

Planet!

By Terry Leatherwood [t_leatherwood@peoplepc.com]

Rated: PG

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Summary: Jimmy goes to work one morning, but it's anything but a normal day. A L&C/Airplane!/Doctor Who/Sports Illustrated crossover.

The morning fog drifted above the streets of Metropolis, obscuring anything more than ten feet above the ground. Anything twenty-five feet up or higher, however, was clearly visible, and the peak of the Daily Planet's globe kept zipping through the top of the fog. The cab radio was playing some jazz tune with lots of bass, going duh-duh — pause — duh-duh — pause — duh-duh — a shorter pause — duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-WHOOSH!

It was most distressing to the young photographer. He preferred more melodic tunes.

Jimmy held his stomach for a moment as he belched. Have to cut out the late-night pizzas, he thought. Especially when taking a cab to work in the morning. That was just inviting indigestion, if not full-fledged ulcers. It wasn't just the weird music that was bothering him. The cabbie was driving as if he rarely got behind the wheel and was used to moving much faster.

He stopped and frowned to himself. The cab driver looked a lot like Clark Kent. But that was ridiculous. CK was one of the paper's best reporters, and there was no way he'd be driving a hack in downtown Metropolis.

It was odd, though, that the cab had screeched to a halt on the curb in front of the Planet building, and that the cabbie had jumped out almost before the car had stopped. As Jimmy exited the back of the cab, another man had jumped in and yelled a destination at the cabbie. But the driver had waved, called out "Be right back!" and turned on the meter. The driver's uniform looked odd, too, with a short red cape and red boots over his denim overalls.

Jimmy stood and let his stomach settle for a moment, then headed toward the door. Two announcers, one male and one female, were attempting to direct traffic over the PA outside the building in between mutual accusations of infidelity, drug use, money laundering, illegal wiretapping, and not putting the toilet seat down.

Funny, thought Jimmy, we didn't have an outside PA yesterday. He shrugged, figuring that it was one of the improvements paid for by the paper's new owner.

He stopped dead in his tracks as he saw his friends — his married friends — Clark and Lois speaking earnestly with one another in the long tiled hallway. Funny, thought Jimmy, we didn't have a long tiled hallway yesterday. Must be another improvement.

Then he listened closer to the argument going on two feet in front of him.

"No, Clark! My mind's made up! I can't do this any more! You can't hold a job, you stay out all hours of the night, and you have a drinking problem!"

"Please, Lois, let's go home and talk about this."

"No! My deadline is in one hour and I have to finish my story!"

"Okay. What about tonight after work? Can we talk then?"

She gave Clark the most pitiful look Jimmy had ever seen outside that funny cat picture website. "I'm taking the post Perry

offered me in Germany."

"What?" shouted Clark. "No! You can't do a humor column there! Besides, you don't speak German!"

"My computer has a translation program. I'm going to make myself famous all over again."

Clark stomped his foot once — cracking the floor tiles — and spun around in apparent frustration. "I don't believe this! Next thing you're going to tell me is that you plan to eat English food!" He lifted his hands to the side and let them drop. "That's the assignment to —"

"Stop! This is the PG folder, remember?"

"Oh, right. Lois, you can't be serious about this!"

"I am serious, Ted!"

"I'm not Ted, I'm Clark!"

"Oh, right. Anyway, I've already moved my stuff into storage. Perry will ship it to Germany once I get settled."

"Lois, please! Look, I — I'll get a job, a writing job! I can start small, doing ad copy for billboards and homeless beggar signs —"

"No, Clark, I'm sorry. It's too late for that."

Clark's face hardened and he seemed to draw inward. "It's not my fault! It was the typo, that stupid, stupid typo! That's the thing that's been keeping me out of the writing game!"

"Clark, no one cares about the typo! That was six years ago. You're the only one keeping that alive."

He grabbed Lois' arm. "Please don't go! I love you!"

She pulled her arm loose and turned to walk away. "I know. I love you too, Clark. But it's just not enough any more." She looked at her watch and grabbed her wheeled suitcase. "I have to go now. I can't be late for my last story in Metropolis. Goodbye, Clark."

Jimmy watched, transfixed, as Clark exhaled deeply and turned to face the camera. "What a [bleep]!" he snarled.

