

Through My Eyes (Perry White)

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Summary: No one sees you quite like your family does. Jerry White considers his relationship with his famous father.

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Disclaimer: I own nothing. I make nothing. All characters, plot points, and recognizable dialogue belong to DC comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise. The first two-and-a-half lines came from a *Complete the Story* book as a story prompt.

It was odd to be in a room full of people who all seemed to look up to my dad like he was some kind of hero. A part of me wanted to see him through their eyes just for a moment. I tried to picture him as they did — the trustworthy newsman who'd given them the facts for over half a century. And he *is* trustworthy, my dad. He's dedicated his entire life to giving the world the cold, hard facts of what is happening.

And the truth is, I was proud of my dad as he ambled across the stage and accepted the award he was being presented with for his lifetime achievement in journalism excellence. He was just beaming with pride. It seemed as if years had fallen from him and he was once again a young man in the prime of his life. He had almost a spring in his step and his voice was strong and clear as he gave his acceptance speech.

But as much as I saw the hero that everyone else saw, I also saw the man who'd so often chosen his career over his family.

Looking back with the benefit of age, experience, and hindsight, I now understand how demanding his job was. The world doesn't stop just because the men and women reporting on the news are sleeping, or are eating dinner with their families, or have taken Christmas off to watch their kids open presents. The news is literally a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week business. Any lapse in vigilance, any moment of perceived "laziness" can cost even the strongest, most respected news source their credibility, perhaps even more than the inevitable mistake in reporting. And honest mistakes *do* happen. After all, every paper has a retractions section to correct what they've gotten wrong in their haste to scoop the competition and be the first to deliver the news.

My father always knew this. And he was more than dedicated to the *Daily Planet*, first as a reporter, then, eventually, as editor-in-chief. His efforts paid off — the paper became one of the most respected publications in the country, and then the world. He and his staff won award after award for excellence in journalism. When people said the word "news," the *Daily Planet* was the first thing to spring to their minds. It still is, even now that Dad is retired and the paper is under the watchful eye of a new, younger editor.

We, as a family, were so proud of Dad today. But we'd all be lying if we said that his dedication to the paper hadn't taken its toll on us all those years.

It started with the long hours. More and more often, Dad wouldn't be home when we had dinner, or even when we got off the school bus. We didn't see him before school either — Dad was

up with the sun, chasing the news. Then, little by little, he came less and less to school functions and extracurricular activities. And that hurt. It wasn't that my brother and I were the only ones whose father was unable to attend such things. Plenty of other kids had dads who weren't around, or were serving overseas, or had work obligations that they couldn't get out of. But even the working dads made it to at least *some* of their kids' events. Our dad was basically known as a ghost. It hurt because it felt like our family came — in every way — second to the rest of the world.

Pretty soon, it began to feel like our family of four was, in reality, a family of *three*. Holidays, weekends, trips were more often spent with just my mother and brother, rather than as a complete family. It became our version of normal, but there was a part of me that always harbored some resentment that I didn't rank higher on Dad's list of priorities than a dock strike or bank hold-up did.

As I grew older, I wound up making a lot of bad life choices as I tried to find something to boost my self confidence. I got in a lot of trouble when I got caught — and I *always* wound up getting caught. I spent time in prison on three different occasions. It was never Dad's fault — not by a long shot. But, at the time, part of me *did* want to blame him. If only he'd been around more, if only I'd had more quality time with him, maybe I would have grown up to be a more respectable man. It took me a long time to realize that Dad wasn't responsible for my actions — only I was.

The last time I got in trouble, I only did what I did to try and impress my father. I got mixed up with a couple of shady guys who, as it turned out, were hell-bent on destroying Superman. I was torn — did I have an obligation to save the alien stranger or did I owe it to myself to keep making money, hand over fist, the way I was?

The look in my father's eyes gave me the answer I needed.

He wasn't impressed with the gifts I was able to give him with my ill-gained "employment." He wasn't swooning over the job he thought I had. He wasn't even focused on the lies I'd spun about turning my life around.

He saw me. Only me. Just Jerry White. Just his son. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else mattered to him.

And then I saw something else in my father as he realized that I was part of the plot to ruin Superman. Trust.

He trusted me, as a man. He trusted me, as his son. He knew I could make the right decision, if I wanted to. Though his voice pleaded with me to save Superman, his eyes told me that he knew I would. It made it easy for me to close that box of red Kryptonite, giving Superman back control over his powers.

