

# Questionable Evidence

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Rated: PG

Submitted: August 2015

Summary: On the night of Clark Kent's murder at the hands of the regenerated Clyde Barrow, Inspector Bill Henderson reviews the evidence.

Story Size: 4,766 words (26Kb as text)

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It doesn't add up.  
I mean it. It just doesn't make any sense.  
The evidence, that is.  
Or should I say, the lack thereof?

I have the testimony of dozens of witnesses. Lois Lane herself was there to see the events unfold. That's the only reason why I believe it. I mean, if I can trust anyone, it's Lois. And Clark too. Or, at least, I used to be able to, while he was still alive.

I still can't believe it. I know it shouldn't really come as a surprise to me at all. Lois and Clark are both the type to take risks, to jump into a situation without necessarily checking the water level first. They've always just passed it off as being "part of the job description." Well, Lane's more of the risk-taker, much more than Kent, if I'm any judge. Clark always struck me as the more cautious of the two. I remember thinking once, not long after I met the young reporter, that I was glad to see someone who appeared to be considerably less reckless paired up with Lois, hoping that he could ground her a bit and keep her safe.

It's not that I dislike Lois.

It's the opposite, to be honest. She's a good woman. A bit of a hard-nose, sure, but shouldn't any good reporter have a sharp edge to them, to help them uncover the truth? She's sarcastic too, but I've dealt with worse. Half the guys — and girls! — in this precinct alone can — and usually do — run their mouths more than Lane ever has. Either way, she gets the job done. I have to give credit where it is due, and she's earned my respect. And once she was paired with Clark, well, as much as I hate to admit it, they were responsible for cracking the case for us far too often. Not that the boys and I were ungrateful for the help, mind you. But between Lane, Kent, and Superman, well, there were times where we felt almost unneeded, even as we savored the feeling of one more case being lifted from our already overworked and straining shoulders.

Still, of the pair of them, I liked Clark a little better, though I knew him for less time than I did Lois. He was less high-strung, less irritable, less excitable, more polite and more willing to step back when we needed the reporters out of our way, so that my fellow officers and I could do our jobs. Oh, Kent could be just as persistent as his partner when push came to shove, but there was also a level of respect that he gave us that I always appreciated.

It's hard to believe he's gone now, his life snuffed out, far too soon, by three bullets fired into his heart.

Everyone we took statements from all agreed on that fact. The Clyde Barrow look-alike — or real live, reanimated gangster, according to Lois — took three shots. All were delivered at point blank range. All were shot into his chest. Everyone saw the man

look down in shock before crumpling to the ground. Everyone mentioned that the gangsters took the lifeless body with them when they fled the premises of the illegal casino.

I wish I had been the one to initially respond to the call. But it was my night off, the first in weeks, where I could spend time with my wife and young son. I'd just made the popcorn in readiness for a movie when the call came in from Detective Wolfe. "It's Kent," was all he said when I picked up the phone. I should have known from the tonelessness of his voice that something was wrong, but I was distracted and didn't think. I joked back asking if he'd picked up Kent for jay-walking or something — the man was of such high character that it was hard to imagine him doing anything wrong at all. "He's dead, Bill," Wolfe replied in that same hollow voice. I promised to be there as soon as humanly possible and hung up the phone, feeling as though I was the one who'd been shot.

I made my apologies to my family and left the house immediately. I'd known Clark too well not to lend my aid to the case, and they knew it. I've always thanked God that Noreen is an understanding woman. Even Ricky seemed to understand why Daddy had to run off to work so quickly, though I could see that he was disappointed. I sped to the crime scene as fast as my cruiser could take me, weaving in and out of the light traffic, my siren blaring a funeral dirge for my friend.

Harry — Detective Wolfe, that is — met me just outside of the casino, morosely pulling a drag from his nearly spent cigarette. He briefed me on the situation and I ducked inside, expecting to see the worst. I knew what to expect. After all, I've seen just about every conceivable nightmare situation during my years as a cop. Not much startles me anymore — not the blood, not the carnage, not the bodies, regardless of how fresh or rotted they are. But the scene that greeted me inside that cursed club punched the wind right out of my lungs.

