

# Camelot

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Rating: K+

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Perry White looked down at the two front page dummies on his desk. '**Superman Is Dead**' one read. The other: '**Superman Lives**'. The same photograph adorned each one: the soon to be classic shot of Superman holding the Daily Planet globe just before he tipped it over onto the sedan that had been illegally parked in front of the building. *Atlas holding up the world.*

Newsprint didn't give the photograph justice. Perry had a copy of it on glossy paper. In that print you could see the exhaustion playing across Superman's face as he held the globe like a huge beach ball. If Olsen didn't get short-listed for the Pulitzer for that shot, the selection committee was out of its tiny little mind.

"Superman," Perry had said, almost shouting. "Perry White, Daily Planet," He had been standing under where the globe would have landed, soaked to the skin from the downpour created when the roof-top water reservoir gave way, but it didn't matter. The story and his people were what mattered. "What the hell just happened?"

"I'm not sure," Superman had said. "But I'm going to find out." He turned and started to float away.

"Wait... Lois is missing."

"I know." Then Superman took off, disappearing toward the ocean. That was the last the city saw of him until he fell from the sky.

"It's kind of morbid, Perry," Richard said, looking over his uncle's shoulder at the dummies.

Perry nodded to the Boy Scout plaque on his wall, one of the few personal things he had in his office. "Always be prepared."

Perry looked out of the shattered inner window to the bullpen beyond. The place was trashed. Paper and glass were everywhere and maintenance was in overtime trying to get everything repaired. Newsroom staff had been trickling back in after the building's evacuation but Perry knew that many had simply checked-in, choosing to head home to their families in this time of waiting. Lois was at her desk, but Perry didn't know what she was working on, if anything. Jason was sitting next to her but he was being very quiet. Too quiet.

The pillar mounted monitors were all tuned to GNN, to the vigil being held outside of Metropolis General Hospital, where Superman was lying in critical condition.

"How is she?" Perry asked, nodding in Lois's direction. Richard looked out into the bullpen.

"I don't know."

"Has anybody heard from Kent?"

Richard shook his head.

Perry sighed. It didn't surprise him, really. Kent had a talent for disappearing. He was never around when you wanted him, but he managed to get his work in. More often than not front page worthy work. Perry tried to recall the last time he'd seen the tall reporter. He had disappeared from the newsroom about the time Richard left to find Lois and Jason. Disappeared and hadn't reappeared. *Lois has his nickname wrong. He shouldn't be called 'farm boy.' 'Houdini' is more like it. I wonder what his excuse will be this time.*

"I'll check on Lois," Richard said, heading toward the office door.

"Do that," Perry said, returning to the dummies. *I'm getting old. None of these kids remember the last time we waited for news like this. Hell, most of them hadn't even been born.*

His thoughts went back to that other event. It had started on a Friday, at twelve-thirty in the afternoon in Dallas, Texas, a visit that wasn't even important enough to warrant television coverage. The news hit Metropolis, as it did the rest of the nation, ten minutes later: one-forty in Metropolis. Perry had been bored to tears sitting in his freshman math class, trying to get his head around algebraic equations. Then the classroom phone rang and the student nearest the phone picked it up. In Perry's mind's eye he could see the wide-eyed horror in Amy McAllister's face when she turned to the class to pass on the message: *'President Kennedy's been shot.'*

Perry could still hear Walter Cronkite's words: *"In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade in downtown Dallas. The first reports say that President Kennedy has been seriously wounded by this shooting."* Perry recalled the stunned faces of his teacher and classmates, similar in so many ways to the stunned looks he had seen on Jimmy and others when the news came through that Superman had fallen from the sky and was near death.

*"The world waits as Superman remains in critical condition at Metropolis General..."*

*"The first reports say that President Kennedy has been seriously wounded by this shooting..."*

The rest of math class was a blur. Perry cut his last class, English, to head to the Daily Planet. By the time he got up to the newsroom the announcement had made it all over the world: *"President Kennedy died at one P.M. Central Standard Time, two o'clock Eastern Standard Time."*

George Taylor was the editor of the paper then. Perry White was just an underage copy boy from the wrong side of the tracks who wanted to become a reporter. The newsroom had been unnaturally quiet when he walked in. All eyes were glued to the television - just like it was now. Perry had found Taylor sitting at his desk, his head in his hands. On his desk was a front page dummy. **'President Kennedy Assassinated'** was the headline. The photo was the now famous one of the secret serviceman standing on the back bumper of the limo.

"What the hell is the world coming to?" Taylor asked. Perry was pretty sure Taylor wasn't actually talking to him.

"I don't know, Chief," Perry had answered anyway.

Taylor had looked at him curiously then handed Perry the dummy. "Get this down to composing," he ordered. "They're waiting for the front page... God help us all."

Perry took the sheet and nearly ran down to where the production manager and the composing people were waiting, down in the bowels of the building. The world felt like it was coming to an end - the country's heart was broken, grieving for its dead royalty. Camelot had been razed and who knew what was going to rise in its stead? Nothing as bright or hopeful - not for many years. Not until Superman showed his face to Metropolis nine years ago and Camelot was reborn. Although they hadn't realized it at the time.

