

The End of the Lane

By Darthsaad

A peril parody of
pre-existing characters

01

“No, absolutely not.”

Perry White sat behind his desk in the Daily Planet offices, glowering at the person standing in front of him. Behind him the Metropolis skyline stretched out for as far as the eye could see, skyscraper after skyscraper sitting like a concrete column in a twentieth century Mount Olympus. The sounds of the city wafted in from below – horns, engines, the clack of elevated subways, and the general hubbub of the largest and greatest city in the world.

But while the view might have been grand, and the office impressive, at this moment the editor-in-chief of the city’s most prominent newspaper looked less like a powerful media figure and more like a bulldog being denied a treat. The silver haired man had his jacket off, his tie loosened, and a scowl of disapproval on his wide, somewhat craggy face.

At first glance the figure of White’s ire seemed incapable of weathering such a response. The woman looking at him was young and attractive, around 5’4 in her heels, with brown hair was pulled back sharply on top but which curled about her neck and shoulders. That hair acted to frame a pretty face with intelligent eyes and a strong but still feminine chin. Her functional jacket and skirt gave her a look of both elegance and efficiency.

“Lois, be reasonable,” White said in his gruff tones. “Tracking down Lex Luthor could be the biggest story of the year – of the decade!”

“Which is exactly why we can’t wait for Clark Kent to just turn up,” the beautiful reporter told him. “Chief, we have to act on this now. The Molari Mob trial doesn’t even start for two weeks. Anybody could do the background work on it. Even Jimmy could do it!”

“Thanks Ms Lane,” the young man sitting on the couch against the wall said amiably as he fiddled with his camera.

White rolled his eyes at the young photographer and spread his hands out to the woman in front of him with her arms folded. “But it’s the CONGO, Lois! The jungle!”

“And it can’t be any worse than the concrete jungle we live in every day,” Lois countered. Leaning over her boss’s desk she tapped the papers in front of him with her finger. “Chief, this is red hot. The leads we have could be worthless in forty eight hours. I know it’s dangerous but I’m a big girl and I can take care of myself.”

Perry leaned back with a look of belligerent resignation. The truth was Lois Lane WAS good – maybe even better than Clark Kent, given her tenacity at landing a story. And with Kent AWOL he didn't have many options. All the other reporters he had available were too green to be trusted with something his important.

"I've hiked before, and climbed as well." Lois said, ticking off points on her fingers like a schoolteacher lecturing a student. "I can swim, drive and shoot with the best of them. I know Luthor's way of operating, how to track him by his contacts, how to..."

"Alright, alright, ALRIGHT!" Perry said, throwing up his hands. "You've got the story."

Lois stern expression dissolved into a warm smile. As always the editor was mystified as to just how she did it – transformed in the blink of an eye from a thundercloud to a rainbow. He knew that quite a few men had been taken aback by Lois Lane's skills at being both intimidating and charming. Had he met her when he was a single man in his thirties he might have been tempted to try giving Superman a run for his money when it came to catching her eye.

"Don't worry, Perry, you won't regret it," she told him.

"Your plane leaves in six hours, so you better get organized," he told her. "You too Olsen!"

Jimmy looked up with a shocked smile. "Me, chief?"

"Yes you. You're a photographer, aren't you? You think I'm sending one of my star reporters to chase down a story like this without pictures to go with it. Get yourself packed." He glowered at the still smiling Jimmy. "And don't call me Chief!"

The docks where the boat plane had pulled in after landing were teeming with figures. Mostly they were the ebony skinned natives of the dark continent, dressed in a variety of clothing that ranged from worn and battered shirts and pants to the more traditional loin-clothes of the jungle tribes. They toiled at moving boxes and luggage from the plane and other craft to the waiting vehicles, or vice versa.

It was through ports and stations like this that the wealth of Africa flowed out into the world beyond, and by which powerful men in Europe and America channelled their resources to track down the sources of that wealth. Hidden in the jungles just beyond the trading post were riches in gold and ivory, in jewels, and in metal deposits that could be turned into fortunes by the captains of western industry.

Lois looked at that frontier now, intent on tracking down her own personal treasure. Since boarding the plane back in Metropolis she had taken the time to change into attire more suitable for this particular jungle. Her heeled shoes, jacket and skirt had given way to a pair of brown leather boots that rose up towards her knees and khaki supported by a wide leather belt. Above the waist she wore a safari shirt with a blue bandanna knotted about her neck. Her hair was pulled back into a bun and she wore a pith helmet on her head.