The place — the white tape square that had been laid down to indicate where the witnesses said they saw Clark fall — was immaculate. Oh, the floor could have used a good washing, but it was starkly naked of blood. Nothing at all indicated that a man had lost his life on the spot. Nothing except the three spent bullet casings from the shots that stole a reporter's life away, easily different from the forgotten casings from a different gun, which witnesses said had been shot into the air in order to grab the attention of the gamblers.

That's all.

No blood. No slick red trail leading from the spot where Clark's body had landed to where it would have been thrown into a getaway vehicle. No tell-tale drops of congealing red, turning black as they dried, to speak of the man's sacrifice.

No body, which wasn't surprising, to be honest. Of course, the gangsters would want to dump it elsewhere, to try to throw the police off the trail, even if it, in all honestly, would *not* have actually make a difference, in terms of our dedication in finding them.

Three flattened bullet casings, which, as we later learned after the lab got back to us with the results, still contained the remarkably bloodless bullets. It was as though they had been shot into something that resisted them, refusing them the ability to penetrate the man's vulnerable flesh.

Tons of witness statements, gathered from shocked, frightened, and alarmed casino patrons, all almost uniformly consistent. One blubbing account from Clark's partner and — if I may say so — best friend. It's the one account I hold as the most important, at least, on a personal level. Her grief was real. She had no reason to lie about anything. I know she gave me the unvarnished truth. And she, apart from all the others, spoke without fear that she would be in trouble with the law for being in an illegal establishment, even freely admitting that she had played some nickel machines to keep her cover — and, I would

imagine, just because the temptation was too great not to play.

That's it.

The sum total of the evidence I have to work with here.

It's not much.

At best, I can call it "questionable evidence."

At worst, I can call it a complete lack of evidence.

I tried to subtly ask Lois about the lack of blood. She didn't seem to notice the lack of the precious life fluid at all. In fact, she seemed hardly aware of *anything*. Her answers to my questions were spoken in a distant, detached voice that, at first, seemed all but incoherent. She never looked at me or any of the other officers on the scene. She just kept staring at the door, as if expecting her friend to step back inside and assure her that some trick had been played and that he was actually fine. Muddy mascara tracks ran unchecked down her cry-reddened cheeks. She never even moved from where she was half-sitting, half-kneeling on the floor, right beside the clean place where Clark's body had fallen.

No blood.

That's the most perplexing part of this whole scenario.

A bullet-proof vest could explain it, I suppose. But I know Lois and Clark. One would not wear the vest without the other also donning the Kevlar. More importantly, I know, without any doubt, that Clark would never, ever protect himself like that if Lois couldn't. And with the way Lois was dressed for their infiltration of the club, the vest could not have been hidden at all, and would have been a beacon to any criminals that they were not as secure in their little hideaway as they wanted to believe. No, a bullet-proof vest isn't the answer here.

It's almost like the bullets missed him. But that isn't possible. He was shot at point blank range. Even the poorest marksman couldn't have missed him, even with his eyes closed. And the bullets themselves prove that they struck something, from the damage they exhibit. But...what? What did they hit? I've been staring at them half the night already, begging them to give up their secrets. And, maybe I'm getting tired but, well, they look like bullets I've recovered from the scene of untold numbers of Superman rescues. They are so similar that I could swear they hit Superman and bounced off.

The only problem is...Superman wasn't here tonight.

No one reported the tell-tale whoosh of sound that usually heralds the hero's arrival. Not a single person caught a glimpse of a red, blue, and yellow blur. No one mentioned feeling an out-of-place breeze that would prove that the man had placed himself between the bullets and Clark's vulnerable body, seconds before the impact. And, more tellingly, Superman hasn't stopped by to give me his statement either, and that's something that never escapes the man's diligence.

More importantly, if Superman had managed to save Clark, then why in the world would Clark have fallen down to the floor, "dead" to the eyes of everyone gathered? Could he have fainted? It's possible, I guess, but not likely. Clark's a stronger man than that. And, if Superman had been here, he would have whisked both Lois and Clark away from the imminent danger they were facing.

