

When Butterflies Gather

By Ron Rogers <rdrogers@swva.net>

Rated: G

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Summary: A visitor from the future travels back in time to an important date in history.

“When Butterflies Gather” is the first in a series of stories about a Lois and Clark who have shared the history with the TV series up until its cancellation. If you are a fan of the parallel universes theory (and I am) then this universe split off at the end of the series, or maybe before if anything contradicts something in the show.

The Encyclopedia Galactica was invented by the late Isaac Asimov, and I’m just borrowing that for fun, too. As it turns out, I’m not the only person who has borrowed the Good Doctor’s creation. Google will give you a couple of good examples.

Of course, I make no profit from this and I’m just writing it for fun. I lay no claim to any of the situations or characters, except those I invented to annoy Lois and Clark. DC Comics, Warner Brothers, December 3rd Productions and all the companies associated with them own the rest.

Some students (and you know who you are!) accessing this historical account, whether through direct neural download or the rather quaint and archaic method of just reading it, may wonder why two centuries are so closely linked in this admittedly cursory look at the time period. Arguably, however, it is safe to say that humanity made more significant advances, technologically and philosophically, in this two hundred year period than all of human history preceding it. This time period, viewed from an historical perspective, can clearly be seen as the single brief instant when man transformed from an earthbound animal to *Galactic Sapiens*.

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Significant and important historical moments abound in this period. Enough so that even a partial list would consume too great a part of this brief article. But the author would be remiss not to mention a few of the greatest events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (in no particular non-chronological order): the first atomic bomb, the beginnings of manned space flight, the permanent Mars settlement, Klein’s K-on warp drive, the first flight to Alpha Centauri, Blenton’s Articles of Intelligence, and the arrival of Kal-El/Superman/Clark Kent on earth.

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The astute student of history may wonder why we left out what may be the most important and seminal event of the twentieth century in the list given previously. It is precisely because this occurrence was so important to the subsequent history of the twentieth, and more importantly the twenty-first centuries that it deserves its own, albeit brief, consideration. We are talking about, of course, the birth and life of Lois Lane.

—Encyclopedia Galactica

—Special 40 Volume Supplement:

Earth and Galaxy, 20th and 21st Centuries

Before he remembered there was no reason for anyone to suspect the day’s historical significance, he was a little surprised at the lack of security at the hospital entrance. Unless you counted the old guy behind the courtesy desk directing people to

various areas of the building. From what he could remember of this time period, he knew the man was probably a retired teacher or maybe even a doctor himself who couldn’t quite handle the boredom of retirement and decided to help the hospital and himself by taking this part-time job. The dark-haired man could sympathize. He had retired several times himself, and he could never handle the overwhelming quiet.

So here he was. Out of retirement again and working.

If you could call this work.

When he had heard about this project, he knew there was only one person who could handle the job. Of course, his wife had told him he was nuts, and he always thought he was the only one who could handle a particular job. That’s why he could never stay retired. “Yes, dear,” he had said to her soothingly, then had gone to the project head and demanded that he be sent on the journey.

Super-humans were a significant and growing portion of the population back home, and there was never a doubt that only an enhanced human would be able to safely endure the physical and mental strains of time travel, H. G. Wells notwithstanding. Of course, Earth was still in “pre-Utopian” days, so the science of the time — though advanced — had been unable to exactly duplicate Wells’ machine and their imperfect copies produced energies that would have been dangerous, if not fatal, to anyone not “super.” Wells himself had been sighted occasionally, but insisted on maintaining his characteristic tightlipped silence.

The only question was: Which super-human would go?

In his mind, there had never been any doubt. In the end, seeing his determination, his wife had helped him convince the project director. That’s when he really knew he had won. Up to that point, their awe of him was balanced by their determination to keep him safely in retirement, away from any potential danger. He had all but given up, sure that they would reject his proposal. But when she decided to help, he started packing his bags. Figuratively speaking, of course.

In all the time he had the pleasure to know his wife, no one had been able to deny something she wanted once she made up her mind.

