

A Little Advice

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Set during the events of Season 2's "That Old Gang of Mine," Superman gets some much-needed advice from an unexpected source.

"Hello Mr. White," Superman said. "I understand you needed to see me."

Perry gave the superhero a grim look and offered his hand. "Yes, I do, Superman. Thanks for coming by." He waved in the direction of the chair. "Have a seat."

Superman sat obediently, facing the editor's desk. "What can I do for you, sir?" he asked politely.

Perry didn't bother with further niceties. "Clark Kent was one of the most promising reporters I've come across in a lot of years, and he's the only one I've ever met who could work with Lois Lane." His eyes narrowed. "Lois is special to me, Superman."

Superman cleared his throat. "I know, sir. But..." He was going to ask where all this was headed, but the Chief interrupted him.

"I'm not sure she's going to get over this," Perry sounded almost accusatory. "She blames herself for what happened to Clark."

"She shouldn't. I've...heard what happened. It wasn't her fault."

"Maybe, maybe not. We both know that Lois takes crazy chances sometimes. But even though she might not think twice about risking her own life, she'd never have gone there that night if she'd known she could lose Clark. He meant a lot to her."

"She meant a lot to him," Superman said softly.

"He was in love with her," Perry said, giving Superman a shrewd look. "Did you know that?"

Superman's jaw clenched slightly before he answered. "Yes," he said. "I've always known that."

"Did you know that *she* was in love with *him*?" Perry watched his guest closely as his question hit home. He leaned back in his chair and gave it a few seconds to sink in before going on. "She was. *Is*. I'm not sure she knew it herself until Clark was gone and she thought there was no getting him back. But she knows it now and thinks it's too late."

"It is," Superman said, losing his battle to keep his voice steady. "It *is* too late."

"Bull!" Perry bellowed, surprising them both with his vehemence. "Judas Priest, son! You're Superman!" He glowered at the superhero before him and jabbed his finger at him for emphasis. "I want you to fix this, and I want you to do it *now*! I don't care what kind of cockamamie yarn you have to spin, but dammit, I want Clark Kent resurrected from the grave and back on the beat."

Superman blanched and then hung his head before saying in a low voice. "Clark took three bullets in the chest at point blank range in front of a room full of witnesses." He raised his head and met Perry's eyes, his face utterly bleak. "Clark Kent is dead."

"You're tellin' me the problem," Perry said, smacking his desk impatiently. "I *know* the problem. What I want is a *solution*!"

Superman took a deep breath. "If Clark Kent was found to be...not dead, and people figured out why, his life would be over anyway. It'd be a circus...a freak show. He'd have nothing to offer Lois, nothing to offer the Planet. Can't you see that?"

Perry's mouth lifted in a humorless smile. "That just means we have to make sure they *don't* figure out why." He leaned forward and looked at Superman intently. "Whatever we come up with — even if it's a little far-fetched — people are going to believe it for two very good reasons. One, because it's going to be plastered all over the front page of The Daily Planet, and The Daily Planet doesn't lie. And two, because Clark Kent was one of the good guys, and people want to believe that good things sometimes actually happen to the people who deserve it. They'll believe it because Clark champions the little people, the people who can't speak for themselves, and because he was young and handsome and had his entire life ahead of him. They'll believe it because they *want* to believe it. All we have to do is meet them halfway, and you watch — they'll do the rest themselves."

Superman sighed and slumped forward, relinquishing his superhero posture to rest his elbows on his knees and cradle his head in his hands. "You just said yourself that the Planet doesn't lie. Neither does Superman."

"Well, we're both going to have to make an exception in this case," Perry said firmly. "The world needs Clark Kent — and I mean the Clark Kent who wears a coat and tie to work. I happen to think that the pen — *Clark Kent's pen* — is mightier, even, than Superman. Clark still has work to do, stories to write, and I'm not losing him to blue tights and a cape without putting up one hell of a fight. Can you really just fly out of here and leave that work undone? Can you leave Lois? Let her grieve?"

"God knows I don't want to, Chief!" Clark looked at Perry in despair, his eyes wild. "But I've been over it and over it in my mind. How could I possibly have survived?"