No, the Superman theory just doesn't add up.

Still, the idea of Superman keeps nagging the back of my brain. I can't seem to get the idea out of my head, no matter how many times I pace the precinct's hallways or how many terrible cups of coffee I force myself to swallow down. Again, I look at the bullets, sealed in the tiny evidence baggie, marveling at how closely they appear to other bullets I've seen that have bounced right off of the Man of Steel. It almost seems like Superman was disguised as Clark tonight. I mean, they *do* look remarkably alike.

But no, Lois was very clear on the fact that *Clark* was the one who was with her. She's closer to the two men than anyone else

on this planet. She would know if the "Clark" who accompanied her tonight was the real deal or not. She would not have wept that fiercely, that uncontrollably, if she wasn't *sure* that it was Clark who'd been shot, if she didn't absolutely believe that Clark was dead.

So then...what?

How did the murder scene wind up clean?

How did the bullets wind up in the condition they are in?

Superman wasn't masquerading at Clark.

But what if...

No. It's a ridiculous idea.

Isn't it?

Still, it makes perfect sense. I think. Or am I crazy?

Could it be? Could Clark Kent actually *be* Superman?

I mean, think about it. I've never seen the two men together, though I feel like I see one or both of them every other day at a crime scene. And now that I compare the two's looks from old photos, they are either identical twins or the same man. Even the little mole above the upper lip is exactly the same. If they are not the same person, then it's actually frightening how much they look alike, to the point where a chill is running up my spine and my hair is standing on end. Even now that I really think about it, while each man has his own personality — Clark's warm, open, friendliness against Superman's friendly but reserved aloofness — they both, on a base level, feel like they are very much the same, in ways I'm not even sure I can fully describe or even accurately pinpoint.

And tonight...

I'm suddenly feeling sick, the urge to vomit almost unbearable, and it's not from the questionable donut I ate in the break room twenty minutes ago. It's a sense of vertigo — my entire world flipping violently on its axis, completely changing.

Clark Kent is Superman.

It has to be true.

If Clark is Superman, it explains everything. The misshapen bullets. The missing blood. Even why Clark's body hasn't surfaced yet, although, to be honest, I would never expect a body to show up so quickly. It can take months, if not years, for a corpse to be found, depending on the method of disposal, if it's ever found at all. Still, from all accounts, the gangsters were in a rush, and it wouldn't surprise me in the least if Clark's body were tossed into a dumpster or abandoned in an alley somewhere not too far from the casino.

No blood.

The bullets couldn't pierce his flesh, if what I suspect is true. Which means, he isn't actually dead. He only pretended to be dead. Which means this investigation is for nothing. There was no murder. Which also means that Clark is committing a crime, by faking his own death. Of course, that raises more questions, including if Lois is covering for him and giving us a false report — another crime. But...I think not. I've known Lois Lane for years now. She's just not that good of an actress. In fact, she's terrible at lying. I can spot when she's bluffing from a mile away. Her grief tonight was in earnest. She was truly heartbroken.

But that means...

She doesn't know.

Ha! She doesn't know! Ha! Ha!

It seems cruel to laugh at her expense, especially now, when she is so clearly broken up over her best friend's death. But you have to admit, it *is* rather funny that a world class, respected, award-winning journalist could work alongside Superman every single day for how long now? Two years? A little longer? Two and a half, maybe? How could she not see it? The Lois I know is always so observant and shrewd in the way she analyzes every one and everything. To miss something this huge...

Of course, it could be that her close proximity to Clark helped to blind her to the other side of him. It could be that she

was simply too close to the reporter to see beyond the business suit and glasses. Maybe her friendship with Clark threw her off the trail, even though she *has* to know that Superman treats her differently than any one else, from the, albeit limited, observations I've noted in my mind over the years. Perhaps Kent was... *is*... just that *good* of an actor. After all, I consider myself to be an excellent liar-detector, but nothing, and I mean *nothing* about Clark ever felt insincere or "off" at all. I always thought he was an upstanding, very polite, eager, and earnest younger man, and a damn good reporter. A little quirky, maybe, but observant and always willing to comply with police requests or share his knowledge with us. It was, perhaps, the best working relationship I've ever had with a reporter. Well, reporters. I have to include Lois in there, especially once she was partnered up with Clark.