Jimmy was dressed in pretty much the same attire he had boarded in, though he had traded in his regular shoes for a pair of old camping shoes. Currently he was fanning himself as the sudden heat assaulted him. It had been late autumn when they Metropolis, which meant they had crossed over into the beginnings of the Equatorial summer.

“Gosh, Ms Lane,” the young man stammered. He raised his camera and snapped a quick picture as men tried to move past him carrying their loads. “How are we going to find our guide in all this?”

Lois frowned. “If this Charlie Tolliver is any good at all he should be able to find us,” she told the young man with a somewhat sceptical tone. Lois had not been entirely happy when Perry told her that he had hired a guide for her, but on this particular point her editor had stood firm.

“Great Caesar’s Ghost, Lois, this is the Belgian Congo!” White had blustered. “There are wild animals, a lot of it is still unexplored, savage tribes that have barely encountered white men. If it’s a chance to track down Luthor it’s worth the risk and expense, but I’m not going to take more chances than we have to, and that’s final.”

So now Lois was stuck with what she just knew was going to be another condescending male who didn’t think a woman could take care of herself. Perry had shown several letters of recommendation he had on Tolliver from a variety of reputable sources in the region, but Lois was remained unconvinced. To her thinking this guy was probably either a fifty year-old English boarding school graduate or some charming rogue with more machismo than brains. *Oh well*, she thought with a mental sigh. *It could be worse. I could have been stuck with babysitting Clark Kent as well.*

“Let’s get off this dock and see if we can’t find this Tolliver,” she huffed. “Assuming he hasn’t got himself lost with Perry’s paycheque in the nearest local dive.”

“Don’t worry, Miss Lane. If there’s one thing I would NEVER lose, it’s a paycheque.”

Lois spun on her heel at the words, and stood blinking. So did Jimmy, though not quite for the same reason.

A bunch of African porters moved aside to reveal a blonde woman about the same height as Lois, dressed in a battered pair of shorts whose length made Lois’ skirt seem positively prudish, and a figure-hugging shirt that seemed to be equal parts patches and pockets and with sleeves torn short to reveal the woman’s toned arms.

Her boots were hiking heavy duty hiking gear with thick short thick socks. Her blonde hair came down about her shoulders in an untidy mess that somehow still seemed stylish, while a pair of large dark eyes stared at them from under the brim of a safari hat with one of the sides clipped up. Her smile seemed almost girlish, but both Lois and Jimmy noted the well-worn holster for a black revolver hanging from her shapely hip.

“Lois Lane, I take it?” the woman said, thrusting out a hand. Lois accepted it and shook. “Charlie Tolliver, but you can call me Charlie. I’m a big fan of your writing.” Lois nodded, still somewhat taken aback, but the woman had already turned to the still smiling Jimmy. “And who’s this?”

“Oh, I’m nobody,” the photographer blurted. The woman raised a questioning eyebrow, and he laughed nervously. “I mean no, I’m somebody. I’m Jimmy.” He cleared his throat and brought his nervous voice down a note. “Jimmy Olsen.”

“Well it’s good to meet you Jimmy Jimmy Olsen,” she said with a smile and a wink. The young man swallowed again and seemed to be trying hard not to blush. Then she turned back to Lois. “Let’s get your things squared away, and then we can get down to business.” She gestured to a couple of native porters nearby and shouted some words of French. The men nodded and stepped over to pick up the traveller’s bags, and Charlie began to lead them through the general confusion in the direction of the trading post.

As they left another pale skinned figure was watching from the shadows of a set of large cargo crates. The man finished his cigarette and turned to one of the black men standing behind him. “Tell the messenger to take a message – Lois Lane has arrived.”

The dark man nodded and hurried off, and was quickly swallowed in the shadows.

Tolliver sat at a small table in the place she had secured for Lois in the local guesthouse. Aside from the room the apartment only had its single bedroom. The windows opened out onto a tiny balcony overlooking the dirt street while overhead a four bladed fan turned in lazy circles, making a futile effort to keep the heat and humidity at bay. Lois was standing overlooking the table while Jimmy sat in the only other chair.