"You were wearing a bullet-proof vest," Perry suggested, sounding excited by the idea. "You knew this assignment could be dangerous, and so you took precautions."

"Even with a vest, I'd be bruised," Clark pointed out, but he sounded more hopeful. "If anyone examined me..."

"They won't," Perry said. "I swear to you, son, we can do this. No one will question it."

"What if..."

"Yeah?"

"What if we said that Superman saved me using Dr. Hamilton's procedure? I mean, I've been dead a lot less time than Capone and the others. And if someone insisted on examining me, they wouldn't find anything unusual."

Perry raised an eyebrow at him.

"Well, as long as it was just a quick once-over," Clark said. "I can alter my vital statistics so that they mimic a normal person's." There was just the slightest emphasis on the word 'normal.' Just the slightest, but Perry heard it and it made his heart ache for the young man in front of him.

"It could work," he said thoughtfully. "The science involved is way above the head of the average man on the street, and that's a point in our favor. They won't understand how it all happened, but they'll see your face on the front page and just be glad it did."

"You think?" Clark asked, sounding hopeful.

"I think it's worth a try," Perry said. "We live in a city with its own resident flying superhero. Folks here are conditioned to believe the unbelievable."

"Maybe," Clark conceded, "but there's still a risk, Chief. This could blow up in our faces. In *my* face for sure and maybe in yours, too, if the Planet backs me up." He looked at Perry hopefully. "Do you really think...do you really think she loves me?"

Perry threw back his head and laughed for the first time that day. "Son, I'm as sure of that as I am of my own name. She loved part of you at first sight..." he gestured at the brightly colored suit, "and the rest of you almost as long. And it's none of my business, but I can't help thinking the path to true love might've been a little more smooth if you hadn't confused the heck out of

her by being two people."

Clark looked chagrined. "So how long have you known?"

"Oh, a long time now," Perry told him with a grin. "Since the heat wave not long after you came here. I got a kick out of boring you with those Elvis stories and watching you try to keep your eyes from glazing over. Very polite fellow, that Superman."

Clark smiled. "His mother used to wash his mouth out with soap if he wasn't. She probably still would, come to think of it."

"I talked to your parents," Perry said, sobering. "I got the feeling they don't like lying any more than you do."

"They hate it," Clark said flatly. "And I hate asking it of them." He spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "But what choice did I have?"

"It's none of my business, but don't you think the time has come to let Lois in on your secret?"

"I dunno, Chief." Clark shook his head.

"She's a whole lot better liar than you are, son. That'll be a big help right there. And if something like this should happen again... well, she'd've been spared a whole lot of grief if she'd known. It's been all I could do, frankly, not to tell her myself. She's a wreck, Clark."

"Won't keep her from killing me when she finds out I've been lying to her all this time," Clark said glumly.

"Well, look on the bright side — she can't kill you without some of that Kryptonite, and it's not too easy to come by."

Clark sighed. "This is *Lois* we're talking about, Chief. She's not going to let a little thing like needing Kryptonite stand in her way. She knows guys who know guys, remember?"

Perry's mouth quirked in a smile. "She's not going to kill you. But she just might if she finds out later and realizes you let her grieve for a man who wasn't dead."

"I'll think about it," Clark said, still sounding doubtful.

"Well, it's your decision," Perry said. "You just get Clark Kent alive again and turning in stories, and I'll go back to pretending I don't notice that he's in love with his partner or that he bolts out of my newsroom ten times a day."

Clark smiled. "Thanks, Chief." He stood up, shaking out his cape a bit. "I guess I'd better get on this whole resurrection thing. I'm going to see if Lois is around. I don't know if I'm ready to tell her... everything, but if she's taking this as bad as you say, I'd like to at least give her a little hope... let her know I have an idea."

"So what are you doing standing here?" Perry asked, making a good attempt at sounding his usual irritable self. "Get!" He waved his hand at the door. "Bring me back a story, and make it a damned good one."

Metropolis's resident superhero flashed his editor a blinding grin. "On it, Chief!" he said, and then he headed out to reclaim the life he'd thought he'd lost forever.

THE END