

Titans

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: A year after Nor's defeat, his father comes to exact his revenge on Kal-El. Warning: There will be a little blood.

Disclaimer: I own pretty much none of the characters showcased in this story. They belong to DC comics and the producers of Lois and Clark, and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise. I just like to take out the characters every once in a while and play with them. I always return them to my toy box, sometimes a little worse for wear (mentally and physically).

I make nothing from this story, aside from the reviews that you, my dear readers, leave for me. It is my muse's lifeblood.

Also: Please note that the random, unexplained infant at the end of "The Family Hour" does not appear in this story. It is the only major deviation that I threw into the story. And also note: Some of the ideas expressed here come from Superman II, like the Phantom Zone and the power crystals. And no, the name of Thor is not inspired by the Thor comic hero. I just like mythological names and wanted something that kind of mimicked the name of Nor.

And now, without further ado, on with the story!

Clark sighed as he raked his hand through his wet, disheveled hair. He leaned lightly against the mop in his other hand, careful not to splinter it like he had the last one, not ten minutes prior. His clothes clung to him wetly, uncomfortably. He stood in the basement of the house he and Lois had purchased a little less than a year before. Puddles of water still covered patches of the cement floor. He'd gotten up that morning and had turned on the shower only to find that there was no hot water. Investigation of the hot water heater in the basement had shown that the old appliance had finally given up the last of its life, the bottom literally bursting, pumping water into the basement for who knew how many hours. He'd called the plumber and had the tank replaced with a new one, but the basement was still a mess. Moving at super-speed, he managed to finally get the worst of the water up off the floor. Thankfully, there had not been many boxes on the basement floor, and what had been left on the floor had wisely been stored in plastic bins at Lois' instance.

Satisfied, he picked through the five cardboard boxes that had been down there. Books. He groaned as he realized that the books were complete losses. He gathered the boxes together and brought them up and outside to the recycling pail.

"Good look for you," Lois said, appreciatively eyeing the sodden clothing that clung to his body, leaving very little to the imagination. "What was in the boxes?" She lightly shut the top of her laptop, taking a break from the story that she and Clark were currently working on.

Clark flashed a brilliant smile at his wife. "Books mostly. A few magazines that I saved for some reason or another. No big loss. I haven't looked at them for ages. I think one of them has some of my college textbooks still." He shook his head as if to say he really didn't know why he'd been saving them.

He moved to head upstairs to the bedroom.

"And just where do you think you're going?" Lois arched her

eyebrow.

"To change."

"That's what you think," she said, a hint of mischief in her eyes as she stood to follow him.

Clark knew the look and chuckled. How had he gotten so lucky to have this woman in his life and who eagerly returned the love that he had for her?

He headed up the stairs, Lois at his heels, swatting playfully at his backside.

"Hey, whatever happened to that harem outfit?" he teased.

"I burned it after I made a fool out of myself by coming to your apartment in it."

"Pity."

Kal-El, said a voice inside of his mind. He froze on the third step from the top, his hand gripping the banister tightly.

Zara? he thought back tentatively.

Yes, came the reply. *I very much need to speak with you.*

Uh, ok.

Ching and I know where to find you. We will be there in less than five minutes.

"What?" Lois said, her eyes searching his face.

Clark knew that he must have had that far-off gaze of his as he'd communicated with Zara. "I, uh, think we're about to have some company. That was Zara. And Ching, apparently."

Lois groaned as her stomach lurched. The last time she'd seen the Kryptonians, they had tried to take Clark away from her so that he could save New Krypton from civil war. He'd managed to return when Lord Nor had come to Earth and taken Smallville hostage. Clark had won his right to stay on Earth but had nearly died twice in the effort. Convicted of high treason, he'd only barely escaped having his molecules dispersed to the universe, and then Colonel Cash had released a gas bomb laced with Kryptonite as Clark and Nor had dueled. In both cases, Clark had escaped death by the skin of his teeth.

Clark saw his wife's face go ashen and tried to reassure her. "Hey, it's ok. I bet they're just coming for...a social visit."

"We don't get social visits, Clark. We get crazy people and psycho killers and aliens looking to kidnap my husband!"

She stumped unhappily up the stairs after him, unwilling to let him out of her sight, lest Zara and Ching steal him away while her back was turned. And yet, she had to admit, they *had* parted on good terms - as friends almost. Moments later, they made their way back down and into the living room, Clark showered and dressed in faded maroon shorts and an ash gray shirt. They stopped short as they took in the sight of people in their living room.

"Kal-El!" Zara exclaimed as she crossed the room to greet him. Ching did the same, coming over to clasp hands with him. They greeted Lois as well.

They repaid the pleasantries somewhat distractedly. Clark greeted the couple warmly - he truly *had* forged a friendship with them in the short span of time when they had fought side-by-side. In some way, it was good to see them again. It was good to be among people that were just like him.

And yet, there was still two others in the room. Clark blinked at the two who stood facing him now as they turned from examining the wedding photos that hung on the walls. Trey, he recognized instantly and wasn't in the least bit surprised to see. Wherever Zara and Ching went, he felt sure that Trey was not far behind, attending to the strongest ruling House on New Krypton. But the other...Clark shook his head, blinking, as though doing so would change what he saw.

The figure across from him held his opened his arms outstretched before him, inviting him into an embrace. A beaming smile lit the elder man's face.

"Kal-El. My son," Jor-El said.

“What?” Clark said, dumbfounded. “No.”

Jor-El peered curiously at his son. “No?” he questioned.

Clark took a step backwards, hands before him as though trying to coax an armed robber to drop his weapon. In fact, Lois had seen him make the same gesture the day before when he’d coaxed a pistol out of the hands of a couple of bank robbers.

“You are...frightened?” asked Jor-El.

“You’re dead,” Clark tried to reason. His voice sounded numb.

“Please, sit and I will explain,” Jor-El said, his voice more of a command than a suggestion.

Numbly, Clark sat on the couch, pulling Lois protectively to his side. He missed the pleased smile that passed between Zara and Ching as they noted both the ring on Clark’s left hand and the way that he held on to Lois in that same loving and protective manner that they had seen him use the previous year. They seated themselves on the love seat as Jor-El took the armchair.

“Why are you here?” Lois asked, a hint of trepidation in her voice, barely noticeable against the determination she held.

She did not need to say that Clark was staying on Earth where he belonged. Her tone said it all.

