

Conspiracy Theory

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Rated: PG

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Summary: A reporter believes she knows the truth about Superman. Her friend thinks she's crazy. Motion-sickness pills recommended.

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Author's Note: Only the characters from LnC:NaoS are taken from television shows.

Iris leaned back against a pillar, watching as Barry collected his tools from the latest theft to plague Central City. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw her waiting for him and gave her a weak smile.

"Everything all right, Iris?" he asked.

"I'm tired, Barry," she said before heaving a heavy sigh.

"Don't you get tired of running all the time?"

"Um..." He stumbled to find an answer. "No?"

She looked up into the night's sky as if searching for something. "I miss Superman," she murmured.

Barry's brow furrowed. "Superman? *You* knew Superman?"

"No, Barry. *I*, Iris West, did not know Superman." Her tone made it clear that she was annoyed. "Central City wasn't his playground."

"Well, at least we have the Flash," he replied, closing his toolkit and standing up.

Iris still stared at the sky. "Do you think he misses flying?"

"What?" gasped Barry, and then quickly corrected himself. "Who?"

"I mean running fast and everything is great, but there was something so awe-inspiring about that blue suit and his red cape flapping in the breeze. I could feel it right here every time I saw him." She patted the center of her chest.

"Iris, you know that Superman's dead."

"Of course he is, Barry," she said wryly. "How could he survive everyone blaming him from not protecting us from Nightfall's meteor shower? He saved us from annihilation but a few rocks fall from the sky? Heaven forbid! How *dare* he allow this? It was all *his* fault! People never cared about him as a person until they realized that he didn't return, and that he was gone for good. After that, the people of Earth started to treat superheroes with the respect they deserve. Well, except those at that good-for-nothing LNN who had the audacity to say that he mustn't have been Super after all, if he couldn't survive that. I wonder how Lex Luthor would've fared flying thousands of miles in space to tackle a meteor the size of Metropolis."

Barry could hear the venom in her voice and how angry she was at the pundits and general population for turning against the very person who had saved them, saved Earth. She sounded as if this slight on Superman's name had been made last week instead of almost three years ago.

He had never spoken to Iris about Superman or any of the other heroes around the country. They occasionally brought up the Flash because, well, everyone in Central City talked about the Flash. He was their hero. Anyway, she was a reporter and he was a crime scene analyst. Flash's name came up during their investigations, during work. However, they had never discussed Flash or other superheroes those few times that they had met

outside of work. Why would they? It was work. He neither wanted to nor was allowed to discuss work with Iris outside of work. She was a reporter, after all, and he worked for the police. There were rules about such things.

"It's only a coincidence," she went on, drawing his full attention again. "That some eighteen months after Superman never returned from saving us from Nightfall that suddenly the Flash appears in town."

"Iris," he said sternly. "The Flash..." He paused before amending his statement. "Superman isn't the Flash."

"Batman wasn't Superman either, I suppose?" Iris retorted.

"Iris," he groaned. "Batman was from Gotham City. He showed up twenty years ago! Long before Superman or Flash."

"Exactly!" she said as if he had argued her point for her.

"And *he* disappeared from Gotham City for good six years ago! Two years before Superman saved that Prometheus Shuttle Space Center thingy and became Metropolis's hero." She waved her hand as if the Prometheus Space Station's name hardly mattered.

"Batman didn't disappear," Barry corrected. "He blew up while saving Gotham from a nuclear explosion."

Iris pointed at him. "Yet, nobody found his body!"

"Who could?" he scoffed. "Arkham is a radioactive hell... uh... hole." He cleared his throat. "A radioactive hole. It isn't safe for anyone to enter." He paused in thought, before saying as casually as he could, "Actually, I hear he might still be alive. I've heard reports of Batman sightings in what's left of Gotham lately."

She rolled her eyes. "He's just propagating the myth that there's more than a handful superheroes in America."

Barry's jaw fell open as he stared at her in disbelief. He who? Where was she getting these crazy theories of hers and how could he stop them? Hadn't she heard of the Justice League? How could there be a league with only a handful of members? Finally, he chuckled. "Iris, I never would've pegged you for a conspiracy nut."

