chamber to receive the life force. After closing the chamber he moved over and sealed himself into the donor chamber. He said to Penny, “Okay, kiddo. You know what to do.”

Penny threw the necessary switches and moved the lever to start the process.

It had no sooner started than there was a problem. Energy bolts like lightning started arching from point to point on the equipment creating a light show of magnificent proportions.

Seeing this Clark cried out, “Lois!” He was remembering when he had given up his life force to Conner Schenk and the same apparent malfunction had occurred and what had happened to him. He cried out, “Penny! Penny! Shut it down! Please Penny, shut it down. Hurry!”

Penny moved to comply but even as she did the display reached a crescendo and when Penny hit the final switch it finally started to fade.

Penny zipped over to Clark and opened his cylinder. Clark deliberately avoided looking at the other cylinder because he was afraid that he would see Lois as an infant lying on the bottom of her cylinder. He said, to Penny, “I can’t look. How’s your Mom?”

Penny looked at Lois’ cylinder and saw that it had filled with smoke but that it was slowly clearing. She said, “Pop, her cylinder is filled with smoke. Was that expected?”

“Yeah, I’m not sure if that’s good or bad.”

“The smoke is slowly clearing. I think I still see her standing there.”

“Are you sure??? She hasn’t turned into an infant?”

“No, there she is. I can see her more clearly now.”

Clark looked and shouted, “Lois!”

Her hands were up covering her face; presumably she had put them up to protect her eyes from the light discharges. Clark was worried because she kept them there even though the light show was over.

Clark opened her chamber and she fell out into his arms and she was limp as a wet dishrag. The first thing he noticed was that her hair had returned to its rich brown color. Her hands finally fell away from her face. Clark was elated when he saw her face for the first time. It was un wrinkled and as smooth as a baby’s skin and she was young again.

Penny stuck close as he carried an unconscious Lois upstairs and placed her in their bed. When he laid his burden down Penny finally was able to ask, “How are you, Pop? Any affect from the procedure?”

“I don’t think so, but it will take a trip to STAR Labs to be sure.” He had been unable to take his eyes off of Lois the entire time. He continued, “Look at her. She looks the same as the day we first met. I wonder how she’ll feel when she wakes up.”

“Yeah, she looks younger than she did in the pictures you took of her and CJ when he was born. Pop, I’m going to go back downstairs and make sure the device is all shut down. I’ll be right back.”

He stopped her before she could exit and said, “Thanks Penny. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Turning to her father and throwing her arms around him giving him a super hug she said, “Pop, you would have done the same thing for me. That’s just what love is. We all know how much you love Mom. We all love her too, but with us it’s different. She’s our mother but, to you, she’s your soul mate. That’s an even closer bond. We understand. We all wanted this. As soon as I finish up downstairs, I need to head on home. Rich

will be expecting me to be there. I think he’s going to be popping the question soon, which means I’ll be bringing him in on the family secret.”

With some concern in his voice Clark asked, “You’re sure he’s the one? It’s a big step, bringing him in on the secret.”

She moved over and gave her dad another hug and said, “Don’t worry Pop, I’ve been careful. I’ve known from the time we first met that he was the one, the same way you knew that Mom was the one,” before she turned away and headed downstairs.

Clark moved over and lay down next to his wife. Neither one noticed when Penny left because they were both asleep. Between giving up some of his life force and the emotional strain Clark was also exhausted.

Clark woke up to the feel of Lois’ hand on his chest. He opened his eyes to see her coffee colored orbs looking into his. He asked, “How do you feel?”

She seemed to take a self-inventory before she responded, “Better than I’ve felt in years. Thank you. I just hope you haven’t given up too much.”

“It would be impossible to give up too much for you. I’d give my life for you.”

“I hope that you know that the reverse is true.”

As he moved in for a kiss he said, “I do.”

With a wicked little grin she said, “That sounds to me like you are repeating your vows. Only the kiss came second.” She reached down and, taking his hand in hers, guided it to her breast. She released a contented sigh and said, “It’s been a couple of years. I think we are due. No, we are overdue. Let’s go take a long, leisurely shower and see where that leads.”

“That sounds wonderful to me.” He stood and assisted her to her feet. She kicked off her shoes and padded barefoot into the bathroom with Clark close behind.

They helped each other disrobe and then they climbed into the shower together. After washing each other they took turns each drying the other and, still nude, headed back into the bedroom. After turning down the covers they cuddled up together and started kissing.

Their kisses deepened and their hands roamed all over each other stroking, squeezing and tweaking as was appropriate. This started a period of marital intimacy. Suddenly Clark was startled into immobility. Even though his body was telling him to move, he couldn’t. He couldn’t believe what was happening. They had slowly started to float

First just a couple of inches and eventually they were near the ceiling. Lois opened her eyes and said, “Oh, I didn’t realize you had floated us up here. It’s just like old times.”

With a look of consternation he said, “Lois, I didn’t float us up here.”

“You didn’t??? Then how did we get here?”

“Well, if it wasn’t me, who does that leave?”

Shocked she blurted out, “What!?!?!?!? Are you saying that I’m doing this?”

“That is the *only* other possibility.”

“But, how can that be? I lost my Ultra Woman powers a long time ago.”

“It has to have something to do with the life force transfer. Dr. Branson told me that my super batteries were over charged. Between that, the Chrono-energy and the way Doodsen’s machine acted, anything’s possible.”