“Don’t worry, Lois. We aren’t here to take Clark back with us,” Ching said soothingly, Clark’s name still sounding so foreign when he used it. It seemed so much more natural for “Kal-El” to pass his lips when he spoke of Clark. “We are here to protect him.”

“Protect him? From what?” Lois demanded, some of the fire dying down and a little fear creeping in. Once again, she remembered the near disaster of the previous year. Her stomach roiled in terror.

“Lord Thor.”

“Thor? Like god of thunder Thor?” Clark asked skeptically. In a move that mimicked his wife, he raised one eyebrow slightly.

“Lord Nor’s father,” Ching clarified.

“Wait. Wait a second. I don’t follow. I thought, aside from the Council of Elders, that only the children were spared from Krypton’s explosion.” He gave a pointed glance at Jor-El.

“So it was thought,” Trey put in. “It seems that a few of the ruling families were able to escape. Some hid among the stars and other planets. Some were scattered so far and wide that we are just now finding them.”

“How many more?” Clark demanded.

Lois gaped silently. She hadn’t heard such a tone in his voice since he’d been commanding the Kryptonian army the previous year. Clark and Superman had vanished for the moment. He was every ounce the Lord Kal-El.

“Almost another thousand.”

“So just over two thousand now,” Clark sighed. Part of him was relieved that there were more survivors than anyone had guessed. Part of him was terrified. “And the threat of war?”

“There have been a few skirmishes,” Zara admitted. “But we’ve managed to avoid all out war. We are growing closer to peace with each day.”

“Good,” Clark said, the noble edge to his voice still there.

“We estimate that, barring anything huge, the threat of war will be completely gone within the next few years,” Ching said.

“Good.” Clark was nodding, his mind spinning as he thought of the tactics involved in constructing a lasting peace.

“Getting back on track, what does this have to do with my husband?” Lois demanded, her anger once again overshadowing any fear.

“Lord Thor discovered what happened here last year. He seeks revenge on Clark for Nor’s death.” Zara’s voice was cool and collected.

“But Clark didn’t kill Nor!” Lois protested.

Zara shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. Kal-El is the one who challenged Nor, brought Nor into the open. And Kal-El did

defeat Nor, even before your military stepped in.”

Clark ran a hand through his now-dry hair. “Great. Some people go on vacation every year. I get psychotic Kryptonians after me instead.” His mild joke fell dead. “OK. So what do we do?”

Lois noticed that he was still deliberately avoiding Jor-El’s presence.

“Can he force Clark to stand trial again?” Lois asked. She bit out the word “trial” like it was poison. Clark’s last trial had been, in Clark’s own words, “a railroad job.”

“No,” Trey said with certainty. “Our laws state that none can stand trial twice for the same crime.”

“What about for Nor’s death?”

“No.”

“But the military stepped in on their fight. I know you said that it was forbidden to have help from anyone. Man-to-man combat only.”

“The Council knows that the same deadly force was used against Kal-El, not to aid him. And it is clear that he won the duel before the gas hit. Not to mention that even if the gas *had* been to aid Kal-El, Nor broke the rules of combat first by calling in more of his men. The Council has already denied Thor’s requests to bring Kal-El to trial.”

“So...what then? He comes to challenge me outside of the court? Can he do that?”

“No,” Ching said, shaking his head. “He comes to murder you.”

Clark let out a long, drawn out breath. “Great,” he muttered again. “So what do we do?”

“We estimate that he will be here in two day’s time,” Jor-El said, causing Clark to snap his attention to his estranged father. “We must prepare you to fight him.”

“I already know how to duel in your customs,” he said firmly. His jaw clenched in anger, but that was the only sign of it.

“True,” Ching said. “And it is likely that Thor will try his hand at a duel. But understand this. Lord Nor was a novice at the duel compared to his father. The drei has been in his hands since the time he could walk. He has age and experience far greater than any of us here. Except for your father.”

“You will not survive this battle without his help,” Zara said gently.

Clark looked at the older man seated in the arm chair and reluctantly nodded his head. The anger boiling in his blood somewhat shocked him. He’d always thought that it would be great if he could have just one conversation with his Kryptonian parents that wasn’t in a hologram. He unclenched his jaw and the fists that he had unconsciously made.

“Outside,” he said, motioning with a jerk of his head. *Out and up*, it seemed to say. He stood and spun. In a flash he was in his Superman suit and out the window, hovering a mile or so above the ground. He waited for Jor-El. After a moment, he appeared, his white suit stark against the clear blue of the sky.

“You have questions.” It was not a question.

“You could say that,” Clark said guardedly. “Starting with...how are you alive?”

Jor-El sighed and raked his hand through his snowy hair in a striking match for the way Clark always had. “After your mother and I sent you on your way to Earth, we sealed ourselves in the Phantom Zone.”

“The Phantom Zone?” Clark echoed.

Jor-El nodded. “It’s a sort of...dimension, I guess you’d say. We used to use it to hold criminals until we could try them before the Council of Elders. Your mother and I thought that we could use it to escape Krypton’s demise. It was risky, which is why we did not want to bring you with us into it. But it worked. We were safely sealed away when the planet exploded. We found a

suitable place to emerge from the Zone, which was no easy task in itself. We remained there until just recently. We had no ship, nothing to travel in and were confined to the ragged little planet we'd landed on. For years we sent out our thoughts, hoping beyond hope to reach one of our own."

"And where is Lara...mom...now?"

Jor-El lowered his eyes. "She passed away several years ago."

Clark felt a twinge of remorse tug at him. "I'm sorry," he offered.

"We desperately wanted to come for you," his father continued. "We knew you'd think that we had abandoned you."

Clark shook his head as the last of his anger melted away. "I guess, in a way, it felt like that when I first saw you a little while ago. I couldn't imagine a reason why, if you still lived, you'd never sought me out to tell me. But, at the same time, I don't regret that you couldn't come and...collect...me. Ever since I first found out who I really am, in those messages you left on that globe, I've admired that you and mom had the strength of heart to send me here, to Earth. Without that courage, I would have been dead." Clark hung his head, ashamed of his earlier anger. "Because you sent me to Earth, I have been able to lead the most incredible life. My powers aside, I've had the chance to grow up in a loving family and to find love...with Lois."

"You feel as if you belong here," Jor-El said with understanding. "I had wondered why you chose to stay here when I heard about what happened last year."