The female guide had a map laid out in front of her, along with a whisky glass and a bottle of bourbon Lois had brought with her on the plane. “This is the last place your information puts the man you’re looking for,” Tolliver said, pointing to the map of the area. Even to Jimmy’s untrained eye the terrain looked rugged. “From here that’s about two days drive by jeep...”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Jimmy said brightly.

“...and then a four-day hike through the jungle,” Tolliver finished.

Jimmy’s mouth turned downwards.

“Long way to go on a hunch,” the blonde said, pushing her hat back up away from her face. She looked Lois over appraisingly. “You sure the two of you are up for this?”

Lois gave the blonde a hard stare. She had been surprised to find their guide was a woman, but it was clear Tolliver regarded city folks like her and Jimmy in the same way that most men regarded the ‘fairer sex’ – which was to say ornamental at best.

“Lex Luthor is one of the most wanted men in the world,” she told Tolliver. “He’s a master criminal responsible for a list of crimes as long as your arm, including blackmail, kidnapping, and murder. He needs to be found and brought to justice – so yes, we’re up for this.”

Tolliver leaned back and looked Lois and up and down. “White said you were feisty,” she said with a smile. “You don’t last long in a place like this without being able to read people. You,” she said, pointing to Lois, “strike me as someone who can take care of herself.”

She lifted her glass and pointed it towards the boy photographer. “You don’t,” she said bluntly.

Jimmy winced. “He’ll do just fine,” Lois told the woman. “All you need to do is get us to the place marked and back.”

“All I need to do,” Tolliver smiled. “You make it sound pretty easy, but I gotta warn you. That area is taboo for the locals around here. Supposedly a tribe live there called the Gaboni.”

“Hostile?” Lois asked.

“Well that’s hard to say,” Tolliver said, leaning back again and taking a swig of from her glass. “Mostly because nobody who’s ever set foot there has come back to say what they found.”

Jimmy blinked. “Nobody?”

Tolliver winked at him. “Nope.”

“So naturally all sorts of legends of bogey men have sprung up,” Lois said dismissively.

“Bogey men I can deal with using a flashlight,” Tolliver said. “But if the Gaboni are real, then we’re going to need something a little more...substantial.”

She stood up and went over to a canvas bag she had left near the door. Opening it she pulled out a pair of rifles; bolt action affairs of the kind hunters used for game. She picked one up and passed it across to Lois. “Ever used one of these?”

Keeping her eyes locked on Tolliver’s, Lois took the weapon from her. She held it up, making sure the chamber was empty, and then drew back the bolt easily and cocked it with sure and steady hands. Raising the gun, she drew bead on a spot on the wall away from the others, set the stock against her shoulder, sighted down the barrel, and squeezed the trigger.

There was a click, and she lowered the rifle and nodded. “Seems like it will do,” she told the blonde.

Tolliver nodded and smiled. “Alright,” she said. The guide looked over at Jimmy. “What about you, cute stuff?”

“Ah, sorry,” Jimmy said sheepishly. “The only thing I know how to shoot are photographs.”

Tolliver gave the young man a smile. “Well then, you better make sure you stick extra close to me.” She patted the gun on her hip. Jimmy looked at the woman in her shorts and blushed scarlet.

“We leave at first light,” Tolliver told Lois. “Vehicles are ready to go, porters will meet us at the place where the road finishes. I’ve used these men before – we can rely on them to be there. You two had better get some sleep.”

“We’ll be ready,” Lois told her. Tolliver gave them both a final nod and slung the other rifle over her shoulder. Taking the bottle she walked out, closing the door behind her.

“What a woman,” Jimmy said in a kind of happy daze.

“Okay Casanova, get to your own room and get some sleep,” Lois told him with a smirk. “We’re in for a busy day tomorrow.”

Outside the hotel the man from the docks stood watch. It was late and he was tired, but Lex Luthor was paying him good money for the information he needed. And if there was one thing the man knew for sure, it was that taking Luthor's money and disappointing him meant a worse way to die than anything the local jungle had to offer up.

02

The safari moved through the thick jungle of the Congo at what felt like a snail's pace to Lois, though Tolliver assured her they were making good time. Perhaps it was just the fact that to the Metropolis reporter every tree looked like every other tree that they seemed to be getting nowhere fast.

