

A Photographer's Eye

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Rating: K

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Jimmy Olsen was baby-sitting young Jason once again. The newsroom was quiet, the paper put to bed hours ago and the night staff knew enough to stay away from the few day-side reporters still working at that time of night. Jimmy didn't mind staying late - Clark would order take-out shortly and would make sure Jimmy's order was included. Baby sitting was fine, so long as he got fed.

"I'm bored..." Jason complained.

"Want to look at the old photo albums?" Jimmy asked. The Daily Planet had yearly albums dating back almost to the invention of the camera. He loved going through them on quiet nights when he had no where better to be. Jason thought they were funny - the funny clothes like out of the old movies, his great-uncle Perry as a younger man working in the same newsroom he now commanded.

"Where do you want to start this time?" Jimmy asked.

"Superman."

Jimmy smiled and pulled out the album for 1997, the year Superman first appeared in Metropolis. Coincidentally, that was also the first year that compiling the yearly album had fallen to Jimmy Olsen. Except for one year while he was overseas, he had done it ever since.

He gently opened the book...

Jimmy Olsen loved his job. The excitement, the thrill of catching the perfect shot, the joy of capturing the essence of the moment. And he was good at his job. He was one of the youngest staff photographers employed by the Daily Planet and his photos illustrated the front page of the paper at least as often as the older photographers with more experience.

There was another aspect he loved about his job - the people in the newsroom. They were intelligent, literate, and hard-driving. And the hardest-driving of the lot was Lois Lane. "A good reporter doesn't get the great stories," she often told him. "A good reporter makes them great." Her stories made the front page more often than any other reporter at the Planet. Her investigations were legendary.

She was also extremely photogenic, although Jimmy was sure she wasn't aware of it. She would give him a cheeky smile when she saw him focusing on her with his camera. She had dark brown hair and hazel eyes that seemed to sparkle with pent-up energy. She had high cheekbones and flawless skin and teeth despite a two pack a day habit.

Perry had once predicted that Lois would be dead before she reached thirty. But that was before CK. Before Clark Kent.

It was through the lens of his old Nikon SLR that Jimmy got his first look at Clark Kent. A tall young dark-haired man in an off-the-rack suit that needed tailoring. He was looking around the busy newsroom, delight shining in the blue eyes behind the dark-rimmed glasses. Jimmy followed him through the camera lens as he crossed the room, barely missing tripping over a chair and two wastepaper baskets on his way to Perry White's office.

Jimmy watched through the glass wall of the editor's office. Perry was looking through a sheaf of papers, shaking his head. The young man looked disappointed, but shook Perry's hand politely and left the office, pausing as Lois stormed past him. He seemed to be listening to what Lois was saying to Perry and Jimmy caught the thoughtful half-smile that came into the tall man's face as he walked out of the newsroom.

The tall man was back the next day and again made his way across the newsroom floor to Perry's office. This time it was a single sheet Perry read. And this time, Perry smiled at the young man as he shook his hand. Again Lois blew into the office without knocking. This time Jimmy was close enough to hear.

"Here's the story on that East 19th Street murder spree. Page one with a banner headline seems about right to me..." Lois announced, handing Perry a printed sheet of paper.

"So why should today be different..." Perry said, mostly to himself. He gestured to the young man. "Clark Kent, say hello to Lois Lane."

The article that got Clark Kent hired ran in that Sunday's paper in the 'Around the City' section. It was supposed to be about the demolition of the old Sarah Bernhardt Theater which was being torn down for a parking garage. Clark turned the story into something far more. *Beatrice was eighteen when she made her debut. Warren G. Harding was President, the unknown soldier was interred at Arlington, and Babe Ruth was sold to the Yankees...*

To Lois's horror, Clark was assigned to City, to *her* beat. Then to add insult to injury, Perry assigned them to work together.

From such inauspicious beginnings, history begins. And Jimmy Olsen had the photographic evidence.

It was that night that another historic event took place. Again, Jimmy Olsen and his trusty Nikon camera were there.