Clark nodded. "All my life, I've tried to fit in here, tried to find my place. When my powers first emerged, I was scared and I felt like the...alien...that I am. But I've found my place here. I'm a son to a wonderful mother and father who are beyond grateful for the son who fell from the sky. I've become a respected professional in a job that I love. I am husband to an incredible woman who I love more than life itself. Lois *is* my home...and my heart. Even as Superman, I've managed to use my powers to help people. I cannot, will not leave this planet and all of the people that I care for here."

Jor-El was silent for a moment. "I am happy and proud that you have found your place here. And I will not try to persuade you to come with us when we leave. Please, believe that I am only here to help you."

"I do, dad," Clark said.

He noted that the word felt strange to him as he voiced it. Rarely had he ever called his Kryptonian parents mom and dad. That was reserved almost strictly for his Earth parents. Even Lois' parents were Sam and Ellen - not mom and dad.

"I do have a question though. How do we know that if we defeat Thor, that no one else will try to avenge him? I can't keep doing this on a yearly basis."

"Because he is the last of his House. Before our planet died, only Thor and his son remained of that House."

"And that House's allies?"

Jor-El smirked a little. "Thor managed to estrange every other House, aside from Zara's. And even then, the House of Ra was beginning to turn against him. Only ancient tradition bound Zara to him if you failed to remain married to her."

Understanding crept into Clark's soft brown eyes. "That's why it was so important for him to marry Zara. It was completely about power. I had thought that maybe some part of him desired Zara as well as the power."

His father nodded. "A last attempt to save his crumbling House."

"Do you think that...Thor has any assassins?" Thinking about Nor's efforts had brought the assassin, Tez, to mind.

Jor-El shook his head. "Thor and his son were as night and day. Nor was formidable, true. But he was a coward. His forte was a sly and poisoned tongue. You experienced that in your trial,

so I have seen in the holograms."

Clark nodded. "I've never seen even a lawyer be that slimy and slick."

"Nor was well trained in dueling," Jor-El continued, as though lost in his own thoughts.

"I barely survived that duel," Clark admitted.

"Thor is far more powerful than his son. And far more ruthless. He knows that his strength is physical, not in a silvered tongue. He will choose to battle you himself. He prides himself on doing his own dirty work. He may choose to duel you. He may choose to fight you with his bare hands. In either case, he will not fight honorably. But he will do it himself."

Clark crossed his arms over his chest. "Nor wasn't exactly honorable either."

"I know. But Thor is far craftier than his son. Far more deadly."

Clark smiled grimly. "What does he know about Earth?"

"He knows he will have powers here."

"Does he know about Kryptonite?"

Jor-El thought for a moment. "He knows that there is a substance here that killed his son. I do not think he knows more than that."

"Ok," Clark said, his mind spinning. "I think I have an idea of how to gain an advantage."

"When you face him," Jor-El warned, "you must be willing to make the kill."

Clark shook his head. "When I first started using my powers to help the world, I made a choice. I will not be judge, jury, and executioner. I will subdue him, and then your laws can deal with him."

"You may not have that luxury. You must be willing to do whatever it takes to survive. Or you will not come out of this battle alive."

"Lois," Clark called out as he and Jor-El descended back into the living room via the windows. "Call Dr. Klein."

"Why?"

"I need access to the Kryptonite he's got in the S.T.A.R. Labs vault."

Lois obediently reached for her cell phone and dialed the number stored in its' memory. It rang twice before Dr. Klein answered.

"Hi Dr. Klein, it's Lois Lane."

"Lois?" came the tinny answer. The doctor sounded distracted, as he often did.

"I've got Superman here. He needs to speak with you." She passed Clark the phone before Dr. Klein could respond.

"Dr. Klein," he greeted the man.

"Superman. I uh, what can I do for you?"

"You've been doing tests on the Kryptonite in your vaults."

"Yes." The doctor's voice was uncertain.

"I need it...shaped."

"Shaped?"

Clark nodded, although he knew that, of course, Dr. Klein couldn't see it. "I need you to take a sample of it and shape it into a knife. With a lead hilt and sheath," he added as an afterthought. "Nothing fancy. Just make sure that it is as sharp as you can get it."

"You aren't...I mean..."

Clark nearly laughed, would have laughed if the situation hadn't been so serious. "No, Doctor. It isn't for me to...use on myself, if that's what you're thinking."

Dr. Klein let out a sigh of relief. "Oh, ok. I thought maybe since I told you that you aren't compatible with Earth women and since I haven't really seen you since...well, you know."

"Nothing like that at all," Clark assured him. "Can you get it ready by tomorrow night?"

“Consider it done.”

“Thanks. I’ll be by to pick it up after dark tomorrow. See you then.”

Clark pushed the button and ended the phone call.

“Ok,” he said. “Dr. Klein is working on my...insurance policy.”

Ching grinned slyly. “Well well, it seems that I have underestimated you. You *are* capable of fighting dirty.”

“I won’t use it if I don’t have to. Besides, Ching, being that close to a Kryptonite knife is a huge risk for me. All the same, I’d feel better going into this if I have an ace up my sleeve.” He sounded slightly indignant.

“We need to find a place to train,” Zara said, cooling the mood. “Someplace out of the way.”

She gestured to the neighborhood surrounding Lois and Clark’s house. It simply wouldn’t do to blow Clark’s carefully constructed cover by having him duel out in the back yard or in the street out front. Clark frowned as he thought. His parents’ farm in Kansas was secluded enough, but if Thor arrived early and hunted him down...

“What about Perry’s fishing cabin?” Lois asked suddenly. She and Clark had been there the previous month with Perry, Alice and Jimmy. The men had drunk beer and fished the weekend away while Alice had shown Lois a few of her recipes.

Clark thought it over. “That might work. It’s definitely secluded.”

Ching raised an eyebrow.

“Surely you remember the place,” Clark teased darkly. “After all, you *did* set a bomb there to kill my friends.”

“Oh Kal-El, you *really* must learn to let go of the past,” Ching teased back with a smile.

Lois was already on the phone with Perry, explaining that Superman needed the place for the next few days. Briefly, she described the situation and promised that she and Clark would get the exclusive.

“Ok,” she announced. “Perry’s on board.”

“Pack quickly,” Jor-El commanded them.

Lois and Clark bounded up the stairs with their hearts in their throats. As quickly as they dared, they flung clothing and other essentials into a couple of duffel bags. Clark gave her the short version of all that Jor-El had told him. He withheld nothing. No secrets, he’d promised her after she’d discovered his alter ego a few years prior. He’d held to that promise and wasn’t about to break it.