Iris wrapped her hand around Barry's arm as they walked down the street. "Well, Barry, when you've experienced what I have, the illogical starts to make sense."

"And pray tell what have you experienced in your twenty-five years?"

"It's closer to thirty, but thank you for that," she said, beaming at him. "Well, let's start with Batman. He surfaced in Gotham City twenty years or so ago, but then he disappeared for a few years, only to reemerge about eight, nine years ago, right?"

"Sounds about right." Barry shrugged. He tried not to calculate dates.

"I've heard it said that Batman broke his back during a bad fall that caused that first disappearance. It wasn't the original Batman who came back. It was Dick Grayson."

"What? Bruce Wayne's ward?" scoffed Barry. "Please!"

Iris shrugged. "Dick Grayson of the *Flying* Graysons. Barry, he never did exist. Dick Grayson was a pseudonym, a stage name."

"Oh, really?" Barry chuckled lightly. "And what's his real name? Robin?"

She flicked off this idea with a flip of her hand. "Another stage name. No, his real name isn't Robin either, but I have my theories." She pursed her lips in thought as she looked at him out of the corner of her eye as if making a decision. "I did meet him, this *second* Batman. Well, not *me* per se, but I threw on a long blonde wig and went undercover. My alias met him. The Batman I met was young, my age or a year older than I was at the time, twenty-two, twenty-three. There was no way he could've been Batman for ten years already. He tried hard to act like the Dark Knight but he wasn't dark enough. There was depression and anger in him, but it hadn't taken over him as it had with the original Batman. He was fighting the darkness and I could see

how he wanted to step into the dawn.”

“You met Batman?” Barry stopped cold. “As a blonde?”

“Keep up, Barry. I met Dick Grayson, the old Robin, dressed up as Batman. Oh, he still had all Batman’s gadgets and gizmos, and everything, but I felt that he was using them to hide something, and do you know what that something was?” she asked, slapping her notepad against Barry’s chest.

He stared at her with perplexed amazement.

“No guesses? Okay, I’ll tell you then,” Iris said, pulling him along again. “He was hiding the fact that he didn’t *need* those gadgets and gizmos.”

“What?”

“Dick Grayson was Superman!”

Barry stopped and turned to Iris, his mouth hanging open. “That’s... that’s... crazy!”

“Perhaps it is, but hear me out. I fell in love with him.”

The color drained out of Barry’s face. “You... *what?*” he whispered.

“I couldn’t help it. He was so sweet and kind. He made me laugh and I made him smile.” Iris’s eyes lit up with these thoughts. “It was only later that I realized the truth, after lining up all the facts that I knew about Dick and Batman that I realized that he wasn’t *the* Batman. Couldn’t possibly be. By then it was too late. He was gone and so was I, having returned to my real life.”

“I heard rumors that Batman had survived the blast and ended up running away to Paris... or was it Italy... with some cat burglar,” Barry said casually.

“Yeah, I heard that too... from Cat Grant,” she scoffed. “The real Batman maybe, but not the guy I knew. *My* Batman had more sense than to run around with a skank like that. The problem was it never would’ve worked for us because I wasn’t being me and he wasn’t himself either. I had my pictures and my story and it was time for my fantasy life to come to an end.” She shook her head. “I never told him my real name. He must have thought Vicki Vale died or disappeared on the streets of Gotham.”

“He’s the world’s greatest detective, Iris. I’m sure that if he wanted to find her... *you*, he would have,” Barry said with a sly smile.

“Oh, but he *did* find me, Barry.”

“He *did*?”

“The last time I saw Batman, *my* Batman, as I never met the real Batman,” Iris went on as if she hadn’t heard Barry. “I kissed him and told him I wished I could stay in the shadows of Gotham City with him, but I couldn’t. My life needs daylight and sunshine. Then, I left. Oh, how I was such an idiot back then.”

“Because you dumped Batman?”

“Technically, we weren’t officially dating. We were just friends, friends with possibilities. Admirers?” She considered that description a moment before continuing, “No, I was an idiot because I told him how much I respected him being a man of the people, not some rich guy throwing his money around. How was I supposed to know that he really was a rich guy literally throwing his money around in the form of Bat-er-rangs? I made it sound like a deal breaker, but it wasn’t.”