The guides had been waiting for them at the rendezvous point, as good as the blonde woman's word. Tolliver had greeted them in their own native dialect, and the tall, smooth headed black man who led the group had flashed her a smile that showed genuine affection.

"This is Sabanga," she had told Lois and Jimmy, "the best guide in the area. Anything this man doesn't know about the jungle hereabouts just ain't so."

"Very...pleased...to...meet...you!" Jimmy had said, speaking loudly and slowly as he smiled and bobbed his head.

"Likewise, I am sure," Sabanga said replied in a deep baritone voice, affecting a courtly bow. Jimmy had looked mortified, but the black man had only laughed and clapped him on the back.

"Come along, Jimmy Olsen," Sabanga had said cheerfully, "we shall get you fitted into more appropriate clothing."

"Which goes for you too, Lois," Tolliver had said, smiling at the female reporter's confusion.

Now, days later, Lois was still not entirely comfortable with the shorts that Charlie had insisted she use to replace her skirt. It wasn't that Lois was embarrassed by her legs, just the opposite in fact. But she had fought tooth and nail to be taken seriously as a reporter in a world where a woman's pretty looks could get a lot of dinner invitations but often meant she was rarely taken seriously. The idea of what the men back in the Daily Planet bullpen would say if they saw a photo of her in her current attire, showing off as much leg as a Broadway chorus girl, made her squirm with discomfort.

Charlie though, had been adamant.

"Listen girl, we ain't goin' on no picnic in the part or hike through Yosemite. I want you able to keep up, and that includes being able to run like Jesse Owens if I tell you to. I don't want to

have to stop and sling you over my shoulder just 'cause you tripped in the skirt and sprained your ankle.”

Lois had seethed silently at that, and it hadn't exactly helped her mood to learn that Charlie had been absolutely right. The shorts were a lot easier to walk through the jungle in, especially with the rifle slung over her shoulder. One time she caught Jimmy staring at her, though in truth he seemed much more interested in the rear view of Charlie as she and Sabanga led the way through the thick underbrush.

Abruptly Sabanga threw up a hand and the whole group stopped. The black man called out something that seemed like a strange mix of his own language and French, and the line of porters slumped to the ground, seeking whatever shade the jungle offered as they rested.

Sabanga and Charlie were speaking as Lois and Jimmy came up to join them. “Problem?” Lois asked, catching the looks in their eyes as they spoke in low voices.

Charlie nodded ahead. In the distance Lois saw what looked like a high ridge, and then actual mountains rising up into a grey clouded sky. Rain seemed to be a perpetual companion here in the Congo, and several times the group had found itself trekking through a drenching downpour that seemed to come from nowhere and vanish just as quickly.

“Those hills are supposed to mark one of the boundaries of Gaboni territory,” Charlie told the two reporters.

Sabanga looked up at the sun and wiped the sweat from his shining head. Somehow the native guide seemed able to read the sky that to Lois just looked like a uniformly grey canvas.

“There isn't much light left for today,” he announced. “Best thing is to camp here. I can scout out some trails before dark so we can start fresh in the morning.”

Lois stepped up and looked at the heights ahead. “Like something from a Rice Burroughs novel,” she said. Her eyes narrowed.

Charlie stepped up and laid a hand on her shoulder, tipping back her safari hat. “What'cha thinking, girlfriend?”

“Just that if Luthor really is determined to stay hidden, somewhere nobody dares go looking might make a pretty good hiding place,” Lois mused quietly.

Jimmy's eyes widened. “Jeepers, Miss Lane, with a bunch of head hunters!” He shook his head. “Even Lex Luthor isn't that crazy.”

Charlie nodded. “Handsome here is right,” she said, as Jimmy blushed. “If you're friend Luthor went hiding up there, the only story you're likely to get out of this trip is his obituary.”

Charlie turned away and headed back to the porters, leaving Lois staring ahead. Sabanga stepped forward and smiled at Jimmy. “One thing though,” he said to the young man. “According to legend, the Gaboni are not head-hunters.”

Jimmy seemed to relax a little. “They're not?”

“Indeed no,” the black man said, starting down the trail. “They are cannibals,” he called back over his shoulder cheerfully, as Jimmy swallowed and turned pale.