Without acknowledging Jimmy's presence, Clark ran to the ticket counter and purchased a ticket, one with hot embers singeing the edges and curls of smoke rising from it. Must be another improvement, thought Jimmy. We didn't have a smoking section yesterday.

Clark ran to an empty elevator car and pressed a button. Jimmy hesitated, then took the next open car and pressed the button for the news floor.

When the doors opened, he stepped out and looked at the new and improved news room. All the desks were set in rows of six across with a narrow aisle between the third and fourth desks. He saw CK sit down beside an older woman who looked a lot like Clark's mother. Then he looked at the ticket in his shirt pocket to find his desk number.

He found his desk near the back of the room, close to the coffee and candy machines. As he sat down, Cat Grant smiled at him and offered him a small bag of peanuts and a four-ounce cup of ice water. He smiled back and shook his head.

He looked at Clark again. He was fidgeting in his seat, adjusting his tie and red cape — wonder why I didn't notice that before, thought Jimmy, looks like the one my cabbie was wearing — and squeezing the armrests on his desk chair and leaving finger marks in them.

The kindly older woman leaned over to Clark and asked, "Apprehensive about reporting, dear?"

Clark nodded shortly.

"First time?" she asked again.

"Oh, no, I've been apprehensive before."

At the other end of the room, the door to the editor's office opened and in walked Perry White, resplendent in his editor's hat and uniform jacket. Under his left arm he carried a brightly colored book. As he walked toward the beverage area, Jimmy could read "Editing For Dummies" on the book's cover.

Perry smiled at Cat as she handed him a large strawberry

milkshake with whipped cream and a single cherry on top.

“What’s the lunch special today, darlin’?” he drawled.

“Got a choice today, Chief,” she replied. “Chicken or fish.”

He rubbed his hands together. “That’s great, honey! I think I’ll have the fish. And go ahead and set up Captain Presley and Captain Stern with the fish, too.”

Her eyes widened. “Captain Presley? Really? He isn’t going to get us all shook up today, is he?”

“That ol’ hound dog? Naw, sweet cheeks, he’s just a big ol’ teddy bear. You get those dinners to the office pronto, okay?”

She smiled and threw him a jaunty salute. “Aye-aye, Captain White!”

Chicken sounds nice, thought Jimmy. Maybe with some fluffy rolls and some potato salad or coleslaw.

He ate the chicken dinner as soon as it appeared on the tray in front of him, which was almost instantly. He even finished off the soft drink that came with it. As he glanced up, he saw Clark take his glass of soda and splash it against the side of his head.

Wow. The guy really did have a drinking problem.

As Jimmy finished his meal, his attention was captured by Clark’s seat companion. “I don’t want to hear about your love life any more, Clark! The first time I would have hung myself if we hadn’t been out in the wheat field and away from any trees. The second time I would have committed hara-kiri if we’d been anywhere near the kitchen and my knives. And now I have an overwhelming urge to pour gasoline over myself and light a match!” She flopped back in the seat and gave out a long-suffering sigh. “Will you please give it a rest?”

“But it was the typo that came between us! That darned typo — ”

“Stop it! No one remembers the typo any more! No one cares! It’s all in your head!”

Jimmy blinked and noticed Lucy Lane, dressed just as Cat Grant was dressed — green string bikini bottoms, green high heels, strategically placed body paint and nothing else — lean down to a man with a golden stethoscope draped around his neck. “Sir?” she asked. “Are you by any chance a doctor?”

A devastatingly rich and handsome man raised his head and smiled that killer smile at her. “Why, yes, young lady, I am a doctor. How can I help you?”

Lucy dodged the man’s lethal smile, apparently not caring as it ricocheted off the wall and took out two teenaged stringers. “There’s a little problem in the editor’s office, Doctor. Could you come with me, please?”

(A perky blonde wearing an oversized gray sweater — which she filled to its breaking point — stood up and smiled dazzlingly at the camera. “The part of the doctor will be played today by Lex Luthor,” she bubbled.)

Jimmy lurched out of his seat, bewitched by Lucy’s ensemble and hoping to see more of her. He followed them into the editor’s office.

He and the doctor were startled to see Captain White and Captain Stern slumped in their seats, unconscious. Captain Presley was rapidly hitting keys on his computer and barking instructions into the phone tucked between his ear and his shoulder. “No! Move the ad for the fried banana sandwiches to page three! Yes, above the fold! And bring up the piano in that gospel number! It’s too low in the mix. No, the one with the girls singing in the background! Right! I’ll call you back about the crossword puzzle.”