“But Dick Grayson isn’t rich. He was a kid from the streets. An orphan.”

“No, he isn’t, Barry. Okay, maybe he was originally, but he had taken over the Caped Crusader’s mantle. Dick Grayson is Bruce Wayne’s heir apparent, if he hasn’t officially abdicated. If anything happens to Bruce, then Dick would inherit Wayne Enterprises, the Wayne Foundation, and Batman’s name in full. It would no longer have been a temporary gig until Wayne got better. Staying in Gotham City and continuing to be Batman meant that Dick would someday turn into Bruce Wayne. He didn’t want to be Bruce Wayne. He wanted to be himself.”

Barry’s eyes widened. “Iris, are you saying that Bruce Wayne

is Batman?”

She glanced around, and then took Barry’s arm again, continuing down the street. “I didn’t say that.”

“Um... yes, you did.”

“Not in those exact words.”

“Okay, not in those exact words, but...”

Iris gave him a ‘drop it’ expression, so he dropped it.

“So, if Dick Grayson isn’t really Dick Grayson and he isn’t really Batman, who is he?” Barry asked.

“Superman.”

“Come on, Iris,” Barry groaned.

“He faked Batman’s death, well the second time, just as Superman did by never returning from Nightfall. Superman is who Dick Grayson was when he came out of the shadows. No mask. No disguise. No secrets. It was like night and day, the difference between Batman and Superman. He still wanted to help people; he just wanted to do it out in the open. By making the two personas polar opposites, he knew nobody would tie the two men together as being the same man.”

“Uh-huh,” Barry said with skepticism. “Sounds like another disguise to me.”

“It was!” Iris enthusiastically agreed. “Dick is no more Superman than he is Batman. I mean he was, because his powers were out for all to see, but *he* the real man, the ordinary man, the man he was when he wasn’t wearing the suit, was still hiding from the world... from me!”

“Okay, I’m officially lost. Are you saying that Superman had an alter ego?”

“Yes! I didn’t realize it at first. All the layers of disguises confounded me. I didn’t recognize that Dick was hiding in plain sight, right in front of me. I mean, I had never seen my Batman without his mask, so how in the world was I supposed to recognize him. Here I was trying to get Superman’s attention and I had it all the time.”

“I thought you said that you didn’t know Superman,” Barry cross-examined her.

Iris placed a hand to her chest. “Not *this* me, mind you, but the me I was before I reinvented myself and moved to Central City.”

“*What?*” Barry’s eyes widened. “Iris West isn’t your real name?”

She rolled her eyes. “Of course not. Get with the program, Barry. Everyone isn’t who they say they are! It’s a pseudonym, just like Dick Grayson was Superman’s.”

“So, you’re saying that Dick Grayson was Superman’s alter ego?”

“No, no, no, Barry! I’m not that dense. If someone calling himself Dick Grayson came to Metropolis only to have Superman show up in town a few weeks later, I would have known immediately that the two men were linked. Everyone would’ve. Well, maybe not everyone. Dick Grayson’s name isn’t as widely known outside of Gotham City as Bruce Wayne’s is. Perry White definitely would’ve figured it out. Dick knew this. Even the original Batman knew this. This is why when Bruce Wayne adopted Dick he changed his name. After Dick left Gotham, he left that new name there as well, and reverted back to his original name.”

“Which was?”

“Not who I thought it was.” Iris beamed at him, squeezing his arm. “He was right there in front of my face, but I didn’t recognize him. By this time, I had realized that Superman was my Batman, who was also Dick Grayson, a spoiled rich kid. The only reason I dated Lex Luthor is because I thought he was Dick.”

“He was a dick,” Barry mumbled under his breath. “Iris, that is the craziest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“I know. I know. I was insanely blind.”

“Lex Luthor didn’t look anything like Superman!”

Iris frowned. “Well, how was I supposed to know shape shifting wasn’t one of Superman’s abilities? It’s not something he was likely to advertise!”

Barry dropped his face into his hand and shook his head. “Lex Luthor was one of Metropolis’s notorious crime bosses!”

