

Hide-And-Seek

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Rating: K+

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Jimmy Olsen's tenor voice filtered into Perry White's office. "I can't find him anywhere! Do *you* have any idea where he went?"

"Um..." Clark Kent's unsteady baritone came next. "I... no. I *don't* know where he is..." He said with a tone of disbelieving surprise.

Perry looked up from his paperwork to see Olsen, hands on hips, scanning the bullpen. Kent slouched beside him, one hand combing through his hair in agitation. *What the hell kinda mess have the Bobbsey Twins gotten into this time?*

"Wow, he's good at this game. Jace! *Jace!* Olly olly oxen free!" Jimmy called out over the newsroom. Staffers popped up their heads, only to shake them in annoyance. Perry huffed and stood up from his chair.

"Do you..." Clark looked at his feet, almost beyond them as if he thought he would find the answers in the floor. "Do you think he might have hid somewhere else? Not on this floor?"

Perry couldn't keep silent any longer. He moved to the doorway and called out to Kent and Olsen. "Don't tell me that you've lost track of a *six-year-old*." By the looks on their faces - Olsen embarrassed, Kent perplexed - they certainly had.

Lois had called Perry up a couple of hours ago to ask if someone could get Jason from school - she'd be back late from the story she was chasing, and she promised Perry it would be worth it. With Richard away at an overseas press conference, she had no one else to ask... Kent, who somehow was hanging about in the hallway at that exact moment, overheard the conversation and piped up that he would pick up Jason and keep an eye on him. Which was fortunate, because even if Lane was his Pulitzer-winning star reporter, and the boy was his great-nephew, he almost might have refused. Really, was he an editor or a babysitter?

Watching his two employees stand there totally at a loss, it seemed like the answer was obvious. "So tell me what happened."

Olsen blushed. "Well, we decided to play hide-and-seek..."

"...and he was off to hide before anyone could set the boundaries," Kent finished.

"So, in other words," Perry stated, piercing each of them in turn with a flat stare, "he could be hiding anywhere on all sixty-five floors of this building."

Olsen shrugged, chagrined.

"Don't forget the two basement levels," Kent offered helpfully.

Perry covered his face with his palm. The two men waited in front of him, probably afraid to speak.

He removed his hand and took quick stock of the newsroom, the time, and the minutes left until deadline...

Then Perry suddenly spoke up. "All right, people!" His voice carried across the busy room, and all business came to a halt. "We've got a situation here! Somewhere in this building Jason White is hiding." He gestured across the room to include everyone, adding, "All of you have twenty minutes to help find him and then get your articles turned in on time!" A low murmuring spread across the room.

"Now let's spread out. You-" He pointed toward a cluster of desks to his left. "Cover the first 10 floors. You, you and you. Take ten each." He pointed around the entire room, assigning areas. "Let reception hold all calls for now."

People stood there in shock for a moment, and a lone voice called from the back, "All this for one little boy? Do we all have to be involved?"

"You'll do it because I asked you." With a gleam in his eye, he lowered his voice to add, "Or you can all explain what happened to Lois Lane."

Like a dam bursting, employees rushed in all directions.

"You two," he cocked his head sharply at Kent and Olsen, "hit the floors above, and the roof. I'm heading to the archives - join me there if you don't find him." They both scurried off toward the stairs.

Perry only took a moment to grab a flashlight before stalking in the same direction. Only the child of Lois Lane could get the *Planet* into this sort of mess.

By the time Perry reached the ground floor of the Planet, he had already notified security and the front desk staff to be watching out for Jason White - everyone in the building knew his great-nephew on sight, he was around so much. Perry strode for the stairwell to the subterranean levels of the building, surmising that Jason would be less likely to use the elevators if he really didn't want to be found. Perry desperately hoped that if Jason *had* come all the way down here that the boy was hiding in the archives... and hadn't somehow sneaked into the printing press area. The advertising circulars were usually printed at this time of day - he pushed down a fresh surge of worry.

"Jason!" he called brusquely into the stairwell before entering it. "Come out, son - the game's over!" Perry's voice echoed up several levels, and he could hear no answering shout. He huffed, stepping down the flight of stairs to Basement Level 1. He opened the heavy door, and just as he reached over to switch on the hall lights, a sudden draft shut the door behind him with a slam. He bit back a startled curse - who knew where the kid could be hiding?