He tossed the phone onto the cradle. “Lucy, honey, I hope y’all found a doctor.”

“I did, Captain.”

“He any good?”

Lucy smiled at the doctor and reached up to play with his hair. “Well, I should be able to answer that question in about twenty minutes.”

“No! Is he any good as a doctor?”

“Oh! Right. Well, his stethoscope is made of solid gold.”

“Good enough. Doc, you come over here and park it. We need to talk.”

The doctor sat. “Very well. What do you want to talk about?”

“I need you to tell me what’s wrong with my flight crew.

They’re droppin’ faster than hotel room keys at my Hawaii comeback show.”

At that moment, Cat Grant burst into the office. “Captain Presley, we have several sick passengers.”

“What are the symptoms?” asked the doctor.

“Fever, chills, vomiting, and some of them are having convulsions.”

He nodded. “And what did they have for dinner?”

“Each of them had the fish.”

“What about the flight crew?”

She raised her hand to her mouth, obscuring Jimmy’s view of her cleverly painted torso. “They had fish, too!”

The doctor nodded again. “All right, now we know what we’re up against. The people in this news room have to get to the hospital soon!”

“Oh my goodness, Doctor!” exclaimed Lucy. “What is it?”

“It’s a large white building with doctors and nurses and patients, but that’s not important right now. What is important is that we call in the ambulances right now.”

“But we can’t, Doctor,” protested Cat, her hips wiggling in time with her movements. “The paper’s on lockdown until we get the morning edition put to bed! No one can get in or out of the building until it’s done!”

The doctor nodded again. Jimmy thought he did that a lot. “Then we have to hope that Captain Presley can put this paper to bed in time!” intoned the doctor.

Jimmy looked at the captain and decided he didn’t look good, not good at all. As Jimmy watched, a rash appeared on the man’s neck and face, a twitch began yanking his fingers away from his computer keyboard, and drool began pouring from his mouth. Jimmy was about to say something when the man’s eyes rolled up in his head and he fell over, unconscious.

Cat and Lucy knelt down to check on him, and Jimmy watched the bikini material stretch nearly to the point of disintegration. He had almost forgotten his name when the doctor tapped him on the shoulder. “You! Young man! Can you edit a newspaper?”

“Wh-what?”

“I asked you if you could edit a newspaper!”

Jimmy looked up at the banks of computers around the wall, at the multiple clocks showing the current time in Metropolis, Paris, Moscow, Tokyo, and the Andromeda galaxy, at the multiple racks of telephones, at the Pony Express riders waiting eagerly for dispatches, and said, “No, sorry. No idea what to do.”

The doctor turned to face the two women, both of whom now had goose bumps all over their bodies. It made their body paint come alive in some very interesting ways. “Then we have to find someone in this newsroom who not only can edit this paper, but someone who did NOT have fish for dinner!”

Lightning flashed outside the office and threw creepy shadows on the wall. The sound of a large propeller-driven aircraft filled the room.

Just then the door opened again and someone else came in. This room gets much more crowded, thought Jimmy, and I’ll be shoved up against Lucy or Cat.

Or both, if I’m lucky.

Then he turned to face the newcomer. It was Lois Lane, dressed as Cat and Lucy were. He looked closer at her upper body and realized that her body paint was a map of the Northern Hemisphere, complete with Mercator projection. He leaned closer and saw New Troy, Metropolis, Hob’s Bay, Gotham City

— the detail was incredibly clear.

He could have stared at her for hours, but behind her stood her husband with an angry expression on his face, and Jimmy decided to let the rest of the world go by.

“Doctor,” said Lois, “this is Clark Kent. He’s a newspaperman.”

“What is it?” asked Clark. “The stewardess said you needed someone to answer the phone — ”

Jimmy stepped back and watched him take in the scene. The three editors, all still wearing uniform jackets splattered with drool, were laid side by side on the floor against one wall. The doctor stepped up to Clark and reached inside his jacket, then pulled out something that looked like an oversized ballpoint pen. “Ordinarily I can fix almost anything with this sonic screwdriver, but this is a situation beyond even its capabilities. Mr. Kent, can you edit a newspaper?”