If it hadn't been for the questionable evidence of this evening, nothing would have tipped me off that Clark Kent masquerades as a superhero.

But now that I suspect it — am *convinced* of it — it all seems to make sense. The way he often picked up on clues my teams and I overlooked. The way he was never around when Superman was. The way he always seemed unfazed by the hero. The way he sometimes seemed to almost know the details of a situation before I could even tell him.

So, while I am surprised at the suspicions I have in mind, I can't say that I'm completely flabbergasted by the revelation.

I guess my real question is... why? Why lie? Why pretend? Why the secrecy?

But even that is easy enough to answer, when I think about it. Superman is a celebrity. He has no real life. He's mobbed when he moves beyond the safety of the police barricades, with women — and some men! — all clamoring for him to notice them as someone he might date, people wanting his autograph, some making further demands on his time — won't he please visit their ailing child/aunt/grandmother/cousin's best friend? — even when it's clear that he's trying to politely get away to attend to more pressing matters. In the early days, he was hounded by reporters and lawyers alike, each of them wanting a piece of him — to have him give them a personal quote to use in their stories or the sole right to distribute his image.

And don't get me started on how dangerous it would be to him and those close to him if the criminal circuit ever got wind of his true identity.

No, I don't blame him for wanting to remain under the radar, so to speak.

Of course, that means I can't fault him for faking his own death tonight. There were simply too many witnesses. Had he not played dead, everyone there would have known. His secret would have been exposed to all the world. There would have been no coming back from that. Of course, there's no coming back from "death" either. Clark Kent is dead. Maybe not physically, but for all intents and purposes, the reporter is dead. Only the superhero lives on.

The thought is both immensely sobering and overwhelmingly saddening.

What must it be like, to have your life literally ripped away from you, without the comfort of the oblivion that death provides? What must it feel like, to have to give up everything that makes you who you are? To be forced to toss away friends and family, all to keep a larger secret intact? To have to watch the woman you love grieve over your absence, and never be able to give her the comfort of knowing that she didn't actually witness her best friend's final breath? And I know that Clark Kent was in love with Lois Lane. Anyone with two eyes and half a brain could see how desperately enamored he was with her.

Was?

Is?

Do I consider him dead because he has to play the part of a

murder victim? Or do I think of him as still alive because he still exists in some form or another, even if he's had to give up his identity?

I can't imagine the amount of suffering he must be going through right now. He's lost everything tonight, all in the span of a heartbeat or two. Never again can he be anyone except Superman. Never again can he hope for any of the things that regular men desire — a job they love, a wife, a family. Never again can he hope for a real life.

I'm not even sure how I know this. That Clark is — or was — the main personality, and that Superman was the extension of his being. I guess, in part, it stems from how well I knew him as Clark. Everything about him was genuine. He spoke of his farmland roots and his family, he had favorite dishes at some of the delis we occasionally stopped by while trading information on a case, and he loved a regular woman. Superman, though no less "real" in the minds of most people, doesn't have a past, as far as I can tell. He simply appeared out of thin air a couple of years ago to save the space shuttle, with no explanation of where he'd come from and no indication of how long he might be around for.

I remember, after he first appeared, being so apprehensive about the newest citizen of the planet, as I once thought of him. That he was an extraterrestrial, I never doubted, though I had only ever scoffed at the idea of aliens prior to his arrival. I wondered, at first, if his intentions were truly pure and noble, the way they appeared to be. I worried that, if he was really here to help, that his help might be limited somehow or only given for a short time before he would leave just as mysteriously and abruptly as he'd arrived. God knows how I hoped he would stay for good. This world needs a hero, someone to look up to as a beacon of hope and morality. He's it — the hero we so desperately needed. And, selfishly, I prayed he would stay around to give the worldwide network of emergency responders a fraction of the relief and help that they need.