They had argued that he would not be impartial. That he was too personally involved — as though anyone else living in modern society was not just as personally involved. But when the final decision was being made, that was actually the argument his wife made that convinced the project director and the review board that only he could go. Because he had such a personal stake in the situation, he would be less likely to do or say something that would change some little detail. He had been inundated with theories on the Butterfly Effect to the point where he was one of the Earth’s leading experts on the hypothesis, where a seemingly innocuous gesture or phrase could snowball into a disastrous change in history.

So here he was, walking through history many years in the past, trying not to step on butterflies.

Patiently, he studied the murals on the hospital walls until the gentleman at the courtesy desk was unoccupied and there would be minimal disruption when he spoke with the older man. He had memorized the hospital plans, but there seemed to be a few discrepancies between the records and reality. Perhaps it would be better to verify a couple of crucial bits of information.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said. The elderly man looked up from the papers on his desk.

“How can I help you?” he asked, smiling.

The dark-haired man returned the smile with one of his own. His wife more than once accused him of wielding a deadly weapon when he smiled at her.

“Just a bit of information,” he answered. “What floor is the maternity ward on, and when are the visiting hours?”

“Third floor, just past the nurse’s station, and you’re in luck.

Still a couple of hours left.” The older man looked at him curiously. “Your first visit?”

“It’s been a while,” he answered. “I’ve come to see a friend’s little girl. She was born yesterday.”

“I thought a good looking young man like you might have a child of your own up there.”

“Not lately,” he answered. “All my children are at home.” He didn’t say whose home. He suspected a couple of them were probably halfway across the galaxy by now. Or at least in the “now” he came from.

“They are a delight,” the man said, running his hand through his gray hair. “Wait until the grandchildren come along. Spoil them all you want, and let Mom and Dad worry about the rest.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, then seeing the man’s look of confusion, added, “So I’ve heard.”

He raised his hand in thanks as he walked to the elevators. He could not afford to let his attention lapse like that again. That little girl in the nursery was too important to him and to the world. At least he did not encounter anyone else before he arrived on the third floor and so had no further opportunities to endanger the future of the humanity.

Surely there was no way that an innocent conversation with an elderly man (many decades his junior, he realized) could jeopardize the galaxy’s future, but learned scientists had cautioned him to assume nothing. “Butterflies,” they repeated, shaking their fingers at him. “Butterflies.”

He flashed an electric, reassuring smile at the nurses on duty as he walked back to the observation window. It took him all of a half second to find her — his eyes just seemed to be drawn instantly to her tiny crib. The hand-lettered tag just confirmed what he already knew. It said “Baby Girl Lane.” So they had not even named her yet. That was okay. He knew who she was.

“Lois,” he said too quietly for any human to hear, which was fortunate for him, butterflies, and the future history to come. If someone had heard him, they would have been almost astonished at the wonder in his voice. As though he were witnessing creation itself and it took his breath away to look on God’s work. Which is exactly how he felt. But this hypothetical listener might have believed there was something remarkable and extraordinary about the tiny child sleeping there, her pink fingers clenched into small fists. Like any human life, she was a miracle that almost defied imagination, but there was something else in the man’s voice, and in the way he looked at her.

Reverence.

Something in the way his eyes narrowed, and the tips of his fingers lightly rested against the glass was almost reverent.

Later, he realized it was fortunate that the recording equipment — stereoscopic video cameras in the otherwise useless glasses, a backup camera concealed in his tie, detectors in his belt scanning a million electromagnetic frequencies — were automatic. He had completely forgotten about them and his mission while he gazed on the tiny sleeping form.

For just an instant, he wondered if there were others here, watching her. Watching him watching her, but decided it did not matter. Nothing could take this moment away from him.

But the thought nagged at the edge of awareness. Had they observed baby Kal-el landing on earth and the subsequent battle with Tempus? Were there temporal scholars in every crevice and closet of the hospital when Lois and Clark’s first child was born? Or the subsequent births? He had not even heard the hint of a whisper of a rumor to that effect, but there could have been visitors from a year or a decade or a hundred years into the future of his own time. He had a sudden vision of the population of Metropolis doubling and time travelers tripping over each other, trying to get the best observation post to watch the birth. He wondered if he should use his own not inconsiderable gifts to look for observers here.