“Yeah, well, I know that *now*! Nobody knew it back *then*. He was a philanthropist, just like Wayne. I thought that Dick had set up a Bruce Wayne package for himself in Metropolis. It was only as I was walking down the aisle to Lex that I realized that the man I loved wasn’t Lex Luthor. I loved the man who had warned me against Lex Luthor. The man who had always been there for me, through thick or thin.”

“Wait, Iris,” Barry said, leaning up against a wall as his knees gave out on him. “Are you saying that you’re really Lois Lane?”

She brushed a lock of her auburn hair out of her face and then caressed his cheek. “It’s obvious now, when you look through my disguise, isn’t it, Barry?”

“Iris... Iris,” he sputtered, his heart tearing in his chest not knowing whether to race at her touch or to stop dead at this revelation. “What... what are you doing?”

“When my partner vanished after Lex Luthor’s downfall during our failed wedding, I did some research on Dick Grayson. I had some time on my hands while the *Daily Planet* was being rebuilt. After Dick graduated from prep school, Robin or Hawk or Nightwing or some other weird bird name never reappeared. I figured he must have gone off to college. Bruce is a well-educated man; he would expect his ward to be as well. Although, Dick did temporarily take over as Batman after graduation, what did he do during the day, I wondered. Bruce Wayne, though on medical leave from Wayne Enterprises, still ran everything from Wayne Manor. So, it wasn’t business.”

Barry swallowed.

“Clark Kent, my... well, Lois Lane’s former partner, studied journalism at Kansas State, at the very same time Dick Grayson triple majored at Gotham U in Chemistry, Biology, and Criminology. Only makes sense; family business and all.”

Barry paled.

“I figure the only person who could get away with studying four different disciplines in two different states at the same time is someone who’s very smart and very quick.”

Barry cleared his throat. “Or they could have been two... two different people.”

“Yes, there’s that,” Iris said, cocking her head to the side. “It turns out that nobody had seen Clark Kent after he had run away from Kansas foster care at age eleven.” She leaned forward just inches away from Barry’s face. “Although, it was rumored that he joined the circus. Nobody runs away and joins the circus anymore, Barry.” She tapped his chest. “Not unless he thought he was some kind of a circus freak.”

“Why would this Clark fellow think he was freak?”

She shrugged. “Because he could hear things being said two houses away. He could see things he shouldn’t and through things. Because he could fall off a barn and not get a scratch. Because he was quick on his feet... or because the world was slowing down. Something like that.”

Barry mumbled under his breath, “Poor fellow.”

“Clark supposedly traveled the world as a freelance journalist in those years after graduation,” she went on. “Dick Grayson, on the other hand, *him* I couldn’t find a peep about. He flat out disappeared. He didn’t join any police department, laboratory, or hospital in the United States. Trust me on this one; I called them all.” She gave Barry a meaningful look. “If Dick Grayson had died, Bruce Wayne surely would’ve held a memorial service. Nope. Nada. Zilch. So, he must be alive somewhere, hiding under another name.”

“It’s rumored that Bruce Wayne disappeared for a few years

after college too,” Barry interjected.

Iris raised an eyebrow. “And how do you know this?”

“I read a lot of biographies,” he explained with a distressed smile.

She nodded. “Yeah. I noticed that about you. You like to keep educated.”

“And?”

“Oh, it’s not a bad thing, Barry. There’s nothing wrong with a healthy curiosity, is there?”

“One would assume,” Barry grumbled under his breath. “So... can I keep calling you Iris, right?”

“If you like.” She shrugged. “A name is merely a label that can be peeled away. What matters is the person underneath.”

“Soooo, what are you saying exactly?”

“That the Flash is actually Superman in hiding and that Superman used to be Robin and for a short time a temporary Batman,” Iris stated as they turned to cut through the park.

That was what he thought she said.