That night the safari was huddled around their fires. A steady rain was falling, and Lois was sitting on a fold out chair in her tent and using the light of a kerosene lamp to look over the maps and notes she had brought with her.

The tent flap opened, and Charlie came in. Her jungle outfit clung to her from the damp, but she smiled as she took off her safari hat and brushed back her unruly blonde hair. "You look at those maps much more and you're gonna read the print offa them," she laughed.

Lois looked up at her and grimaced. In any other place rain like this might have been a blessed relief from the heat, but here it only seemed to add to the ever-oppressive humidity. "The rain never seems to get to you," she observed.

Charlie unslung her rifle and pulled up another chair as she laughed. "Girl, if you are someone who don't like getting' wet you are certainly in the wrong part of the world."

Lois smiled despite herself. There was something about the blonde woman that one could not help liking, and the reporter sensed a kindred spirit.

She nodded to the rifle. "You never go anywhere without that," she said.

"Nope," the woman said, patting her holster "Or this."

Charlie fished a flask from her shirt pocket, unscrewed the cap and took a swig. "I'm a white woman in Africa, and you don't last long here by being careless."

The reporter in Lois sniffed a story and leaned forward. "Have you ever had to use it?" she asked. "The gun, I mean."

Charlie eyed her carefully, as if wondering how much she should say. "To defend my honour?" she said, with a melodramatic tone to her voice. "Once or twice."

"From hostile tribes?" Lois asked.

Charlie laughed out loud. "Hell, no. Not that they can't be trouble, mind you. But no, the most dangerous predators of that kind are always the guys with white skin."

Lois blinked. "Really?"

Charlie smirked.

"Oh yeah. The great white hunters who've had a few too many drinks round the campfire and are out to bag themselves some trophies, and get to thinking the pretty blonde guide is one. Never had to kill one, least not yet, but a few came damn close to finding out what the business end of one of these feels like," and she patted the rifle next to her.

Lois nodded. "Seems to be a common male condition," she said.

Charlie winked and offered her the flask. Lois hesitated for a moment, then took it and raised it to her lips. The contents were harsh and burning, but sent a wave of warmth through her and Lois took some pride in the fact that she managed to finish and return the container without coughing.

“Alright, Lane,” Charlie said with a nod.

Lois sat back and looked at the blonde, imagining her dealing with the loutish approaches of some rich man out to get a different kind of notch in his rifle. “You said the hostile tribes can be dangerous. Does that include the Gaboni?”

Charlie took another swig from her flask. “Well, they’re a different kind of trouble. Dangers that you can see, they’re easy. Lions, elephants, guys with spears – you can generally avoid messiness if keep your head and know what you’re doing, and if not I have this,” and she nodded to the rifle.

“But superstition and boogeymen, that’s a lot harder. I’ve seen safaris go to hell real quick because of some local taboo or spook story. The men we’ve got with us are true as you can ask for around here, but fear can make even educated people do crazy things. And the only education most of these fellas have is listening to stories round the tribal fire.”

“I’d trust our porters to back me up against a charging bull rhino, but if they thought we were heading into Gaboni territory we’d see some trouble, sure enough.”

Lois nodded, but then winced and slapped her leg. “Damn mosquitoes here are the size of crows,” she complained.

Charlie put the flask away and fished something out of her other pocket; a small flat container with a twist lid that held some kind of ointment inside.

“Here, this’ll help,” she said, taking a dab of the stuff and smearing it on her fingers. Without asking she reached across and hoisted Lois long leg onto her laps and began to rub the smelly concoction on Lois’ calf.

“Sweet mercy, what is in that,” Lois asked. Her nose wrinkled as she sniffed.

“Probably better you don’t know,” Charlie answered, using both hands to rub the ointment into Lois lower leg.

Her fingers tickled slightly as they painted it on behind the reporter’s knee. Lois thought she had strong hands for a woman. Taking another dab from the container the blonde guide began to work the ointment across Lois upper leg, and then slowly around her thighs.

For not reason Lois could explain she suddenly felt very warm. And not just the humidity of the Congo – this was more like the warmth of the whisky flask, but even more pervasive. Feeling Charlie’s hand rubbing across the smooth skin of her thigh sent a slowly rising tide of heat creeping up from her leg across her whole body. The woman took her time, working the ointment into Lois’ skin with those strong but gently hands.