"Now look!" Perry had yelled at his top reporters as they stood in the conference room the day after Superman's first appearance. "We're sitting on top of the story of the century here! Our only problem is how to get it - exclusively!" He waved a copy of the morning Post at them. **'It Flies!'** the banner screamed. The Star: **'Look Ma, No Wires!'** Finally the Planet itself: **'Caped Wonder Stuns City.'**

"I want the name of this flying whatchamacallit to go with the Daily Planet like bacon and eggs, franks and beans, death and taxes, politics and corruption!" Perry had continued.

"Well, I shouldn't think he'd lend himself to any cheap promotion schemes..." Kent had managed to say, much to the surprise of everyone in the room. For most of them, it was the first time they had even heard his voice.

"Who's talking cheap? I'll make him a goddamn partner if I have to! I want the inside dope on this guy. Does he have a family? Why did he show up last night? What's he got beneath that cape, batteries? Who is he? Where's he from? What's his favorite ball team...? And I'll tell you one thing, boys and girls," he shook his hand at them, pointing. "Whichever one of you gets it out of him will have the single most important interview since God talked to Moses."

Lois Lane brought in the first interview. She had titled it *'An Evening With Superman'*. Perry retitled it: *'I Spent the Night With Superman.'* She hadn't been happy, but then Lois was rarely happy when people made changes to her work. Her interview with the hero was on the front page. Superman was on the front page at least once a week until the day he disappeared and of all the reporters on the planet, Lois Lane and her partner, Clark Kent, were the ones who got the interviews and Perry doubted it was due to their sparkling personalities.

"I think Superman is sweet on Miss Lane," Jimmy Olsen had once commented to no one in particular. The other staffers had scoffed at him.

But Olsen had been right. Superman was a knight in primary colors who chose *not* to be king. Lois Lane was his head-strong Guinevere and Kent was the spear-carrier for both of them. Superman had made Metropolis his home. His presence made Metropolis the city of hope, the city of tomorrow, Camelot. Even after he left for parts unknown, the city's hope in the future hadn't quite died, at least not until the Spires came down.

There had been only one front page dummy that day. **'Terrorists Attack Global Commerce Center Thousands dead, more missing.'** Another prizewinning photo graced the front page of the Daily Planet. A photo that only hinted at the horror of that day. There wasn't a family, a business, in the city that hadn't been affected by the attack on the Spires. The Daily Planet lost four good people when the first tower collapsed.

It could have been worse. But the question had gone around: *'Where is Superman?'* The truth of the matter was that there was little or nothing he could have done. Once the first plane hit, it was only a matter of time until that tower collapsed. Superman might have been able to save some of the trapped people, but he couldn't have saved all of them: the damage was too much, the need too great. And could he have stopped the second plane, saved those people? That was impossible to say. Perry suspected the answer was 'no'. That the villains of the piece

had been prepared for super-human intervention and had Superman shown up to save the day, the world wouldn't be waiting vigil now: Superman would have been buried with all the other missing victims of that catastrophe.

The towers of Camelot fell that day. And there was no one to rally around, no one who could help show them how to rebuild their hope, to rebuild the white towers. Religious and political leaders tried, but they didn't understand the heart of the 'City of the Future'. They didn't understand a city that had been once been blessed by a man who could fly.

Then Superman returned and the city rejoiced, accepting him back with open arms and hearts. The prodigal son had returned. The future had finally come home.

Recriminations and questions would come soon enough. The city's honeymoon with her favorite son would likely be a short one. But Perry was afraid that Superman's death so soon after his return might finally spell the end of Camelot, the end of the future.

It would simply destroy Lois. She hadn't taken kindly to his disappearance. Her editorial, **'Why the World Doesn't Need Superman'**, was a testament to that, even though it had taken her nearly five years to get it out of her system. Perry knew that his return, and Kent's, had threatened the carefully laid foundations of her world, although she didn't want anyone to know it. *I wonder if Richard knows...*

Perry took another look at the two dummies on his own desk. He sighed, picked up the phone on his desk and dialed the production director. "Phil," he said as soon as the other end picked up. "I want to hold off as long as we can before we go to press with it."

"We can't wait too long," Phil reminded him. "We've got to get the presses rolling. We're just waiting for the front page."

"I'll let you know in a few minutes," Perry promised. He hung up the phone and walked to the door of his office. Lois, Richard, and Jason were nowhere in sight, but Polly was still at her desk. "Polly, any word on Superman?"

"He's been upgraded to serious," Polly told him. "GNN says Lois has been let in to see him."

*So that's where they went.* Perry nodded and went back to his phone.

"Phil? It's 'Superman Lives' for the front page... They let Lois in and he wouldn't *dare* die on her."

*Superman lives. Guinevere has ridden to the rescue of Arthur. Camelot, here comes the future.*