

The Company Picnic

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© 12-Jul-09

Rating: K+

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Author's Notes: Part of the Shadows Universe and takes place after **Summer Storms**. This one really didn't want to come until Perry said it was *his* turn to tell a story. Written for the 2009 12 Days of Clois Summer Food Challenge



Perry White looked over the crowded picnic area, still wondering at what possessed Bruce Wayne, the Daily Planet's publisher, to hold a company picnic. Franklin Stern had stopped the annual summer get-together, ostensibly for financial reasons, during his stint as publisher. The fact was that company picnics were an old fashioned idea that simply didn't fit in with today's high pressure society.

Perry didn't know what had prompted Wayne to reinstate the custom. Perry had agreed with Stern those many years ago - picnics were old-fashioned and trying to force people who work together to socialize more than they already did or didn't was, at best, a fool's notion.

The Daily Planet had 670 employees and it seemed as if all of them, their significant others, and thier children, were in Pelham Inlet Park. He knew it wasn't true. Only about half of the Planet's employees had even been free to attend the get-together - the paper was a 24/7 operation. For those stuck at work Wayne had authorized catered lunches.

Park rules forbade alcohol, but Perry knew that Gil, Ralph, and Steve had, no doubt, brought in an entire cooler of beer and harder stuff. Perry hoped they had the sense not to leave any evidence of their crime. But then, it *was* Gil, Ralph, and Steve Lombard from Sports - the Three Stooges.

Jimmy Olsen was bouncing around like a teenager, camera in hand. Perry watched him with an almost fatherly pride. The boy had come a long way since that day thirteen years before, when Perry discovered the newest newsroom intern wasn't an intern at all but a homeless teen living out of one of the many basement storerooms. Rather than turn him over

to Children's Services, Perry gave him a job as a gofer.

Lois Lane had taken the boy under her wing even though she was only about four years older and just out of college. Perry knew that Lois had spent her Christmas bonus on Jimmy that first year, buying the boy his first real camera.

"Anybody can write about what happened," Perry overheard Lois admit. She'd had a few too many drinks at the Christmas party and didn't know that her boss was standing right there. "But to take that perfect shot, that picture that really is worth a thousand words... that's something special, Jimmy Boy," she had continued. "Don't disappoint me. You're taking me to the Gold Room when you win your first Pulitzer."

"Sure, Miss Lane," Jimmy had agreed with a shy smile.

Olsen hadn't won the Pulitzer yet, but it was only a matter of time. Perry wondered if Lois realized how utterly besotted of her Jimmy had been. As near as Perry could tell, Jimmy still had a bit of a crush on Lois. Not that Jimmy would ever act on it - Lois was a married woman and despite outward appearances, her husband wasn't someone to be trifled with.

Perry's eyes sought out Lois. She was at the play area, watching her son play with the other kids his age, a look of contentment on her face. Who would have ever imagined that Lois Lane, hard-bitten world renowned journalist, would be such a doting parent? Perry certainly would never have imagined it, at least not until it happened.

"Perry, I need to tell you something," Lois said, closing his office door behind her. Perry arched one brindled eyebrow at her. She was unusually diffident, almost shy. This wasn't the Lois Lane he knew but then she'd changed over the past few months since Clark Kent left to go 'find himself'.

Perry glanced through the glass office door to see his nephew Richard standing with his hands in his pockets, waiting, watching. Lois had started seeing Richard a few weeks after Kent's departure. Perry normally frowned on office romances, but Lois seemed to need a steadying hand and Richard was a good steady man. Besides, it meant that Richard might actually want to stay in Metropolis for a while.

"Go on, I'm listening," Perry urged, leaning back in his chair.

"I... I'm pregnant," she stammered.

Perry straightened up. This was the last thing he had expected to hear from her.

"What do you intend to do?" he managed to ask.

"My mom thinks I should terminate it," Lois said.

Perry was surprised to hear that Ellen Lane had made that suggestion to her older daughter. He put that aside for the moment. "Never mind what anyone else thinks," he said. "What do you intend to do? And what about the father? Is it Richard?"

Lois shook her head. "I don't think so."

"Is that why Clark took off so suddenly?"