When they were finished, they returned to the living room, Clark once again in his blue and red suit. They stood together for a moment, surveying their home. Clark felt a vice of fear close in around his heart. In the pit of his stomach, he feared that this might well be the last time he stood in these rooms. His luck in surviving the encounter with Nor wasn’t lost on him. He was terrified of facing Thor. He felt Lois close her arms around his waist, could feel her trembling. Apparently, the same thoughts were swirling around his wife’s head as well. He gave her as reassuring smile as he could muster. Gently lifting her in his arms, he rose off the floor and flew off in the direction of Perry’s cabin.

In a matter of seconds, they were landing at the edge of the lake. Lois lifted the stone next to the front door of the cabin and retrieved the spare key that Perry kept there. They filed into the place, Jor-El and the others having arrived via one of their ships. The glowing, white orb hung suspended over the lake, out of the way.

Inside the cabin, Clark spun out of his suit and back into his shorts and t-shirt. He left his glasses carefully folded among the items in his duffel bag. Outside, Ching called to him, a couple of dreis in hand. Jor-El had one too, she noticed. Trey sat in a frayed folding chair to watch. Zara guided her over to a couple of chairs

on the other side of the door. They watched as the three men readied themselves for battle. They began slowly. Clark felt rusty as he began, twirling the drei before him defensively, readying for the attack. Soon, however, the moves came back to him. He grew more and more fluid in his motions as the three fought. Now and again, Jor-El or Ching would stop him and instruct him on more effective stances or movements. Zara too, would occasionally chime in from the sidelines.

“Not going to pick up a staff?” Lois asked curiously. Zara hadn’t instructed Clark last time, but then again, in her tiny apartment there hadn’t been much room for that. It still made her wince to think of the destruction that Clark and Ching had unleashed in her living room.

“I can’t,” Zara said.

“What? Women aren’t allowed to...” she began to ask when a slight motion caught her attention. Zara’s hand had briefly fluttered to her abdomen. “Oh,” she said, embarrassed and more than a little jealous. “I didn’t...that is...”

Zara smiled at her. Lois turned away, trying to hide the heartbreak that washed over her.

“Are you alright?”

“I, uh, congratulations,” she murmured.

“There’s something bothering you,” Zara observed patiently. “Lois, I know we didn’t start off on a great foot. But, I hope you can consider me enough of a friend now.”

“I...it’s just that...I’m a little jealous,” Lois admitted. “Clark and I...we can’t...have children. His body isn’t compatible with mine. Or mine isn’t with his. Don’t get me wrong. I wouldn’t trade a moment with Clark for anything. But...” she trailed off.

“But you still feel incomplete,” Zara’s face softened into sympathy.

Lois nodded. “Exactly. When Clark decided to go with you last year, I grieved. I grieved as though he had died. I grieved for myself, for the future I had lost. But this...this hurts in such a different way. I know it kills Clark that he can’t have the family he’s always wanted. And it kills me that there is nothing that I can do to change that.”

“I’m sorry,” Zara said, grabbing Lois’ hand in comfort. Not knowing what else to say, she turned her attention back to Clark’s lessons. “You’re leaving too much of a gap between the drei and your body still. Hold it close. Closer. That’s it. The closer you keep it, the less room Thor has to maneuver his own into to connect with your thick head.”

A tree toppled over with a crash as Clark sent Ching flying. Lois winced as Jor-El brought his drei firmly across Clark’s back. Clark spun and caught the rounded end of his drei under his father’s chin, but the elder Kryptonian rammied his own into Clark’s gut. Clark flew backwards several feet, shook the dust off, and advanced again.

The lessons continued until the sun set. The three men paused to eat, dirt and sweat covering them. Lois blinked at the sweat covering her husband’s brow. Rarely had she ever seen him sweat. The last time she’d seen that much of it, Clark had been dying as a Kryptonian virus ravaged his body. She had almost lost him that time, and she darkly wondered if his sweat this time was some sort of bad omen. The thought made her sick to her stomach.

After dinner, the lessons picked up where they had left off. Perry had lights on the outside of the cabin, for the times when he enjoyed a little night fishing. It was late when they quit for the night. After a quick shower, Clark finally slipped into the guest bed with his wife. He was exhausted. He easily slipped into a deep sleep, content to have his arms wrapped around Lois, content to have her head on his chest as she slumbered.

More of the same followed the next day. Jor-El was even more aggressive with Clark’s training than he’d been on the previous day. Sometimes they used the dreis, sometimes they

fought hand-to-hand. Lois was alarmed and hoped that Clark wasn't pushing himself too hard. It simply would not do if he trained so hard that he was too exhausted to fight Thor. But weariness seemed to slip from her husband's shoulders as easily as the rain that fell that afternoon. After dinner, Clark flew to S.T.A.R. Labs and picked up the lead lined case that Dr. Klein held ready for him.

As they slipped under the blankets of the guest bed that night, Lois laid her head on Clark's chest, listening to the steady beating of his heart. She listened to his steady breathing. Nervous tears slipped from her eyes.

"Hey," he said, gently lifting her head to look at his face. "What's the matter?"

"Clark, I'm scared," she admitted. "There's time still. Let's fly off someplace where he can't find us. I can't lose you. And I'm afraid that I will if you face him tomorrow."

"We'd have to hide forever, Lois," Clark murmured against her head as he cradled her. "And he will find me. I've learned a lot about him in the last two days."

"I just want to go back to our lives and worry about the appliances in our house again," Lois sniffled. "I don't want to worry about losing you."

"Then don't," he smiled at her. "I've got the ace up my sleeve, remember? I'm going to win this."

"Hello, Detective Henderson. This is Superman. I need you to evacuate and cordon off Centennial Park. Don't let anyone within a block of the place. No, not a bomb. Nothing like that. It's about to turn into a battlefield. Yes, I know you are with homicide, but you're the only contact I trust enough to get this done now. Thank you."

Clark ended the phone call and handed Lois her cell phone back. He was dressed in the blue and red Superman suit emblazoned with the red and yellow S on the chest. The glyph, he now knew, that stood for the House of El. The only difference this time was that on a thin leather cord around his neck, the Kryptonite dagger hung, the sheath hidden behind the fabric of the suit. Lois loathed the fact that the one thing that could kill her husband was laying so close to his heart. The last time he'd raced the Kryptonians, it had been her unworn wedding band. Beside Clark, his father stood in contrast, the crisp white denoting him as the head of the House of El.

Clark nodded as Lois eyed him. He ushered her outside, gathered her into his arms, and flew into the air. Stopping a few hundred feet up, he buried his face into the top of her head.