The baby girl twitched, as though startled in her sleep, and he had to fight an urge to rush to her side, lift her in his arms, and comfort her. She scrunched her eyes tight, and her hands waved around for a few seconds, and he thought she was going to break into a loud cry. Instead, she yawned, took a deep breath, and drifted back to sleep. There was something about her that he had seen in the adult version. An innocent determination that she never lost. He smiled, somewhat sadly. She had so many obstacles and sadness ahead of her, but so much happiness and triumphant joy in the future, too. She would survive. She would thrive.

She was Lois Lane. She could do nothing else.

And finally, he wondered. Even knowing the story of Lois Lane and the history and lives she had touched, he wondered if the universe or God or Whoever made these decisions had done the right thing. Krypton had been a planet of billions of intelligent beings, hundreds of billions of different types of animal and plant life. A history of art and literature and science and men and women and children and life so complex and fantastic that scientists from a dozen worlds still studied the planet’s remains trying to learn more about them. All destroyed.

Philosophers still argued why. Why did an entire world have to die just so that a tiny child named Kal-el would be sent to earth to grow up and become the earth’s — and specifically — Lois Lane’s savior. Was it truly necessary to destroy a world to save the life of that tiny baby girl with the dark curls and beautiful eyes?

That question had haunted him for years. He had obsessed over it. He had brooded on it. Lost hours of sleep that added up to years of wakefulness. After a few decades, he had finally accepted the necessity. The Serenity Prayer had helped with this, and with those times before he retired when he could not save everyone:

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.*

Though he might not understand it, that’s the way things were. He knew what the “experts” said, of course. He’d read long, rambling essays on Krypton’s history and society, based on observations from covert visits by the inhabitants of several other worlds in Krypton’s vicinity before it was destroyed. All the pictures and video recordings available on the social structure and psyche of Krypton’s version of humanity. Their conclusions were unequivocal. If the planet had not been destroyed, the Kryptonian race would have been extinct within a thousand years. Despite their scientific advancement, the archaic societal system held the seeds of its own destruction. They could not help but destroy themselves. Even the New Krypton offshoot was unable to overcome their history. Without the inertia of an entire planet to sustain them, they died out not in a thousand, but within a hundred years.

Eventually, the only native-born Kryptonian was the dark-haired baby who had traveled to earth in a hastily built starship and grew to become Lois Lane’s friend, protector, lover, and husband. Purged of the remnants of the alien world and its decaying touch by the loving parents who found the baby.

He was close to an epiphany on the death of Krypton and that starship’s journey to earth when he was interrupted by a sound he had been waiting to hear.

His time was growing short. Even now, he could hear her father outside the hospital, talking to a colleague about his newborn daughter before he entered to see her, and it would not be a good idea for the elder Lane to encounter the visitor. In her father’s voice, he could detect the beginnings of disappointment that would grow into an attitude of resentment at not having a son. This would affect Lois for most of her adult life. He was

tempted to stay and take Sam Lane by the lapels and educate him on the glorious feeling of having daughters so bright and quick that they made everyone around them better than they thought they could ever be. Explain to him his own personal experience with a girl child that had opened up possibilities of love and happiness that he never knew could exist.

He had loved his own wife so much that he thought he could never feel as strongly about any other living thing. Then he had held his baby girls in his arms and learned the true meaning of infinity. Love without end. The capacity to love is not limited. It expands to fill the universe, and still there is an infinity left.

But Sam Lane had to make his own mistakes and eventually learn from them. And Lois Lane would endure those mistakes to become the woman she needed to become. No matter how much he wanted to, he could not ease her pain. There was too much at stake. For the universe, of course, but most of all for him.

His fingers rested on the glass again, twitching slightly as if anxious to touch her. Again he resisted. The tiny pink card with “Baby Girl Lane” printed on it had a tiny picture in one corner that one of the nurses must have drawn there. He smiled. A butterfly. A final reminder. Had someone put it there for him?

“Lois.” He said her name once more, this time with a smile and less wonder in his voice. He was glad he was the one to come here and record the event. The entire adventure had raised and settled questions that he never knew he had.

Sam Lane was in the elevator. Time to leave.

He scanned his surroundings as only he could, then pulled up his sleeve to reveal an electronic device slightly larger than a watch. He held his finger above the return button and glanced toward the baby girl.

“See you later, sweetheart,” Clark said, then went home.

THE END

but to be continued in “When Changes Gather”