An almost ghostly giggle came out of the shadows. "Jason?" he asked, turning on the lights for real. The hallway was completely empty, with not even a box to hide behind. However, the door to the archive room stood slightly ajar...

"Jason!" he called again through the doorway, annoyance threading through his voice. "Come out of there! The game's over!" He stalked around one of the stacks, startling one of the interns, a petite blonde he wasn't sure he'd ever actually met before. There were so many that came and went.

"Oh, Mr. White!" she exclaimed, clutching a stack of old newspapers to her chest.

"Have you seen a little boy playing around in here?" he asked her, feeling like a fool.

Her brows knitted together in a puzzled frown. "I don't think so..."

He frowned in return. "Well. Make sure to call the front desk if you do, all right?" Nodding, he began a tour of the stacks, just in case.

Another yelp of astonishment caused him to turn back toward the intern. "What happened?"

"Oh, nothing..." she called back with a touch of embarrassment. "The papers I was holding just seemed to *jump* out of my hands. I'm such a klutz, sometimes."

He chuckled, and went to help her out. "I've done that more than once." He squatted down to pick up one of the sections she'd been holding - something from the era when Superman first appeared. "And not just since these old hands got a touch of rheumatism."

"Thanks, Mr. White," she answered with a slight blush.

"No problem, Miss..."

She held out her hand. "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Ch-"

At that moment the stairwell door slammed out in the hallway, and they both jumped. "Excuse me..." He stood quickly and rushed in the direction of the sound. That kid might be able to get one over on Abbott and Costello, but he'd be damned if he'd let a six-year-old best Perry White.

He pelted down the stairs, pushing through the door into Basement Level 2. *I hope to God he's not really down here.* Perry wanted to trust that Jason was cautious enough not to go near the heavy machinery, but who knew the mind of a child? Better to be safe than sorry.

To his relief, the presses weren't actually running. He could see the foreman conferring with one of his underlings, next to the control panel. "Hey, Roscoe!" he called out, walking as quickly as he could to the machine area.

The man didn't hear him, so he called out again. "Roscoe! Have you seen a kid down here?"

Roscoe tapped a couple of buttons on the touch screen, and then turned toward him. "What did you say, Perry?" he shouted, just as the printing press behind him started up with a loud whine...

Holy sh-! "Stop the presses!" He broke into a run, waving his arms in a 'stop' gesture. "Shut it off! *Shut! It! Off!*"

The foreman punched the control panel again, and the machine slowly came to a halt. "What's the problem?"

Perry put a hand over his heart, breathing heavily. "Jason White is hiding somewhere in the building and we're all looking for him."

"You don't think he'd be all the way down here, do you?"

Perry ran a hand over his face tiredly. "I sure hope not, but this *is* Lois Lane's kid we're talking about here..." He gestured for Roscoe to follow him.

Suddenly, from behind them a shout of "Gotcha!" followed by squealing laughter made them turn. Clark held the giggling boy awkwardly in his arms. Jimmy scrambled out of the stairwell behind them, calling out "*There you are!*"

A rush of relief filled him, followed by a twin rush of anger. "Jason!" Pointing sternly, he bore down on his great-nephew. "I don't care *what* kind of game you're playing, boy, don't *ever* set foot in this room without permission!"

Jason's giggling smile quickly fell, and he opened his mouth to speak, then stopped, looking at Clark, of all people.

"Yes, Jason, it's very important," Clark agreed, setting Jason down on the floor. "There's a lot of heavy equipment and a lot of old machinery in storage down here... which makes it

really difficult to *see* you if you get into trouble." They shared a significant look.

Jason thought for a moment - and then his face, instead of twisting into a rebellious scowl, changed to an expression of somber remorse. "I'm sorry, Uncle Perry, Mister Clark, Mister Olsen," he apologized to all of them in a small voice. "I won't do it again."

"You'd better not," Perry warned - but it seemed pretty unnecessary. He'd never seen that look on his mother's face, not even after the most disastrous events. He must take more strongly after his father in this regard.

Perry swiped a hand through Jason's hair. "It's like you can hide in the shadows, kid - you sure you don't have superpowers or something...?" he began to joke.

And then at the sudden silence around him, he realized just what he had implied. Jimmy's gaze was pointedly fixated on the ground. Clark's eyes were overly wide. Jason looked between them all and laughed innocently. "Don't be silly, Uncle Perry, I'm not Batman!"