It was a dark and stormy night. Cliché, but in fact a storm severe enough to threaten the closure of all three airports had hit the city. Despite the weather the Daily Planet's helicopter landed on the roof of the parking garage to pick up Lois for an appointment at Metropolis International. The high winds caught the machine, entangling the skids in the power cables that fed the roof floodlights. The helicopter pilot lost control as he tried to take off. He was knocked unconscious as the helicopter itself teetered then went over the side of the building, its fall stopped only by the weakening cable.

The shock tossed Lois out of her seat and while crowds watched from the street below, a streak of blue and red came to her rescue. Jimmy saw it all through his camera and didn't believe it - it was a man flying without benefit of wings or any detectable mechanical means.

In the weeks and months that followed, Superman became a household word throughout the world, thanks in part to the articles written by Lois Lane and Clark Kent, and the photographs of James B. Olsen.

And in Metropolis, the city of his first appearance, he became a favorite son, working hand in hand with the police and fire departments to aid in whatever needed to be done. Metropolis had always been a city that looked to the future. With Superman in residence, its

future looked brighter than ever.

In the newsroom of the Daily Planet, Lane and Kent stayed teamed up, bringing in story after award winning story. Individually, each of them was good. Together, they were the stuff legends were made of.

The original predictions among the staff members that had worked around Lane the longest was that Clark Kent wouldn't last a week under Lois's heel. The week became a month. A month became three months then a year and finally it occurred to people that Clark had survived his initiation by fire. Lois hadn't killed him and thrown his body into Hob's Bay. Instead he brought her coffee, donuts and pizza, corrected her copy, watched her back while she was in the field, and argued with her when she was wrong.

No one *ever* argued with Lois Lane and lived. But Clark Kent did. And again, Jimmy had the photographs. Clark explaining something, leaning forward in his desk chair, gesticulating in his effort to counter *her* arguments. Lois standing beside his desk, watching him with much the same expression a cat had while weighing the threat level of the dog crossing the yard. Then her eyes would soften as whatever reasoning he had mustered meshed in her mind and she nodded. Or he would and the noise level in the newsroom would go down to a more tolerable level.

From his office Perry White would watch them, a faint inscrutable smile on his craggy face.

There weren't many photos of Superman in the Daily Planet yearly albums, but there were a few - the first rescue of Lois Lane, an interview with Lois, a charity event with Daily Planet staffers where the superhero paused long enough in his busy day to allow photos to be taken.

Jason studied the photos of his favorite hero carefully. Then, they opened the second book. It had more photos of Lois and Clark together. The birthday party she arranged for him when she found out, purely by accident, when his birthday was.

The night of the Metropolis Press Club's Kerth awards. It was the first year since she started at the Planet that Lois hadn't been nominated for the prize. Clark had gotten the nod instead for his article on the treatment of the aged in Metropolis. The photos showed a smiling Lois on Clark's arm - more evidence of a Lois Lane no one expected existed. She was dressed in a low-cut black dress, her dark hair up in a fashionable knot. Clark was in a tuxedo and she was holding on to his arm like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Clark won his first Kerth that year.

The third book was more of the same until August. That was the month Clark and Lois were given an undercover assignment at Niagara Falls. They were to pose as newlyweds to find the truth behind reports that the local honeymoon resort operators were misleading and scamming the young couples who had come there to start their lives together. He had a photo of them together, her in a pink suit, him in a business suit with a pink boutonniere. They were both smiling nervously at the camera, looking very much like newlyweds.

That was the last photo of Lois and Clark together. At least for a very long time.

Perry had assigned them to Niagara Falls and Clark sent in that story. But the next story Clark sent in was from a town in the upper reaches of Alaska. It was about problems with the oil pipeline. It was a brilliant piece of investigative journalism, probably one of the best pieces Lane and Kent ever wrote. But when they got back to Metropolis, Lois couldn't stop crying and Clark - well, the photos said it all. Even after Lois stopped crying there were no smiles on Clark's face, only a haunted look full of pain.

That was the last photo of Clark until he returned from supposedly traveling the planet for six years.

"Jimmy, that's me isn't it?" Jason asked, pointing to one of the Christmas party photos toward the back of the album. Lois was smiling at the camera again, although not as brightly as before. There was a new face beside hers in the group - Richard White, Perry's nephew and new assistant editor for the paper. But what Jason was pointing to was the bump of Lois's belly. The bump that Lois's hands were protectively folded over. There was a smile on her face, but her entire body said more: *I have a bastard to protect*. Lois was four months pregnant.