"I love you," he whispered to her. "No matter what happens today."

"I love you too," she said, swallowing around the lump in her throat. "Be careful. Please. I can't live my life without you in it."

"I will," he said, his words a solemn vow. "I'll defeat Thor, and then we can get back to our lives. Maybe take a nice cruise. Our first anniversary is just around the corner."

Despite herself, Lois smiled.

She kissed him lightly on the lips. He responded and deepened the kiss, hungrily devouring her lips, unable to get enough, like a drowning man finally surfacing and able to breathe again. She met each kiss, demanding more, giving him more in return. Long minutes passed all too quickly before they finally broke.

Come get me, Kal-El, said a hard, deeply booming voice in his mind.

Centennial Park, Metropolis, Clark instructed him.

"What?"

"It's time, Lois."

Unable to speak, she nodded. She understood why, of course. If anything happened to Clark or the others, at least she could seek other help in Metropolis, as opposed to the backwoods

where Perry had his cabin. But she still didn't like that this battle was going to be on display like the last one had been. They floated back to the ground, Lois going with Ching and the others in their craft. Clark flew on alone.

Minutes later, they all stood in Centennial Park, Lois and the others a hundred feet behind Clark. It was disturbingly silent in the park. Somewhere in the distance, the fountain where Clark had proposed gurgled and splashed. A few birds tweeted overhead. But the sounds of children laughing and conversations between co-workers out to lunch together were painfully missing. Lois chewed her lower lip in fear, her eyes scanning the sky. Suddenly, a figure in black leather dropped heavily to the ground, cracking the concrete walk where it landed.

"So, *this* is the mighty *Lord* Kal-El," Thor sneered. "Pathetic."

Lois resisted the urge to cry out. Thor was a hulking mass of a man. He stood easily half a foot taller than Clark. *Closer to a foot*, she thought bitterly. *And twice as broad*. Sandy, close cropped hair gave him a hard, militaristic look. Steel gray eyes seemed to burn with hatred. His face seemed to be chiseled granite. He was heavily muscled, reminding Lois sharply of a body-building competition she'd covered early in her career at *The Daily Planet*. Terror flooded her. He looked capable of breaking Clark like a twig, despite her husband's dense molecular mass and powers.

"Lord Thor, you are in violation of the treaty between Earth and New Krypton, as well as being in violation of several of New Krypton's laws. I insist that you return to your ship and leave this planet." Clark's voice was steady and calm as he stood, arms crossed before him.

"I'm going to enjoy tearing you apart, boy. You *will* pay for my son's death." Thor glanced at where Jor-El, Ching, Trey, Zara, and Lois stood, as though seeing them for the first time. "And just in case you decide to try and help Kal-El," he said, addressing them, "well..."

He pointed his gauntleted left arm at them and pressed a small button. In an instant, a force field had them surrounded. Lois pressed against it. Aside from a slight purplish haze, the field was completely invisible. Yet it stopped her hands as surely as a brick wall. Thor gave a ruthless smile and turned back to Clark.

"Last chance, Thor," Clark said, warning etched in his voice. "You *don't* want to fight me."

Thor tossed his head back slightly and laughed. "Oh but I *do*. I will enjoy *finally* destroying the House of El. First you. And then *him*." He gestured towards the imprisoned Jor-El.

He pressed another button on his left gauntlet, and a drei appeared in his hands. Clark reached for his own, which was propped against a bench. In an instant, it was in his hands, a now familiar extension of his own body. Clark took a defensive stance and waited for Thor to make his move. Every lesson over the past two days, as well as those he'd learned the previous year, played over in his mind.

It's a lot like martial arts. Make his strength his weakness. Turn it against him.

"Well, come. Make your move, *boy*," Thor taunted.

Clark stood his ground and did not move. He was aware of everything. The warm sunlight on his skin, feeding his powers. The cool breeze that blew in fits and starts. The rustling of the leaves above his head. The distant honking of a car horn. His gaze was fixed on Thor, his every muscle taut and waiting like a coiled spring. Thor laughed to himself when he saw that Clark wasn't moving.

"Are you afraid of me? You should be."

"No," Clark said firmly. His grip on the drei was tight and ready.

They stood facing each other, two veritable titans. A silent

battle of wills passed between the two, though neither moved a muscle.

Then, in the blink of an eye, Thor was before him, drei whirling. Clark sprang into action, parrying the blow before it could contact his body, then used the same momentum to drive Thor back. Thor stumbled backwards a step and grinned murderously.

“So you’ve been trained have you? Good. This should make things more fun...for me.”

Clark rounded on him, arcing the drei before him as he made a sweep for Thor’s knees. The strike hit home, but the force was not enough to fell his opponent. Thor’s body rocked for a split second and then grew still again. He pushed his own drei out as Clark completed the motion, the rounded end colliding with Clark’s jaw. Clark was pushed back several steps but regained his footing before Thor could make another move. He steadied himself and slipped back into a defensive stance. Thor was on him in the next second, and Clark barely had time to block the attack.

Gradually, he felt himself losing the advantage he’d hoped to gain. Thor was merciless in his attacks. Soon, it was all Clark could do to parry, much less strike blows of his own. His only chance lay in the dagger. But when or if the opening to use it would occur, he did not know. Finally, Thor managed a blow that sent Clark flying backwards several feet and into an old maple tree. The tree splintered and crashed to the ground at the impact of his body. Clark staggered to his feet, groping for his drei. A fire burned in his eyes as he raised the staff. He felt his mind go blank, nothing but determination to make the kill flooding his body. Only once before had he been able to summon such a void inside of himself. He was one with the weapon in his hands. Faster and faster he spun the drei until it glowed, then he quickly aimed it at Thor’s chest. A bolt, bright as the sun, sped from the rounded end of the drei and struck Thor square in the chest. The massive man flew backward, taking out a row of benches. He spluttered and stood. Clark paused, amazed that the man had survived the blast. He had felt the energy that had rushed from the drei. It had been a greater force than even he had ever experienced, and he’d ingested explosives before.

Thor grunted and grabbed at his neck, pulling a slender, clear crystal from beneath the black leather. He held it away from his chest and in Clark’s direction as a red light shot from it. The beam of light struck Clark in the center of his chest. Intense pain enveloped him, but he was dimly aware that it was unlike the pain that Kryptonite would have caused him. Against his will, a cry of agony escaped his lips. The light beam retreated back to the crystal, which now glowed fiercely red.