As the rubbing motion reached up to where the edge of the shorts Charlie had to lean over and Lois caught a glimpse of curving breasts inside the damp shirt. The wet fabric clung to the outline of those twin mounds and Lois was aware of a tightness in her throat as she watched them move subtly as Tolliver rubbed.

“I..uh..I can finish!” Lois blurted out. Her voice sounded louder than she had intended. She realized she felt short of breath and took her leg down quickly.

For her part Tolliver didn’t look upset or offended – just gave her a small smile and shrugged.

“Sure Lois, here,” she said, handing her the ointment. “It’s okay, a little goes a long way. But make sure you use it everywhere.” She stood up and stretched, then picked up her rifle.

“Well, I’m for bed. Sing out if you need any help with that.” The woman gave a wink and headed out of the tent.

Lois Lane was not a woman to be easily shocked, but she sat for a long moment wondering if what had just happened had REALLY happened. *Oh boy, Lane, you sure know how to land the interesting assignments,* she thought to herself.

But then she shook herself free of the places her mind was wandering and reached again for the map she had been examining.

Charlie lay in her tent staring at the ceiling and thinking about the look on Lois Lane’s face as she had used the ointment on her.

At first glance she had taken the reporter for a pampered city princess, but the blonde had to admit the woman had shown real grit so far. No complaints about the camping conditions, no asking for extra breaks in the trek through the jungle, and no yelping at the various signs of nature all around them. Charlie had known some men who could have learned something about how to be tough from the pretty brunette.

And the way she wore those short shorts sure as hell don’t hurt either, she thought with a grin.

Well, there was plenty of time to get to know Lois a lot better between now and the end of the trip. Perry White had given enough funds for a couple of weeks. Right now, she was waiting for Sabanga to report back on what he had found. The black man being late back didn’t trouble her; he knew the jungle well.

Resting on her sleeping bag with nothing else to do the pass the time the blonde let her fingers travel down to the edge of her pants as she pictured Lois Lane’s face again...

“Uh, Ms Tolliver?”

Jimmy Olsen’s voice just outside the tent startled Charlie from her sensuous daydream. She sat up and pulled back the tent flap to stick her head out.

“Hey, handsome,” She gave him a wry smile “Visiting a lady in her tent late at night? I hope your intentions aren’t dishonourable.”

“Oh gosh, nothing like that,” the youth said, and Charlie had to smile. He was so cute when he got flustered. “But uh, I can’t find Ms Lane.”

Charlie blinked. “She’s in her tent, last I saw.”

“That’s what I thought, but she’s not there now.”

The guide paused. Lois was probably just a call of nature, but then she thought about the way the reporter had been looking over those maps and her questions about the porters and the Gaboni. Reaching over she picked up her rifle and put on her safari hat.

“Come on,” she said, moving past the young man.

Lois moved through the jungle slowly. She wasn't sure how far she was from camp, but it had to be a good distance. She respected Charlie's knowledge and even liked the woman, but nothing was going to get between Sam Lane's little girl and the story of where Lex Luthor was hiding – certainly not the superstitious fears of some native porters.

She stopped and balanced the gun in one arm while getting her bearings. The stars here were a thousand times brighter than in Metropolis, and the clouds had parted enough for her to make out the shadow of the heights ahead against the white speckled sky. She didn't know what she expected to find, but her reporter's instincts were telling her that if there was anywhere Lex Luthor was to be found in this jungle it was right ahead. If there was a village somewhere nearby, she was sure she would see or hear a sign of it.

Suddenly Lois stopped again. She sensed something nearby, something not right. Perhaps her days in the jungle had sharpened her senses, but she bent down slowly and felt with her hand. Almost at once she found something sticky and wet, and with a faint coppery smell. Reaching further she encountered an object; faintly warm, and with a horrible familiar shape.

Reaching into her pocket Lois pulled out a match and lit it.

The face of Sabanga stared up at her, a bloody gash running around his throat from one side to the other. The pool of blood she had dipped her hand in spread out around his head and shoulders as the jungle soil drank it down. The man's face didn't hold an expression of fear or pain – only mild surprise.

Taking a breath Lois rose and brought her rifle up, but even as the match went out strong hands grabbed her from behind. Two of them seized the gun, another covered her mouth, and before she could get off more than a muffled cry she was dragged back into the jungle.