Clark had been gone nearly as long. And Superman had disappeared. *I have a bastard to protect*.

Jimmy looked over to check on Clark. The tall man was still on the phone, most likely with some source. It was going to be a long night. Jimmy pulled out the next album.

The fourth book (2001) showed Lois and Richard together at the office parties, her pregnancy growing more and more noticeable as time went on. There was a change the first week of May. Lois was gone from the newsroom and Richard was beaming like a proud father. Lois had named her son Jason Samuel White. Richard was put down as the baby's father.

Jason's first photo in the Daily Planet album was a telling one. Lois's first day back after maternity leave and then nearly a month of working from home. The baby was three months old and Lois was every bit the proud mama. Jason had a cap of dark hair and the most brilliantly blue eyes Jimmy had ever seen except on one other human being - well, one human being and one alien. Jason was smiling at the camera. He'd been smiling at everyone who came close. Richard was standing behind Lois and the baby, beaming at the camera.

They looked like the perfect little family, except for the trace of tension in Lois's smile and the fact that Jason looked nothing like the man in the photo. Jimmy saw it and he knew Perry White saw it as well but neither mentioned it. Lois never mentioned Clark's name.

Life went on and the photos documented it. Lois and Richard announced their engagement. Jason grew, began toddling around the newsroom. New faces appeared in the Christmas party photos filling the holes left by missing colleagues.

The destruction of the Spires the previous September had left a lot of holes to fill in the newsroom. They lost twelve people that awful day. The day the world realized that Superman was no longer around and would probably never be around again. But life at the Daily Planet continued. The newsroom, indeed the whole world, licked its wounds and forged ahead.

The delivery boy brought in two pizzas, two large bottles of soda, a box of breadsticks, and salad. Jimmy knew that one of the pizzas was a vegetarian special for Clark and the other was pepperoni and olive for Jimmy. Jason would eat from both boxes. The salad was also for Clark, but Jason would have part of that as well.

The meal was spent in companionable, albeit quiet, conversation. Clark seemed a little distracted and Jason was tired. Jimmy wasn't sure where Lois had disappeared to, only that she was following a story on something happening in the mayor's office and there was a press conference scheduled this evening. Jimmy assumed Lois would end up at the press conference. When Lois left the newsroom that afternoon she'd been swearing that herroner-the-mayor had deliberately scheduled the conference so it would miss the Planet's deadline.

The phone on Clark's desk rang and he went to answer it, signaling the end of their meal

together. Jimmy and Jason took their plates back to Jimmy's desk and he brought over another album.

This next few were ones that hurt personally, but he would never let Jason know that.

In 2002, Jimmy had found a girl friend. Her name was Angela and she worked in research. She started appearing in the pictures of the newsroom get-togethers. The photos presented a smiling blonde woman who looked very nice on his arm. By the time of the Christmas party, she and Jimmy were engaged to be married. Life was looking good. Even without Superman in his viewfinder, Jimmy's career was firmly established. He won a Kerth for his photos of the heroes at the Spires. They were also nominated for the Pulitzer.

The next book showed Jason getting even bigger, walking well on sturdy toddler legs, a mischievous grin on his face as he explored wastepaper baskets. Lois and Richard both would smile at the camera as they rescued their son from whatever trouble he was getting into. But still, the smiles Lois gave Richard were never quite as bright as the ones she had given Clark. Those smiles were now reserved for Jason. The boy was oddly frail for all the energy he seemed to have. He had asthma and allergies that seemed worse when he spent a lot of time in the city.

Richard and Lois moved out of New Troy Island into a house across the river, into a good neighborhood with cleaner air. It was far more expensive than Richard and Lois should have been able to afford, but Jimmy knew from Perry that Richard's mother's family had money. And while Richard's father and brother had joined the Crane family business, ship-building, Richard had chosen to follow his uncle's footsteps, journalism.

That June Jimmy and Angela got married. Life was looking very good. Jimmy had a front page photo at least once a week. He got another Kerth nomination. Job offers from other organizations were coming in but he chose to stay at the Planet. The paper was his family and he loved it there. It just wouldn't be the same anywhere else.