Slowly, Clark pushed himself up, unsure of the exact moment when he’d sunk to his knees. He felt so...strange. So...*weak*. He grabbed at his drei and was alarmed at how much heavier it felt in his grip. Thor advanced on him, and Clark attempted to use his speed to close the distance and attack before his rival could fully recover.

His speed was gone.

He tried to fly and stayed rooted to the ground.

The drei grew heavier in his hands and those shook from the effort of his grip.

His strength was gone.

All of his powers were gone.

Panic shot through his mind.

“Yes,” Thor laughed. “You see, your father wasn’t the only brilliant scientist on Krypton. I had my own. This crystal,” he kissed the crystal mockingly, “holds some of our red sun’s power in it. And now, you’re as helpless as a baby.”

Behind him, Clark heard Lois’ muffled scream. Still, he held his ground, holding the drei defensively to his body.

“Oh this *is* going to be fun,” Thor said, amusement and

confidence in his voice.

In a second, he was before Clark, raining blows upon him. Clark parried some, but he just wasn’t fast enough to fend them all off. A savage blow struck the side of his face. Clark heard and felt the bones of his jaw break. Another blow broke the bones in his left arm. Each new strike caused him to cry out in pain. Blood flowed from dozens of cuts. His suit, which had previously been protected by the aura he possessed, now hung torn and tattered, the S glyph torn completely in two. The strikes he managed to parry and land himself jarred his hands and sent pain shooting through his broken bones. Thor landed another blow, this one across the chest. Several of Clark’s ribs snapped. It suddenly became agonizingly hard to breathe. He suspected that a lung had been punctured. He’d seen it before when helping accident victims. He coughed as he tried to get enough air into his lungs. Droplets of blood dotted his hand when he pulled it away, and he knew that it was not from his spilt lower lip. His left eye was swollen almost shut.

Thor laughed and tossed his drei to one side. He slipped a knife from his boot as he approached Clark with slow, measured steps. His entire bearing exuded confidence over having his prey helpless before him. As he neared, he kicked Clark’s drei away even as Clark blindly groped for it. Clark made a feeble grab for the knife and was rewarded with a lightning fast slash across the chest. Blood issued forth from the wound. Thor reached down, even as Clark tried to writhe his body away, and grabbed a fistful of his hair. Pulling his head back, he prepared to slit Clark’s throat.

With a grunt of effort, Clark reached and grabbed hold of Thor’s descending wrist. He twisted it, trying to force the hand and knife away from his all too vulnerable flesh. Thor laughed manically.

“You know,” he said, the blade of the dagger hovering inches from Clark’s jugular, “this was almost too easy. And yet, I’m still going to enjoy this. Goodbye, *Lord Kal-El*.”

Clark roared his anger, a burst of adrenaline giving him just enough strength to push against Thor. Enough to push the massive mountain of a man back several inches. Enough to stun Thor.

Taking advantage, Clark grabbed at the man’s gauntlet, his finger brushing the button that controlled the force field. He felt it click, heard the hum of the field vanish.

Thor was stunned for a second. A second was all it took for Clark to reach his own dagger. The second it slipped from the lead sheath, both men were wracked with pain. But Clark noticed something he hadn’t counted on. Although the sickly green Kryptonite blade was killing him as surely as it ever had, the pain was far less than in the past. There were no powers for it to strip away from him.

The distraction was momentary. Thor pushed himself determinedly to his feet. He threw himself at Clark, dagger raised. Clark had only a second to curl and place his hands and feet before him as Thor threw his body at him. Pain shot through Clark’s body from his wounds and from the Kryptonite, but he held firm as Thor’s body connected with his. The dagger sunk hit deep into Thor’s gut, and Clark used the last of his failing strength to flip Thor’s body over his, using the momentum that Thor himself had provided. Thor crashed to the ground behind Clark, and Clark knew no more.

Lois had watched the battle with growing horror and fear. Jor-El’s body was stiffened in terror beside her. On her other side, Ching was trembling with pent up rage.

At last, Clark managed to release the force field that had penned them up like animals. As soon as it was free, she was running towards Clark, the others hard on her heels. She could tell by their grunting that they could feel the Kryptonite ravaging

their bodies. She shouted for Zara to stay back until the dagger was safely sheathed once more. Zara obediently stayed, keeping as far a distance as she could between her unborn child and the rock that could very well take its life.

In moments, Jor-El and Ching reached Thor's side. Ching withdrew the dagger from the man's gut and passed the vile thing to Lois. She hastily put the weapon back in its sheath and into the small lead box that housed the entire weapon, avoiding looking at the slick blood that covered the green stone. The instant she had the dagger safely sheathed, she could see the strength return to the men. She did not see the wound on Thor close. She did not see as Jor-El tore the crystal from Thor's neck. She did not see Ching banish Thor to the Phantom Zone. She heard but did not see as Zara reached her side.

Her eyes were riveted on Clark, who lay on the ground like a dead thing. Tears in her eyes, she frantically search for a pulse, breath, any sign of life.

She found a weak pulse and breathing so shallow it was hard to believe that it could sustain her husband. His skin was ashen, and he'd lost a lot of blood.

"Help him," she pleaded to everyone and anyone. "Don't let him die." Her hands were on his chest, trying to hold the precious lifeblood inside of him.

Rarely had she ever seen Clark bleed and only at times he'd been without his powers. But as alarming as it had been to know that he'd been able to cut himself while shaving, she'd never seriously seen him bleed, not on this scale. She fought the impulse to vomit.

Jor-El was instantly at her side, laying his hands over his son's wounds. Lois blinked away a few tears, and when she looked up, she was once again on Ching's ship. The feeling was disconcerting. Zara was already moving about the chamber, grabbing various instruments. Ching was lowering Clark's unmoving body onto a table that reminded her all too well of that in an operating room.

Gently, Trey guided her out of the room and into a plush bed chamber. He stayed with her as the hours ticked slowly by. Lois sat unmoving, staring out the window at the glistening stars beyond. Every second felt like a year as Lois gripped her husband's wedding band in her hands. Every minute was a lifetime. Every hour, eternity.

At last, the chamber door slid open. Jor-El entered the room. His white robes were covered in blood.

Clark's blood.

There was a weariness to the way he carried himself, and Lois' heart caught in her throat.

"Well?" she heard herself ask in a voice that was barely above a whisper. It was more of a plea than a question.

