

And you don't tug on Superman's cape

Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—The cobwebs were thick in the newsroom at the Daily Planet, the last echo of print journalism in Metropolis.

Perry White, the old and crusty editor, was gone. His old and crusty photograph hung dustily on a wall. The few old and crusty reporters who remained had stopped throwing darts at it after the youngest of them had forgotten who he was.

Reporter Lois Lane, now in her 80s, sat at her metal desk, typing a pretend story on her IBM Selectric with the power turned off. She'd changed her name from Clovis Hitch in her youth to protect her innocence—and now there was no reason to. The man in blue tights and red jockey shorts had never gotten serious.

Clark Kent cleaned his black-rimmed glasses with a paper towel. He hadn't written a paragraph in 70 years, but was still eager for any assignment that involved taking notes in cursive. His last phone call had come in the 1980s when super heroes were being feted at the White House. Clark's blue-black hair had gone with the wind, and a roll around his middle had come in with the tide.

His cape lay at the bottom of his sock drawer. Its hem had frayed.

Clark knew that he could no longer fit into a phone booth, even if he could find one in 2012, which he knew he couldn't. The last time he tried to disrobe, he'd been arrested at an open-sided kiosk with his cape over his head and his pants around his ankles.

Lois had seen through Clark's eye glasses and mild-mannered clumsiness years ago. But she went along with Superman's disguise, because sometimes smart girls have to put up with dopey boys.

For his part, Superman had wearied of rescuing Lois from figments of a cartoonist's imagination. He had saved her life at least 934 times since joining the Daily Planet. He wasn't sure that he could do it again.

Then the newsroom's phone rang.

"Who would be calling a print newspaper?" Clark muttered.

Lois, still the optimist, picked up. "NEWSROOM. We're here!"

"TWO CARS AT LOVER'S LEAP PLAYING CHICKEN."

She hung up. "CLARK—we need to get over to Lover's Leap, fast. This is our big scoop. It could save the paper."

“It may even be a job for Superman,” he said.

“Let’s go,” she said, gathering the one pencil and note pad that she’d requisitioned in 1993.

“Lois...uh...I’m not in uniform. I lost my driver’s license last year. Can you stop by my home on the way?”

“You used to wear it under your mild-mannered suit.”

“Well, it got a little tight.”

“Clark—are you still more powerful than a locomotive? Can you still fly faster than a speeding bullet?

“I hope it’s something I didn’t forget, like riding a bicycle.”

“Do you need a magic feather?”

“I’m Superman, not Dumbo,” he said.

“It couldn’t hurt.”

“Superman is not going to start zooming around with a magic feather up his nose!”

“Here. Take my just-in-case feather that I’ve kept in my purse all these years.”

“Just-in-case feather?”

“Just in case you dropped me.”

“Lois—maybe it’s best that we never got together.”

“Well, after all, Clark, you are an illegal alien, not to mention a strange visitor from another planet. Still, there was the Hotel George Sank on 33rd, the night Eisenhower got elected for a second term.”

“A moment of weakness. I was on my way to the Fortress of Solitude when you plied me with margaritas.”

“Man of Steel, my foot,” she said with no innocence. “Come on, let’s get on the story.”

At Lover’s Leap, Lois and Clark found the cars lined up side by side, engines revving, about 50 yards from the edge. A crowd of people stood and stared.

One car was your father’s Buick. At the wheel was Mitch “Let’s Hit the Ditch” McGoner. Riding shotgun, handgun and semi-automatic was Johnny B. Bad.

The other was a sail car with a hybrid motor fueled by corn-based horse manure. At the tiller was Brother Barry, Defender of the Huddled Masses including those in high finance.

Johnny B. Bad held one end of a short rope in his right hand and Brother Barry held the other end with his left.

“Vroom, vroom,” said Johnny B. “Whoever lets go first, loses.”

“Vroom, vroom. Bring it on,” said Brother Barry. “You won’t have a name when you ride the big airplane.”

“First one over the cliff, wins,” Mitch announced.

“Wait,” Lois said with reportorial urgency. “Let me ask a few questions before you start. Why are you doing this?”

“We want to show everyone that we are ready to destroy our father’s Buick in order to save it,” Mitch said.

“Anything they can do, I can do better,” Brother Barry said. “I want to show the American people that the only thing we have to fear from driving off a cliff is fear itself.”

“What are you two idiots talking about?” Lois asked in honest ignorance.

“We’re sending everyone a message,” Brother Barry said.

“From that kind of question, it’s not hard to figure out that you’re one of those left-wing, liberal-media feminist elitists,” Johnny B. said.

“I’m a Coolidge Republican,” Lois said. “In 1927, only the richest two percent paid any federal income tax.”

“So back then 98 percent of all Americans were moochers and deadbeats,” Mitch said.

“Things are getting better,” Brother Barry added.

“Enough talk,” Lois said. “Boys, let ‘er rip!”

“Wait,” said Clark. Wearing his Superman costume, he stepped in front of the two cars. “How ‘bout we all go for some burgers and shakes? It’s on Lois.”

“I’m not paying out of pocket to miss a story like this,” she said.

“Somebody has to pay,” Clark said with elaborate reasonableness.

“The boys won’t, and I don’t carry a wallet in this get up.”

“Vroom, vroom,” the boys said together.

“All the innocent people who live at the bottom of Lover’s Leap will be hurt if you two drive over the edge,” Clark said.

“Vroom, vroom,” the boys said.

“That’s not Truth, Justice and the American Way,” Clark said.

“Vroom, vroom,” the boys said.

Superman hoped the old juices still flowed. He tried to lift your father’s Buick but dropped it when he felt something pull in his lower back. He didn’t even try to lift off.

I used to be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, he thought, now I can’t even bunny hop.

“Vroom, vroom,” the boys said.

Superman had one last idea. He took Lois's feather, broke it in half and gave a piece to each car.

Johnny B. and Brother Barry dropped their halves in the dirt between them. The cars raced off.

"Let's go, Lois," Superman said. "You have your story, and I know that Superman's finished."

"A story with a bad ending sells big. I'll smoke those bloggers. I'll share my byline with you."

Superman grimaced. "No thanks. My heart is heavy."

"You're still my guy, Clark Kent," Lois said. "This story will keep us writing for months. We should celebrate. How about a margarita after I file?"

Clark shrugged. "How about I make a married woman of you?"

"Clark! There are cliffs, and then there are CLIFFS."

"Vroom. Vroom," he said.

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