And yet, for all of that, I knew Dad was devastated that I was a part of such a plot to bring down the Man of Steel. He was aghast to see that box in my hands. He was scared — not of what I was doing, but for the trouble I was in. He promised to help me, to be there, no matter what, and, for the first time in a long time, I believed him. It wasn't an empty promise to show up to a spelling bee when I knew, without a doubt, he'd be too busy with a staff meeting or marking someone's article up with one of the red pencils he was rarely seen without. This promise — this solemn vow to be there for me, no matter what — humbled me.

It was the first time I'd ever thought of my dad as a hero, because he was saving me from myself.

My dad believed in me, despite the fact that I hadn't earned his trust at all. It triggered a switch in my brain. I surrendered myself, willingly, to the authorities, whereas once I would have fought tooth and nail to escape justice. I knew I deserved whatever jail sentence the judge would give me as a repeat offender. But I was determined to clean up my life, for real this time. So I worked my butt off. I spent my time in prison taking correspondence classes and finished the college degree I'd started once, years before.

When I finally got out — on a reduced sentence, thanks to

Superman putting in a good word for me (another person whose trust I hadn't earned but still somehow found myself gifted with) — I pounded the pavement, putting in resumes wherever I could. Unsurprisingly, I had to start small and pay my dues, as Dad put it. I didn't have many options as a recent parolee, because no one was willing to gamble on an ex-con. Dad offered to find something for me at the *Daily Planet*, but I didn't feel right about that. So I found a job busing tables at a restaurant. It wasn't much, but it felt good, to be making an honest paycheck at a job I'd been able to secure on my own. And, more importantly, I knew I was proving to Dad that I deserved the respect and trust he'd given me. Soon, I added a second job, driving a cab in the hours I wasn't at the restaurant. The hours were long and lonely, regardless of how chatty my passengers could sometimes be. All the while, I kept looking for a job I actually wanted.

It took more than a year, but finally, my hard work paid off. I landed a job selling medical supplies. And, if I can pat myself on the back for a moment, I was *good* at it. So good, in fact, that I was able to climb the ranks relatively quickly. Before long, I was a supervisor and making a very comfortable living. For the first time in a long time, I was *happy*.

My job wasn't the only thing that improved either. My social life was getting better too. I made new friends, leaving behind many of the toxic ones I'd once known — men and women who'd helped lead me down the dark paths I'd once wandered. A few saw how much my life had changed and asked for help in changing their own lives around, and I happily gave them what help and advice I could. Six months into my sales job, I met Anya. She was the dentist I saw after I chipped my tooth during a game of basketball with Jimmy. We started dating, fell in love, and two years later, we married. Two years after *that*, our daughter, Erica, joined us, and my heart was complete.

And my relationship with my father? It grew stronger by the day. He was proud of me — truly proud! — that I kept my word to become a better man. I came to slowly realize how much he'd given up during my youth — and how much that had hurt him — to bring his career to where it was. That was an important revelation, to recognize the fact that Dad had hated all of the sacrifices he'd needed to make in order to become successful in the news world. It colored all of my memories of those missed holidays and events, the days when my mother, brother, and I went without seeing him at all. What resentment I still had left — and it wasn't much by that point — finally slipped away. I still grieved the loss of the memories that could have been, and I still do, in a way. But I understood his reasons why he'd done what he'd done. It was the best way he knew how to provide for his family. It was his way of doing some good in the world.

Still, I didn't wish to live my life like my dad. I didn't want to share the same regrets he had, of not seeing his kids grow up. I made certain that my career choices catered to two specific criteria. The first was that it had to be something I loved and could make a comfortable living doing. And the second was that it had to be flexible enough to allow me to be an active part of my daughter's life. I can't say that I made it to every single awards ceremony and sporting event, but I made it most of them, making doubly sure that I was there for all of the most important ones.

My dad.

He's not a hero for all the years he's given himself over as a servant of the public. He's not a hero for his part in putting criminals in jail, exposing fraud, or bringing the public's attention to charity events. His flaws aren't the retractions he's had to print over the years or the investigations that went wrong in his earliest days as a reporter.

He's a hero because he believed in me when no one else would. He's a hero because he was the first to trust me to do what was right. He's a hero because, without him, I'm not sure I ever would have found the strength to turn my life around. Without his

encouragement, I'm not sure I would have *wanted* to. His flaws — as I'd grown to think of them over the years — showed me just how human he is. And that made all the difference. He wasn't a mythical god or hero. He was a simple man who gave his all for me, even when I hadn't been able to see it.

The public could worship him or villainize him as they see fit. Dad never cared much for how people viewed him as a person, only that they trusted his paper to give them the unvarnished, unbiased truth. As a result, the opinions of the masses have never mattered to me either.

Perry White will always be my own, personal hero.

THE END