"He lives," Jor-El said. "It took some doing, but we have managed to stop the bleeding and mend the broken bones. His right lung was completely collapsed. But we've repaired that as well."

Lois' breath came out in a rush. She hadn't realized that she'd been holding it. She leapt up from the chair she'd been occupying and hugged the older man tightly. She placed a kiss on his cheek.

"Thank you," was all she could whisper.

Jor-El smiled warmly at the woman who'd given his son a true sense of home...and love. Though he had never dreamt it possible, he approved of the Earth woman that held his son's heart.

"He still doesn't have his powers," he cautioned. "I will try to reverse what Thor did, but it may take me some time, if I even can."

Lois nodded. "Can I see Clark?"

"Yes. Of course."

He turned and led her to another bed chamber. Clark was sitting up in bed, bare-chested, experimentally flexing the arm

that he'd broken, tenderly pressing against his ribs, putting a tentative hand to his jaw. Ching stood nearby, laughing at Clark's wonderment.

"I've already told you, Clark," Ching chided him, "what has been broken has been mended."

"That doesn't mean that it's easy to believe," Clark countered. His eyes fell on Lois, and a huge smile broke on his face.

Lois was dumbfounded. She'd spent the last hours preparing for the worst. She'd been prepared to see his still and lifeless body if they couldn't save him. She'd been prepared to see a broken body in a coma if they *could* save him. But this...she hadn't been prepared for this. There wasn't a mark on Clark to indicate his latest brush with death. Not even the ghost of a wound appeared on his body, nor was his eye swollen shut any longer. He was awake and in good spirits, it seemed, from the banter she'd heard him trade with Ching.

"Clark!" was all she could say as she rushed to his side in disbelief.

He reached for her, pulling her close as she reached his side.

"I thought I'd lost you," she whispered to him as she leaned in to kiss him.

He eagerly met her kiss. When they broke, she cautiously examined his bare chest, running her fingers over where Thor had slashed him. There wasn't a stitch or scar to be seen.

"How?" was all she could say. Her eyes never strayed from Clark.

"I told you. We repaired what was broken," Jor-El replied.

"But how?" she pressed.

"It is difficult to explain. You already know that our bodies and our scientific discoveries are vastly different than those of Earth. We, as Kryptonians, can harness the light of a yellow sun and use it to quickly repair our bodies. We've learned to focus it into lasers that can quickly knit broken flesh or bone back together. It's as if Clark never sustained his injuries today. Although," he added as an afterthought, "he may be sore tomorrow. And a little weak from his blood loss. That is the one thing that we cannot remedy. Come," he said, motioning to Ching and Trey, "Kal-El needs to rest. Trey, return the dagger to this...Dr. Klein. Immediately."

The two men followed him out of the bed chamber. Lois climbed onto the bed, needing to be close to Clark's body. She kicked off her sneakers and climbed beneath the blue satin sheets. In an instant, Clark's arms were around her, gently pulling her against his naked flesh.

"I have never been that scared in my life," he whispered into her hair as he bent his neck to kiss the top of her head.

"Me too," Lois agreed. "I really thought that he'd killed you."

"For a few minutes there, so did I. When I awoke, all I could think was that I was dead and that I'd never be able to hold you in my arms again."

"Clark, your powers..."

"I know."

"What are we going to do? What if Jor-El can't restore them?"

"Then I'll learn to be the best normal person I can be."

"What about Superman?"

"We'll figure something out. Maybe Superman goes off to New Krypton after all." He yawned fiercely. "Stay with me?"

"I wouldn't go anywhere else. Oh," she said, feeling his wedding ring digging into her thigh as she shifted on the bed.

She pulled out the gleaming golden band from her pocket and slipped it over his finger. His face visibly brightened before another yawn rocked him. He settled back into the pillows and closed his eyes.

"I meant it, you know," Lois said as she settled next to him.

"What?" he replied drowsily.

“I told Superman that I’d love him even if he was an ordinary man living an ordinary life.”

“I remember,” Clark said.

“I’m here for you, no matter what tomorrow brings. I’ll help you in every way that I can. You are the most amazing, loving, perfect man that I know.”

“I love you,” he murmured into her ear.

“I love you more,” she replied, turning to plant a feather light kiss on his lips.

Lois snuggled against his chest as he hugged her tightly. For a long while, she lay there just listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat and the deep, even breaths filling his lungs. Lulled by the comforting sounds, she too drifted off, all of her fears slipping from her and leaving exhaustion in their wake.

For nearly a week, Lois and Clark went about their lives. They wrote the story of the two Kryptonian titans that had done battle in Centennial Park. They withheld nothing, except for Superman’s loss of his powers. Aside from protecting Clark (not that anyone else could possibly shape another red-sun-powered-crystal), it was simply too risky to let the crime organizations know that there was a chance that Superman might permanently be out of the crime-fighting business. Still, they had to explain Superman’s absence, so they wrote that he was recovering from his injuries and testifying in Thor’s trial. It was another little lie, as Trey had already delivered Thor to New Krypton, and the man had already been sentenced and executed by the Council of Elders. He hadn’t been able to tell them how the power crystal had worked before his execution. Still, it made Lois feel good, on a professional level, that *The Daily Planet* (and more importantly she and Clark) was the only paper to run the story. The police barricade had effectively prohibited anyone else from seeing the battle.

But she was worried about Clark. He was still adjusting to life without his powers. It broke her heart every time she saw him struggling. He’d reflexively slip his glasses down his nose to investigate something, then stop and sigh as he realized that his powers were gone. She saw him sadly shake his head when he couldn’t fly up to the ceiling and replace a light bulb. She could see from the slump of his shoulders that it really bothered him to have to pull out the step stool. She saw the pain in his eyes as they stood covering an apartment fire, saw how desperately he wanted to dash in there and help, saw the unshed tears as he watched the paramedics drape sheets over the faces of bodies that were all too still.

He never complained to her. Never said how useless, how helpless he felt. Never mentioned how empty he felt inside. Instead, he put on a brave face and acted like the eternal optimist that he usually was. His parents knew of all that had happened - he’d called them the morning after the battle. There was a lot to do on their farm, and he had told them not to leave Kansas when they suggested that they try and find a way to come to Metropolis. Only once did he have Jor-El fly him out there for the day. Still, he knew that his act didn’t have Lois completely convinced. He tried to put a good spin on things. They could now enjoy a dinner together without him needing to dash off and save the day, for example. But the simple truth was - he felt lost without familiar comfort of his powers.