The rest of 2003 wasn't quite as well documented. Jimmy had been sent overseas to cover the war in Chechnya. Those photos weren't in an album at the Planet, although they were on disk. Lois and Clark had been gently pressuring him into compiling the photos into a book on the war.

Angela's face didn't show up in any of the photos George Rodgers took of the office parties, although Jimmy had been assured by Lois that Angela had been invited. Jimmy suspected Lois knew why Angela wasn't at the parties but he had never asked her about it and didn't intend to.

2004 wasn't exactly a banner year for Jimmy Olsen, although it couldn't be told from the photos in the book. He returned to Metropolis a changed man. The other members of the staff welcomed him back, clapped him on the back for the good job he'd done overseas. It didn't stop the nightmares, nor did it help that his wife had emptied out their apartment as well as their bank accounts and had moved in with a police detective that had moved to Metropolis from Gotham City.

He poured himself into his work, but it wasn't the same. It was harder to get the great shots and fewer of his photos made it to the front page. But his shots of the newsroom, of the people, showed he still had his photographer's eye. Jason was growing like a weed.

People stopped asking about Superman.

Jason grabbed the next book - 2005. Another banner year for the Daily Planet. Sales were back at the level they'd been before Superman's disappearance. More new faces in the newsroom as the old guard retired, or died.

Jason growing taller, stronger as he overcame some of his frailness. As he grew he looked more and more like his biological father. Jimmy would catch Lois watching her son, a wondering expression in her face, as if she couldn't quite figure out how Jason had come about.

There was a photo of Lois on the fifth anniversary of Superman's disappearance. She was holding up a copy of that day's Daily Planet: *Why the World Doesn't Need Superman*. It was an editorial. It probably didn't need to go on the front page, but it had been a quiet news week. Other articles on the inside included a retrospective of Superman's exploits prior to his apparent abandonment of Earth as well as events since his disappearance. The lives lost because he wasn't around.

Jimmy caught Lois's expression - grimly triumphant. It reminded him of Angela's expression when she finally told him what she thought of him for leaving for overseas, leaving her alone. Behind Lois, just within the frame, Richard stood watching her, holding Jason. Jimmy still couldn't read Richard's solemn expression in the photo. It wasn't pride. Sadness, maybe?

Lois was nominated for the Pulitzer for her editorial. She won. The award was normally presented in May, but various exigencies postponed the ceremony until the first week of October. By that time, Clark was back, and so was Superman.

Jimmy remembered it was if it were yesterday:

"Olsen," Perry said conversationally. "I just got a call from Clark Kent. Seems he's back from wherever he went and wants his job back."

"So, when does he start?" Jimmy asked. He tried to keep a grin off his face. He'd missed the gangly reporter.

"Considering how he left, give me three reasons I should give him a job?" Perry demanded.

"Um, he's one of the best writers you know," Jimmy said, ticking the items off his fingers. "He's the only one, besides Mister Richard, who can put up with Miss Lane for more than ten minutes. Norm Parker up and died, so there's an open desk." Jimmy shrugged. "It was his time."

"Kent starts back Wednesday," Perry told him. "You might want to warn Lois."

Superman returned to the world the same day Clark Kent came back to the Daily Planet. Lois got the exclusive once again. Then Luthor struck, creating his crystal island that threatened to destroy the rest of the world. Superman saved the day once again, but ended up injured, comatose in the hospital. It was Lois and her son who visited him, got the next exclusive when he recovered.

But the Clark Kent that came back to the Planet wasn't quite the same man who had left. The world had traveled on without him and he was having trouble coming back. The cheerful, goofy smile didn't show up as often and there was a bleakness in his eyes that hadn't been there before he left.

But still, it felt good to have Clark back. It showed in the faces of the old-timers when they noticed him sitting quietly at his desk. The Daily Planet was happy he was back. Almost as happy as having Superman back on the front page. Jimmy managed to get some of the best shots of his career during and after the disaster. He missed his old Nikon, but the new Sony digital camera had the advantage of using memories cards so he didn't have to worry about film.