I was thrilled when it became apparent that Superman was going to stick around. I was relieved when he, time after time, proved that he *was* really here to help out, that we could rely on him and the amazing powers he so deftly wields. Though he doesn't wear the uniform of any emergency responder the world has ever known, and though the only badge he carries is the enigmatic, stylized S on his chest, he is one of us. He is a cop, a firefighter, an EMT, a member of the SWAT team. He is whatever he needs to be, taking his role from whatever the scenario demands.

He is as much a brother in blue to me as any of the other men and women that I work with on a daily basis. He is a friend, not so because he is Clark Kent, than anything else. And so, I will never let on that I know his secret. No matter how he chooses to proceed from this night forward — taking up a new identity, living as Superman full-time, or finding some way to make it appear as though Clark was not actually shot and killed — though I can't imagine that being a viable option — I will remain quietly supportive of his decision, and will do what I can to help, so long as I can keep him from guessing that I know the truth. It's the least I can do for a man who gives so much of himself to others on a daily basis, never expecting or wanting anything in return, except maybe for others to follow his example and help to make the world a better place.

I wonder where he is now. Someplace out of the way where he can grieve in private, is my best guess. It's what I would be doing, if I were in his shoes... or boots, I suppose. It's even possible that he went home, assuming that his parents know of his hobby. I'm not the one who called the Kents with the news. That was Wolfe. It's his case, after all. I'm just here helping because Kent was a friend to all of us. I do wonder how the Kents took the news. Were they shocked? Did they just *act* like they were shocked? In any case, Superman has not been heard from at

all tonight. The news has been silent with any news about him, which is eerie. I can't remember a single day since his arrival when I haven't heard of Superman making some kind of rescue or appearance somewhere in this wide world of ours.

But tonight, it's as though he died as well.

Maybe he has.

Maybe losing everything tonight in such a violent, unexpected way was too much for him. Maybe, having made the ultimate sacrifice, he feels that he's got nothing more to give. Maybe he's decided to hang up the cape and become...who? A new identity completely? A lone hermit in some isolated place where he will barely exist until he truly does die, where he is no one at all, a wandering spirit that is neither Clark nor Superman?

I wish I could reach out to him. But I wouldn't know where to look, for starters. And even if I did, what could I say? Nothing I can think of would be of any comfort, support, or encouragement without me letting on that I know his secret. That's the last thing that he needs — the stress of knowing that the fragile precautions he's constructed to keep his private life secure have fallen away, even if only for this one trustworthy policeman. At least, I *hope* he considers me trustworthy. No, more than that. I *believe* that he does. After all, I'm — as far as I know — the only officer he's trusted with the other big secret in his life...a deadly green rock called kryptonite.

I wish I could reach out to Lois and offer her some comfort. But, I can't do that either, without blowing Clark's secret. All I can do is vow to capture the men responsible for Clark's death. And despite the fact that the man still actually lives, those gangsters *did* murder him tonight. They ended his life as surely as if they had shot him with a kryptonite bullet. I won't rest until they are brought to justice.

And then...what?

Nothing can bring Clark back. While it might help him feel a little better, might ease his heart and mind a little, having his killers behind bars won't suddenly make it okay for Clark to once more walk the streets. It's weird. It's the same in any murder case — bringing the killer to justice, while a relief for everyone involved, can never bring back the deceased. It can only help soothe a small portion of the hurts left behind in the hearts and minds of the victim's loved ones. But this case is different. This time, the one who was killed actually *will* know that his killers were brought to justice, only it can't possibly help him. I worry for Clark when that happens, and it *will* happen. I worry for his mental state. How depressing will it be for him to know that it means nothing, in terms of bringing him back to the world of the living? But, knowing Clark...or, rather, Superman...I know he will be pleased to know that the gangsters will be off the streets and unable to ruin any other lives.

And so, I vow that I will not rest until these criminals are found. I will not rest until they are brought before a judge and jury, and a sentence is passed down, determining their fate. And somehow, in the midst of that, I will try to find some way of reconciling with the fact that not all is as it seems. I will do my utmost to bring healing to the people who loved him. I will strive to bring Clark himself as much peace as he can get, by finding those who ended his life, and by guarding his secret with my own life.

And for myself, I will try to find a way to grieve for a murdered man who still lives on.

THE END