Jor-El, Zara and Ching spent half the time on their ship and half the time camped out at the Kent’s house. Jor-El spent nearly every waking moment tinkering with the crystal that Thor had used. He approached the item carefully, not wanting to either break the slender crystal or to accidentally turn it on himself. Clark spent as much time in the ship’s lab as he could stand, not really able to help his father in his work but enjoying the time he could talk with the older man. Lois gave him his space and found herself becoming fast friends with Zara and Ching. They played

cards and board games together, like a normal group of friends. Ching was getting to be quite good at *Scattergories* in particular. Sometimes, Clark and Ching sparred in a vast, open room on the ship. Ching went easy on Clark, and Clark used the time to let off steam and train his all too vulnerable body.

And still, Clark looked to Lois to be his rock. He knew that he wasn’t fooling her by putting on a happy face. So he talked to her, let her know of his fears - chief among them that he’d no longer be able to protect her as he once had. Lois did her best to mollify him and often wound up healing his heartache in the bedroom - not that either one of them minded.

At the end of the week, Jor-El emerged from the ship’s lab. Teleporting into the living room, he called out for his son. Outside, crickets were chirping in the night. Clark emerged from the dining room, Lois on his heels. He blinked as his eyes adjusted from the long hours of typing. He and Lois had been finally getting to the story they’d started chasing days ago - a rash of robberies directed against suspected Intergang mob lords.

“I’ve done it!” Jor-El announced, pride booming in his voice.

Zara and Ching looked up from passively watching an episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess*. On screen, Xena was freeing the god Prometheus. The god stood and slipped off the bonds that held him chained to a boulder.

“Are you sure?” Lois asked.

“Positive,” Jor-El assured her. “Are you ready?” he asked Clark.

“Yes.”

Jor-El lifted the crystal in his hand, holding it by the chain. It swung to and fro lazily. Pointing it at Clark’s chest, Jor-El released the crystal’s power, the red glow emptying in a beam of light. The beam crashed into Clark’s chest with a force he hadn’t quite expected. Intense pain enveloped him, and a strangled cry escaped him. Lois could only look on as Clark slumped to his knees, fearing to touch him, lest the action interrupt the process of restoring his powers. After a few seconds, the red light vanished, seeming to sink right into Clark’s skin. Tentatively, he stood and flexed his body, testing to ensure that he was still in one piece.

He walked over to Ching and grabbed him by his shoulders. He hoisted the man off the floor and above his head. A wide grin spread over his face as Clark levitated into the air.

“I’m back,” he grinned, not bothering to hide his relief and joy as he set Ching back down.

Ching feigned an indignant brushing of his clothing, but the relief of seeing Clark’s powers restored was evident in the laugh that quickly erupted from him.

“Thank you,” Clark said as he closed the distance between himself and Jor-El.

He opened his arms, and for the first time in his life, he embraced the man who was his biological father.

Epilogue:

It was April. A cool breeze blew in the streets of Manhattan after the gentle rain of that afternoon. Lois and Clark walked Fifth Avenue, wandering idly. Clark was in a black tuxedo, a red rose pinned to his lapel. Lois was in a sexy black dress, a matching corsage on her left wrist. They laughed easily, Lois pointing out places she wanted to visit the next day.

“So, Mrs. Kent,” Clark asked as they walked, arm in arm. “How does it feel to finally win a Pulitzer?”

Lois laughed. “Incredible. And way different than I ever thought it would be like.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, when I was first starting out, I obsessed over it.”

“You? Obsess over something?” he teased her lightly and feigned shock.

She swatted his arm affectionately. “I always pictured

winning the award by myself over some risky undercover investigation. I purposefully picked the most dangerous assignments I could, always hoping that this would finally be the story that was Pulitzer worthy. I never imagined that I'd be sharing it with my husband, that's for sure. Then again, I never pictured myself as married. It just makes it so much more special."

THE END

A brilliant smile played over Clark's face. "I thought Perry was going to have a heart attack tonight. First his reporting team of Lane and Kent win for the coverage of Superman's duel with Thor. Then Jimmy wins for his photo of the event. I still can't believe that he hid in the public restroom and shot the fight with a telephoto lens." He shook his head ruefully. At least Jimmy had been too busy shooting photos of Superman and Thor to realize that Clark hadn't been in the force field prison with Lois and the other Kryptonians. "Not that I grudge him his award or anything. But he's getting as reckless as you. I think you're rubbing off on him."

"Hey, that's not a bad thing, you know. Especially considering who his best friend is," her voice lowered to a whisper, "Superman."

Clark chuckled. "Lois, you keep Superman busy enough as it is. Don't add Jimmy to the mix."

"You know, of course, that the three of us have completely screwed ourselves by winning. Perry is never going to go easy on us again." Lois laughed.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," Clark smiled.

They walked in silence for another block before crossing into Central Park.

"You know," Lois said, as they found themselves in a peacefully quiet, unoccupied section of path, "I never thought back then that I would ever have any reason to be grateful for your brief loss of your powers." She kept her voice low, knowing that he could hear her with that super hearing of his.

He stopped and turned towards her.

"Me too," he said, lovingly caressing her heavily pregnant belly.

It seemed, according to Dr. Klein, that when Clark had lost his powers, his protective aura had been stripped from him. That was why he'd been able to bleed and have his bones broken in the fight. That same aura had been what was preventing his seed from being compatible with Lois in their quest to have children. When they'd made love over the course of the week when that aura was missing, Lois had conceived.

They'd been cautious in the beginning, taking their time before finally deciding that Dr. Klein had to be told the whole truth - of who Clark really was and why Lois was pregnant by Superman. They hadn't known whether or not Clark's alien DNA would cause trouble in the pregnancy. And they still didn't know if the child she was due to have in a few short weeks would inherit his father's super abilities. They'd been ecstatic when the pregnancy had turned out to be an easy one, except for the three months Lois had endured morning sickness.

Dr. Klein had been delighted to find that there had been a way for them to finally conceive. And he'd been more than excited and discreet about Clark's secret. As a result, he'd been Lois' doctor and would be, aside from Clark, the only one in the hospital room when the time would come for them to finally have their son.

Clark bent quickly and placed a light kiss on his wife's stomach. "So strange," he whispered. "Thor came to kill me in revenge of his son's death. He came to destroy the House of El. And instead, he's the reason why the House of El lives on. He's the reason why our son exists."

He draped a protective arm around his wife and steered her towards where their hotel lay. Knowing Lois, tomorrow was going to be a very busy day for them both.