“In other words,” she went on. “Clark Kent became Dick Grayson when he joined the circus after his folks died when he was ten. About four years later, he was adopted by Bruce Wayne after Jason Trask and Bureau 39 killed the ‘Flying Graysons’ family thinking the whole bunch of them were aliens. After graduating from high school, Dick took over the family business as Batman while the real Batman was recovering from wounds sustained on the job. He met and fell in love with at first sight a blonde by the name of Vicki Vale, whom he then tracked down to Metropolis when she disappeared from Gotham City. He decided that since Vicki claimed to admire ordinary fellows, he would become the boy the Kents raised on that farm in Kansas. Nobody was more ordinary than good ol’ Clark Kent. He couldn’t stop helping people though, so the Man of Steel soon arrived from Krypton! Only Lois Lane broke poor Clark’s heart when, irony of all ironies, she became engaged to a rotten billionaire instead, probably as Bruce Wayne warned him she would. So, after things didn’t work out for either of his heroes, Clark did what he normally did when the going got tough, he ran away. He couldn’t be Dick Grayson or Clark Kent, or Superman or Batman or some kind of birdman, because that would be too obvious if Lois wanted to track him down. So, he created a new super identity and a fresh start in Central City as the Flash.”

“Why are you telling me all this?” he asked.

Iris looked up into the starry night again. “Aren’t you tired of running, Barry?” she asked, taking his toolkit out of his hand and setting it on the ground. “I am.”

“Huh?” he stammered.

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “Wouldn’t you like to fly once more?”

“You think I’m this Flash guy, who just happens also to be Superman, Robin, and an erstwhile Batman?” Barry roared with laughter.

“There’s one way to test this theory,” she whispered, moving her face closer to his.

His laughter subsided as he realized what she was about to do. “Iris, would you still want me, if I was just Barry Allen, crime scene tech?”

She ran her fingers through his hair and brushed her lips against his. “It’s always the ordinary man who I loved,” she whispered. “The costumes keep getting in the way.”

“Uniforms,” he corrected as she pressed her lips to his, taking away his breath.

Some minutes later, he rested his forehead against hers.

“Finally,” she murmured, running her fingers through a passing cloud.

“What took you so long to find me, Lois?” Clark asked.

“I had a few hiccups along the way,” Lois murmured, kissing down his cheek to his lips again. “I should have realized sooner

that you'd never have chosen the color green. Oh, and if you bump into Green Arrow, Green Lantern, or Martian Manhunter, apologize again for me."

His eyes widened in alarm. "*What?!*" he exclaimed, zooming them higher.

Lois shrugged. "Hey, you ran out on me first, buster. Is it my fault that you're a tough man to find?" She kissed him once more. "Don't you agree that flying is so much better than running?"

Clark had to admit that she was right about that.

THE END

Disclaimer: This story was inspired by the characters created by Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster as they were portrayed on the *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* television series, developed by Deborah Joy LeVine. The characters do not belong to me; they belong to themselves (although Warner Bros., DC Comics, and the heirs to Siegel and Shuster might disagree). Many thanks to all the writers on the above-referenced show. Batman was created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger for DC Comics. Robin, Nightwing, and Dick Grayson were created by Bob Kane, Bill Finger, and Jerry Robinson. The Flash and Barry Allen were created by Gardner Fox, Harry Lampert, Robert Kanigher, John Broome, and Carmine Infantino.

I would also like to thank the creators of *Gotham*, *The Flash*, and the *Arrow* TV shows for inspiring this story, even if it wasn't their rendition of these beloved characters I used for this story. If it weren't for becoming addicted to your shows, I never would have been inspired to write this story. Thank you.

I would also like to thank my daughter for beta-reading this story, despite its confusing and convoluted storyline. I apologize if she didn't catch all of my grammar mistakes as she's only ten.

Breakdown of the history of this story:

1966 — Clark born

1967 — Lois born

1976 — Clark orphaned

1977 — Batman makes his first appearance in Gotham City.

Clark runs away from foster care & joins circus as "Dick Grayson."

1981 — "Dick Grayson" adopted by Bruce Wayne (Robin appears) — Clark's 15

1984 — Robin disappears (Dick/Clark goes to college)

1986 — Batman is injured / retires (aka disappears)

1989 — Dick/Clark graduates from college. "Batman" returns.

1990 — (New) Batman meets Vicki Vale

1991 — Arkham explodes apparently killing (new) Batman

Early 1993 — Clark and Superman arrive in Metropolis

Late 1993 — Superman doesn't return from saving Earth from Nightfall (yet, Clark still works at *Daily Planet*.)

mid-1994 — Lois almost marries Lex Luthor, realizes her mistake only after Clark leaves Metropolis

1995 — Flash arrives in Central City

1997 — Time of this story