“Well, sure, I edited the Smallville Posthole Digger years ago before the typo, but that was a small one-horse paper! This one is immense and much more complex! It’s a completely different type of editing — altogether!”

The doctor and all three scantily-clad women stood erect in a straight line and said in deadpan unison, “It’s a completely different type of editing.”

“Look, I can’t do this!” Clark protested. “There’s no way I can put this paper to bed!”

“You’ve got to, Mr. Stryker!”

“The name’s Kent, Doctor!”

“No, I’m the Doctor!”

Clark blinked twice and tried again. “No. My name is Clark Kent, not Stryker. And no, I can’t edit this paper!”

With that, Clark spun around and yanked open the office door. The doctor turned to Lois and barked, “Woof! Woof-woof-woof!”

“I’m sorry, Doctor, I don’t speak Canine.”

“Oh. Right. Ms. Lane, can you edit this paper?”

“Well — ” she looked at the computers — “I don’t know if I — ” she glanced at the clocks — “this might not be the best edition — ” she kicked a Pony Express rider in the groin as he reached for her map — “but I’ll do my best.”

She sat down in the co-editor’s chair and began hunting and pecking on the keyboard, then she picked up a headset and plugged it into a random connection. “Hello? Is anyone there? Really? Why do you want to know what I’m wearing? What? You — you sleaze you!”

She yanked out that connection and tried again. “Hello? Who is this? Bill who? Bill Henderson? I thought you got transferred to a serious drama. Really? I didn’t know they did role-sharing like that. Who, me? I don’t know. I’d have to be pretty desperate to do that. What? No, I’m not hungry. Oh, that’s your name! Really?” She put her hand over the headset’s microphone and turned to the other women. “He says his name on the other show is Munch!” Lois giggled. “Isn’t that a hoot?” She pulled her hand away. “You still there, Bill? Good. Listen, I need someone to talk me through this. Who? Rex Cramer? I think he’s still in the Metropolis loony bin. Yeah, something about landing an airplane without a pilot. No, I don’t see any ironic parallels! What kind of girl do you think I am?”

Cat and Lucy looked at each other and shook their heads. “We’d better warn the staff to be ready to assume unemployment positions,” muttered Cat.

Lucy nodded. “Maybe at my next job I can wear something a little warmer. My butt is like ice!”

The doctor reached out and stopped them before they could leave and dodged a quick slap from Cat. “Ah-ah-ah,” he smiled, then he turned serious. “We need to get these men to the back of the newsroom. They’ll be safer there.” He waved at Jimmy. “Young man? Help them.”

Yeah, right, thought Jimmy. Like I could move that three-hundred-sixty pound Captain Presley by myself.

Lucy bent down and grabbed Captain White under the arms and began dragging him backwards. Jimmy watched her and thought he would faint.

Cat bent over and grabbed Captain Stern under the arms and began dragging him toward the door. Jimmy watched her and forgot to breathe.

When they were gone, the doctor stepped out onto the news floor and began speaking. “May I have your attention, please?” Everyone looked at him and no one looked at the two incredibly beautiful and barely legally dressed swimsuit models, each one dragging an unconscious editor toward the back of the news room.

“While it is true that the chief editor has experienced a slight stomach discomfort,” intoned the doctor, “it is not true that the morning edition is in danger of not being printed.” The doctor glanced meaningfully at Jimmy, who rolled his eyes and grabbed the rotund captain and began slowly wrangling him down the aisle.

“The editor’s office is in the capable hands of Ms. Lois Lane. Everything’s under control.”

Jimmy stopped to rest and saw that the doctor’s nose was now at least twenty-eight inches in length and still growing.

“The important thing at this point,” continued the doctor, “is that we do not panic.”

As Jimmy huffed and puffed past Ralph, the man began yanking at his tie and panting hard. “I — I can’t stand it!” Ralph shouted. “We’re all going to be fired! We’ll all be unemployed before nightfall! I won’t be able to pay for my Cadillac or my Armani suits!”

Cat slipped past Jimmy — she was now wearing a blue long-sleeved flannel nightgown that reached to the floor — and shook Ralph hard. “Calm down, Ralph!” She delivered a resounding slap. “Stop it right now!”

Jimmy kept dragging the corpulent captain down the aisle as Lucy — who was now wearing shapeless fuzzy long johns complete with a buttoned flap in the back — pushed past Cat and began shaking Ralph. “Get hold of yourself, you big wussy!” Her slap spun his head halfway around.