She shook her head again. "I don't know, Chief. I don't remember sleeping with Clark, but I don't remember going to Alaska, either."

Perry nodded in understanding. He had sent Lane and Kent to Niagara Falls on an undercover assignment as newlyweds. Somehow, the pair had ended up in Deadhorse, Alaska, covering problems with the oil pipeline instead. Lois had come back to the bullpen an emotional basket case and Kent had not been much better. Then, suddenly Lois's tears stopped and she couldn't remember going to Alaska - traumatic amnesia the doctors said but Perry hadn't believed it. Kent took off to see the world.

Jason Samuel White was born at the end of April, and Lois transformed from an

irritable pregnant woman into a doting, attentive mother of a frail little boy. The birth certificate listed Richard Peregrine White as the boy's father, but anyone with eyes to see knew that Richard wasn't the biological father. Clark Kent was. But Kent was nowhere to be found and Lois forbade Perry to even look for him.

Then Kent came back. Now he was married to Lois Lane and Jason was acknowledged as his son. Perry would never have characterized the match-up as being made in heaven, but it seemed to be working for them despite the stresses of being a three career family.

Perry looked around for Kent. He was nowhere to be seen, again. Perry had no doubt that, if he turned on the radio, Kent's flashy alter-ego was off dealing with some emergency.

He took a sip of his iced tea, wishing he dared add something stronger to it. His doctor had made him give up cigars some years before and alcohol was now on the list of forbidden things. Not that he listened to his doctor all that much.

"Jason!" Lois's voice cut through the noise of the many conversations. "Be careful," she called to her son. The boy, now a sturdy six year old, was standing on top of the steel play structure, arms out as if ready to take off flying like Superman.

"Hey, Lois, where's your better half?" Lombard yelled.

"Oh, he's around," Lois yelled back. "Just got tired of your war stories. You know what a sensitive stomach he has. He couldn't take the bull."

One of the kids shot Lois with a water gun. Lois spun around and Perry realized she had her own bright orange water gun in her hand. She took off after the shooter.

"Um, Perry, aren't Lois and Clark in charge of the hot dogs?" his wife asked.

Perry told her they were. Earlier, Clark had been putting on a show of ineptitude as he tried to get the charcoal briquettes started. There'd been laughter as Lois took over and got the fire going. Clark had tried to beg off cooking the hot dogs but Jimmy and Lois wouldn't let him out of it.

"So, what's Lombard doing?" Alice White asked.

Perry looked over to see Lombard skulking away from the grill Clark had been put in charge of. He also saw Lois watching the former football player with narrowed eyes. She loaded her water pistol from the bucket at her feet.

Clark was wending his way through the crowd. He opened the grill to check on how briquettes were doing.

The grill exploded into flame, tongues of fire leaping into the air. Clark jumped back, astonishment written across his face. The tall man simply stood as if he couldn't quite understand what was happening or how he should react.

Lois came running, knocking the grill's lid down to snuff out the flames. "Earth to Clark, are you okay?"

Clark seemed surprised at the question. After a moment he nodded. "That isn't supposed to happen," he added. His glasses were covered with soot. Perry knew that anyone except Clark would have been seriously hurt by Lombard's stunt.

Lois knew it too. Her expression turned stern as she spun around, looking for her quarry. "Lombard, you'd better run 'cause you'll be in a world of hurt when I catch you!" Lois took off after Lombard, water gun in hand. Clark wiped his glasses and took off after his wife at a distance eating lope.

"Well, we know who wears the pants in that family," someone commented. Perry placed the voice as belonging to Jim from ad sales.

"Nah," Perry corrected. "Lois has the better legs for a skirt. She's just a little more blatant

that he is. But that's why they're the best team in the business." Perry paused, considering. "Lombard had better pray Clark catches Lois before Lois catches him or even Superman may not be able to save him."

"Perry, hon'," Alice said in feigned innocence. "If they're going to get arrested for hurting Lombard, who's going to do the hot dogs?"

Perry just looked at his wife of thirty years for a long moment then began to laugh. *Maybe company picnics weren't so old-fashioned after all.* He took his wife's hand and headed toward the hot dog grill.