

A Recipe for Trouble

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Rated G

Submitted November 2013

Summary: Perry carries out an ultimatum — with interesting results.

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Perry was still more than half asleep when he started the morning by looking at the Planet's most recent subscription updates. As the blurry words in front of him swam into focus, his eyes widened. Even without the help of his first bitter cup of newsroom java, Perry found himself quite suddenly and electrifyingly awake. How on Earth had she done it? He would never have guessed that any reporter — even one so talented — could have such an effect on the newspaper's readership in less than a week. According to this report, circulation was down by over 10% compared to last week. The reason was almost universally the paper's new food columnist.

Over the four days since Perry had (temporarily, thank Elvis) transferred Lois Lane from the Planet's city section to its food section, the paper had received drastically increasing numbers of complaints, ranging from allegations of recipes that resulted in noxious, inedible messes to charges of food poisoning to an accusation that the new food columnist was perpetrating "a crime against humanity." This last had been in the passionately scathing letter of a M. Bouchard (some famous French chef, apparently), cancelling his subscription.

Perry sighed, already busily wording his explanation to upper management for the temporary transfer of one of his best investigative reporters to recipe-writing. He was almost pathetically grateful that the week of punishment was almost up. The sides of his mouth twitched ruefully as he remembered the scene that had brought them to the current impasse.

A FEW MONTHS EARLIER

Terrorists storming the Daily Planet and holding four of its members hostage (plus Lex Luthor) in the news-floor conference room wasn't exactly a regular event, although it wasn't unheard of. It certainly added spice to an otherwise boring evening. Perry thought as he bent his mind to possible escape plans. He knew they couldn't rely on getting any outside assistance. The telephone lines had been cut. They were too high up to signal for help. Willie, the Planet's tottery octogenarian night guard, was probably already asleep at his desk nursing his hernia. If the five hostages didn't do something, it could easily be too late by the time anyone realized something was wrong.

The situation certainly looked...challenging. But things didn't truly spin out of control until Lois decided they were just wasting time sitting around. Within moments and without so much as a by-your-leave, she had coerced her unwilling colleagues into a scheme with which each of them had a certain measure of distrust — distrust which was soon proved entirely justified. Lois's half-baked plan to have Perry fake a coronary (thereby distracting their captors while the others staged a rout) was like trying to kill wasps by swinging a baseball bat at their

nest. It didn't work, and it only made them madder.

Almost immediately, the head goon visibly lost his last tenuous grip on his patience. Eyes flashing, mouth tight with fury, the gangbanger raised his gun and aimed it unerringly at the Editor-in-Chief. The world stopped. Perry heard five shots ring out.

He was dead.

A few moments later, Perry realized he was still breathing. He chanced opening his eyes. Looking down, he saw a semi-circle of holes encircling his right foot. He lifted his shoe and wiggled his toes, letting out a quick breath of relief. They were all still there. His gaze then returned involuntarily to the man with the gun.

"A nine millimeter automatic," the thug stated smugly. "Better than a triple bypass. Am I right?"

Perry could only nod, eyes bugging out ever so slightly. "Yes, sir. I feel a whole lot better already." The air flew in and out of his lungs as he was hit with an incredible (but unconscionably delayed) rush of adrenaline. He lost the thread of the conversation for a few moments as he finished his frantic mental tally. He wasn't dead. He wasn't hurt. He was fine. He was...

He was going to kill her! As the tidal wave of shock began to ebb, his anger bubbled upwards. He watched as the terrorists filed out of the room, already arguing amongst themselves. His fellow hostages were all looking at him, obviously concerned. Lois appeared positively guilty. But he wasn't in any mood for an apology. As she opened her mouth to speak, he overrode her, the words bursting from his throat in a menacing growl:

"Lois, if you *ever* try roping me into another deal like that, the only writing you will ever do is writing *recipes* for the food section."

PRESENT DAY

Well, in retrospect, perhaps he should have chosen a different news department for his ultimatum. However, with five smoking holes piercing the floor next to his foot, he hadn't exactly been at his deductive best. He had known for years how much his star reporter hated cooking (although he hadn't known — at the time — that the antipathy was mutual). Surely, he had thought, that threat would make her at least a *little* more circumspect.

He should have known better. There was no power on Earth (or Krypton, since even Superman seemed quite powerless in the matter) that could stop Lois from dangling over the jaws of death — often dragging her friends and colleagues right along with her. It had been less than a month since the Planet was rebuilt, and she had already roped him into several of her harebrained (but admittedly, investigatively brilliant) schemes. Finally, he had to put his foot down.

Much good it had done him.

Perry blew out another breath. Well, after this debacle, Lois was preserved from ever writing recipes again (or rather, the food section was forever safe from the ravages of Mad Dog Lane on a rampage). He would just have to come up with a more intimidating ultimatum.

Perry ruminated on this thorny issue for several minutes. Maybe he could just assign her to more dog shows, or police academy graduations, or girl scout jamborees. Even better, he could put her in charge of the stacks for a while. Have her start microfilming some of the older editions they hadn't gotten around to preserving yet. Or maybe....

He grinned suddenly, his eyes lighting with unholy glee. Maybe next time he would threaten her with writing obits. The readership would *love* that. After all, he thought, rolling his eyes toward Jimmy, who had just dropped off another teetering pile of cookbooks onto Lois's desk, one should never underestimate the need for a good obituary.

THE END