As the doctor pulled Lucy to the side and began shaking Ralph — Jimmy glanced up and saw a line behind the doctor featuring Penny with a bat, Eduardo with nun-chucks, Steve with brass knuckles, a priest with a spiked mace, and others with similar weapons — Jimmy panted, “Hey, how come you girls changed clothes?”

Cat put her hands on her hips. “We wouldn’t even wear those other outfits in your dreams, Olsen.”

“But — ”

“And don’t expect to see my sister undressed like a swimsuit model again, either!”

Jimmy lifted his hands in surrender. “No problem. Mind if I get this guy back there?”

The women’s faces softened. “He looks so lonesome tonight, doesn’t he?” purred Cat.

Lucy nudged the other woman’s elbow. “Much more o’ that an’ you’ll be checkin’ into the Heartbreak Hotel, darlin’.”

Cat frowned. “Isn’t that Perry’s line?”

“Yeah, but he’s not up to it right now.”

Both women burst into laughter and brushed past Jimmy to disappear into the break room. Jimmy lifted his burden once again and wished he had a furniture dolly.

He finally left the portly pilot propped up against the candy machine. The line of reporters ready to ‘calm’ Ralph had dissipated, so he made his way toward his seat, only to observe the doctor — with his nose back to normal — talking to Clark once more. He overheard something about fast-food hamburgers

and ‘winning one for the Flipper,’ which didn’t make any sense to him. It did, however, seem to make sense to Clark, who leaped to his feet and strode purposefully to the editor’s office.

Clark threw the door open and called out, “Lois! I’ll take the controls. You stay on the phone.”

Jimmy slipped into the office before the door closed. He had to see this for himself.

Kent’s fingers flew over the keyboard. As Lois called out section names, Clark pulled up a window for each page and made adjustments and entries and moves and deletions so fast that Jimmy could almost see the computer begging for mercy. He looked up at the clocks.

“Nineteen plurghs to go,” he called out.

Lois — who was by now wearing a conservative dark blue business suit with low heels, much to Jimmy’s disappointment — turned and snapped, “That’s Andromeda time! Give it to us in minutes!”

“Oh, right. Uh, twenty-one minutes to deadline.”

Clark’s hands flew faster and faster. Lois’s hands gripped her chair and she gasped as Clark hit ‘enter’ so hard the key cracked. He stood, disconnected the broken keyboard, attached a new one, and sat down so fast that Jimmy’s vision blurred.

The doctor opened the office door and leaned in. “I just want you to know that we’re all counting on you. Good luck.” Then he left.

Jimmy looked at the clock. Eight minutes to go. Time flies when you’re having fun, he thought, and CK was obviously having the time of his life. He wouldn’t stop — he couldn’t stop. Unbelievably, he began moving faster. “Hurry!” cried Lois. “We don’t have much time left!”

“I think — yes — that’s got it!” Clark grabbed the mouse, clicked on the ‘File’ menu and then on ‘Save,’ and then leaned back and exhaled.

Jimmy looked at the clock again. Two plurghs — oops, wrong clock again. “Fifty-two seconds to deadline!” he called out.

“Hurry!” shouted Lois. “Send the complete file to the print room LAN so they can put it on the printers!”

Three more mouse clicks and it was there. The print room supervisor sent an instant message to the editor’s console which read, ‘File Received. Lockdown Released. Good work, everyone!’

Lois and Clark jumped up to hug each other. Jimmy tried to get in on the hug too, but somehow they bumped him in the chest and he fell over backwards and hit his head on something hard —

Jimmy lurched up out of sleep and found himself entwined in his bedcovers, lying on the floor beside his bed. His pajamas were soaked with sweat and his mouth tasted like someone else had thrown up in it.

He fought his way clear of his sheet and blanket and ran to the bathroom to rinse his mouth and brush his teeth and disinfect his trachea. As he stood over the sink, his labored breathing finally eased. Then he looked into the mirror and shook his head at himself.

“Okay, you were right. No more anchovy, sardine, and pineapple pizza after midnight.”

Then he glanced at the clock. No! He must have forgotten to set the alarm the night before. He’d overslept! He only had twenty-three plurghs to get to work. He had to hurry.

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Leatherwood — Planet!

THE END