Perry assigned Richard and Clark to investigate the source of kryptonite-laced

ammunition that was coming into the city and getting into the hands of local gangs and hoodlums. From the outside it seemed like an odd pairing. Lois Lane's fiancé teamed up with the newly-returned father of her son. But both men had worked on much the same investigation earlier in their careers. Their shared resources would be the key to breaking the story.

Jimmy had one good shot of the two men working together. They had been in the conference room pouring over maps and aerial photographs laid out on the large table. Neither man had noticed Jimmy in the doorway. Clark had found something in one of the aerial shots and was pointing it out to the other man. Their expressions were intent, serious, triumphant. They were hot on the trail of something big.

That was the last photo of Richard alive. The next day he was dead. He'd been murdered and Clark critically injured by the people they'd been after. Lex Luthor was shot to death by Lois Lane after he shot Clark.

The next series of photographs was of the newsroom - the wide-eyed shock in Polly's face, the determined resignation in Jeff and Eduardo's faces. It was the Spires all over again. Jimmy remembered thinking as he took the photos that Lois might not recover this time. Again, Superman had failed her, but it was more personal this time.

But again, Lois surprised everyone. The week immediately following the massive earthquake Clark had been the one to pick up the slack, covering for reporters and copy editors who were missing time at work as they tried desperately to put their lives back together after the disaster. And he did it despite having been hurt in the quake. This time, it was Lois who was covering for Clark as other staff members struggled back to work.

By some miracle, Clark survived the attack on him and suddenly, it was Lane and Kent again, almost as though he had never left. Perry didn't assign them together. Lois did.

"Get the lead out, Kent," she ordered, not waiting to see if he complied as she hurried toward the elevators to follow an emerging story. "Jimmy! You're with us!" she yelled. Jimmy knew better than to argue. He grabbed his camera bag, camera and his coat and hurried to fall in behind her and Clark.

George Rodgers took the photos of what the rest of the newsroom later dubbed the Three Musketeers. He also got a shot of Perry watching them leave, a familiar, bemused smile on his worn face.

Richard was dead. He had been a good man and he was mourned. But Lane and Kent were back and the Daily Planet newsroom took notice.

That was also the day Jimmy found out one of the reasons why Lane and Kent were the best.

He brought Perry back photos of the fire they had run out to cover, including two he knew would never be published in the paper. One was of Clark, his back to the camera, running toward the fire just before Lois yelled his name. The second was Lois talking to Clark. His head was down as he listened to her, her hands wrinkling the sleeves of his coat as she kept him in front of her. Behind them, fire fighters were hard at work trying to regain control of the fire.

Perry picked up the photo of Lois and Clark together. "Print me up a good copy of this one. Five by seven will be fine," the editor ordered.

Back at his desk Jimmy looked closely at the photo Perry had picked out, trying to see what it was that the other man was seeing. Lois was talking to Clark. His expression was guarded yet full of pain. Then it struck him. He'd seen that expression before, somewhere, on

someone else. Someone Clark's height and coloring. Someone 6'4", 200 some odd pounds, black hair, blue eyes. Someone at a fire where there were fatalities. Someone Jimmy had photographed fairly recently.

He checked his files and pulled out one of the photos of Superman at a fatal textile factory fire the prior week. Superman's head was down as he listened to the man in charge, Chief Obote. The older man's hand was grasping Superman's upper arm, as though to keep him from flying away. Superman's expression was guarded, yet there was pain there. Pain that he hadn't been able to do anything for the people who had died.

He looked over to Perry's office and caught sight of the older man gravely watching him. Perry nodded once and went back to his desk.

It all fit. Clark Kent was Superman. Lois Lane was partnered with Superman. No wonder they were the best. And somehow, he wasn't surprised. Another photo of Lois and Clark, but with Perry and Jason this time. Her dress was black again, but more conservative than the one she'd worn to the Kerths with Clark so many years before. Clark and Perry were in tuxes while Jason wore a dark vest with a small bowtie. There was a copy of her Pulitzer acceptance speech tucked into the album.