He asked, “Can I look forward to this every time we make love?”

There was a giggle in her reply as she threw his words back at him, “I don’t know. Maybe only when I’m this happy.”

They floated back down to the bed and in the afterglow of their lovemaking they lay together, arms and legs entwined they discussed the possibilities of the return of Ultra Woman. After a

while they got up and she dug out her old uniform and tried it on for size. Since it was spandex, there was no question of it fitting and she modeled it for him. He spun into his Suit and asked, “Who’s up for dinner in Paris?”

With a smile she said, “I just might be.”

Smiling he said, “Wait just a minute.” He sent out a mental summons, /Kids!/
 He got back a smattering of replies, and then he sent, /The procedure worked, better than expected. Let’s meet in Paris at the base of the Eifel Tower in half an hour. Make sure you are all in uniform. You’re not going to believe this./

Clark Junior replied for the rest of the kids, /Sure thing Pop! We’ll all be there. We should be able to make it a late night if you want. I don’t think any of us have early classes tomorrow./
 /That’s good! This calls for a celebration./

Lois gave him a look. He had excluded her from the call so she had not heard it, but knew he was up to something. She said, “Okay, what gives?”

“Oh, nothing. Let’s make sure the house is locked up and the oven is off before we leave.”

After his little delaying tactic they took off for Paris. Midway across the Atlantic he said, “Let’s stop at the Eifel Tower before we find a café.”

Now she knew something was up, but she decided to humor him. As they approached Paris she used her telescopic vision and zoomed in on the Eifel Tower. What she saw warmed her heart and brought a tear to her eye. All eight of the kids were there cheering, welcoming her.

That was when Ultra Woman made her return debut. The next day they had gone to STAR Labs and they had confirmed her powers and assured her that they were permanent.

Epilogue

In the far distant future of this universe, Tempus appeared to pop out of thin air as he stepped through the time window. It was only seconds since he had left and turning around he resumed his seat on the bench. He looked around expectantly. He didn’t know just how the changes would occur, he just knew that there should be some changes. At the very least there should be some litter. He had kidnapped Lois Lane and moved her ninety years into her future when there would be no possibility of Clark Kent being able to father any super offspring, but there were no discernible changes. In fact, if anything, the area was perhaps a little more neat and clean than it had been before he had taken his trip.

There were still families picnicking. Wait, didn’t that family have six children a minute ago? He counted noses and came up with a different number, seven??? There were still children playing and couples strolling, hand in hand. It was positively bucolic and nauseating.

Suddenly a young girl on a hoverboard zoomed past at a high rate of speed. That in itself was not too surprising, however a boy on skates was chasing her and he was moving faster than a child should be able to on skates. As he watched, fascinated, the boy put on an extra burst of speed, moving almost faster than the eye could follow, zipping past the girl who jumped off the board and took off after him on foot at superspeed.

<How can that be?!?!? This is going to require some research,> he thought. Hastily he pulled out a data-link and performed a historical search for Lois Lane and Clark Kent. He sent the data to the heads-up display on the right lens of his glasses.

He was surprised at the amount of data that was in the data banks as evidenced by the time it took to collect it all.

As fast as he could, he started reading and as he did he simply got madder and madder. It turned out that somehow Superman had been rejuvenated and had reunited with Lois. One

result of their later union was that there had been eight children instead of the five they had had before his interference. The difference was three sets of twins. Instead of preventing Utopia he had only delayed their having children for ninety years, but then they had had more than made up for the delay and that fact had actually hastened the creation of Utopia. Something else caught his eye. What was that entry? He scrolled back up to it. As he read he thought, <There was another Superhero? Ultra Woman? Who was that? Is there a picture?>

As he hit some additional keys trying to find a picture. Finally he found one and didn’t recognize her, because she was wearing a mask, he thought to himself, <Now, there’s irony.>

If, instead of going for the irony and returning her to him when he supposedly couldn’t father any children, had he simply dropped her off in another universe, this wouldn’t have happened.

As he looked past his research he saw a couple of TTEMPO field agents approaching. They were always so easy to identify. They thought that they blended in, but they really stuck out like a sore thumb. They were almost as bad as Herb, who always dressed in that old fashioned suit and bowler hat. <God, what a fashion statement.> If he was going to have another chance at preventing Utopia he would have to leave, quickly.

He pulled out his time window device and keyed in a random number. But before hitting the execute button he noticed a couple strolling towards him hand in hand and at sight of them he became instantly fearful.

The man was wearing a Superman uniform. A closer perusal disclosed the fact that it was in very fact Clark Kent and the woman at his side was also wearing a super uniform and he recognized her as Ultra Woman.

He was actually not too surprised to see that it *was* Lois Lane! <She was the female superhero!!! How did it happen????>

>

Then he saw them look over at the picnicking family who were all waving. That wasn’t outside the realm of possibility that they would be recognized but then he heard, “Mom! Dad! Come on over and join us!”

It was then that he realized just how wrong his plan had turned out and muttered to himself, “Oh well, better luck next time,” then he stepped through the time window and disappeared from this universe just ahead of the TTEMPO agents.

As he stepped through he thought, < I’m not too surprised to see that she doesn’t bother to wear the mask anymore. After all, now there are thousands of super offspring!>

THE END