The Christmas photos showed a happier Lois. Her smile was bright and genuine as the camera caught her watching Clark and Jason handing out presents at the newsroom Christmas party, although there was still an undefined undercurrent in the photos. Richard had been dead less than three months and there were still times Jimmy caught her staring off into space or her eyes filling with tears she didn't want anyone to see.

Eduardo Valdez was promoted to fill the assistant editor post left vacant by Richard's death. Eduardo still looked uncomfortable in his new position.

Jimmy looked over to Clark's desk. Clark wasn't there, but the overhead monitor showed a GNN report of Superman helping out with an apartment fire over in the Lafayette neighborhood. Clark would have another article to write in the morning.

Jimmy and Jason opened the last finished book. Winter became spring. Superman kept an eye on the city, lending a hand where ever it was needed. Lois and Clark were sent off on an assignment to Napa Valley for various reasons and ended up eloping to Reno. Jimmy didn't have a photo of the wedding, but he did have one of their announcement.

Jason peered at the photo and grimaced. They had come into the newsroom dressed in jeans and leather jackets and had gone into the conference room to talk, leaving the blinds open. In the photo, Lois was sitting on the conference table, her arms, and legs around Clark who was standing in front of her. Perry White was standing outside the conference room looking in, fists on his hips.

Trust Lois to find the most outrageous way to make the announcement. The rest of the newsroom had been floored. No one had expected Mad Dog Lane would get married at all, especially not after her interminable engagement to Richard. That she might choose to marry the Kansas farm boy was outside the realm of possibility. But it had happened.

And as when Lane and Kent were first partnered, predictions were made that it wouldn't last a week, then a month, three months... Their first anniversary was several months ago.

Jimmy looked over to the hallway outside the newsroom as one of the elevators slid open.

"I swear that woman did it deliberately," Lois Lane announced as she walked into the newsroom. "Mayor Jessup has to be the most annoying bi..." She stopped in the middle of the word as soon as she caught sight of Jason running toward her.

"Dad bought us pizza and salad," Jason began.

"I hope there's some left," Lois told her son with a grin. "I'm famished."

Jimmy had his camera out and Lois gave him a cheeky grin as she straightened up, stretching her back and rubbing her swollen belly under her maternity blouse. She took Jason's hand and headed to her husband's desk and left-over pizza.

"So, what is Mayor Jessup up to now?" Clark asked, giving her one of his cheerfully goofy grins. Jimmy hadn't seen him come back into the newsroom. But then, few people ever did. Perry occasionally referred to the talent as 'stealth mode'. *Clark Kent: now you see 'im, now you don't.*

"Aside from having the conference at night so I couldn't make the deadline, she announced she was giving up her bid for governor," Lois said.

"That's what we expected," Clark reminded her.

Lois glowered at Clark. He stood and offered her his office chair, which she sank into. "Then Junior here," she said, indicating her belly, "started tap dancing on my bladder and Jessup started asking if Superman was keeping an eye on me since I was obviously so far along."

Clark started chuckling, placing one of his large hands over the child within. "Do I need to worry about the police looking for you?" He didn't seem to notice Jimmy and the camera.

Jimmy started snapping away. Lois had hated photos taken of her when she was expecting Jason. And absolutely no one had been allowed to touch her. Now was better. Now Clark hovered protectively around her when they were together and Jimmy knew he was always listening for her. That she was happy about it showed - she glowed, almost literally.

"I swear she was alive when I left," Lois told him. "I told her I was sure Superman was keeping an eye on me in the event I did something unpleasant to someone who made comments like that."

"Lo-is..."

"It shut her up," Lois defended herself with a grin. "Now, are you taking your cranky pregnant wife home tonight, or are we sleeping here again?"

Clark stood up. "Jimmy, do you need a ride home?"

"I'm good," Jimmy announced. He decided he would stay a few minutes to download the photos into his computer for safekeeping before heading to his tiny apartment.

Lois, Clark and Jason smiled tiredly as they walked to the elevators heading for the parking garage. Jimmy tracked them with his camera, taking one last shot of the day. Clark hefted Jason on one arm while drawing Lois to him with the other. Jason was looking back at Jimmy, a contented grin on his face. After everything they'd been through - separation, near-death, death - the camera, his photographer's eye, revealed a happy family, capturing the moment for all who cared to see.