

# A Hero's Heart

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Rated PG

Submitted May, 2009

Summary: Watching his wife sleep, Clark muses on the true meaning of heroism.

Story Size: 1,977 words (11Kb as text)

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Clark stared down at the sleeping form of his wife. His heart tore just a little as his gaze swept over her, cataloging her injuries... this time. A large bruise over her left eye was turning purple, and a small white bandage crossed the bridge of her nose. The nose wasn't broken but it had taken quite a blow and would be extremely tender and sore for many days to come.

Lois had several cuts and abrasions marked by a large number of Band-Aids and compresses. Her breathing was shallow and just a bit labored due to the tight wrap around her torso to protect her cracked ribs. Her left hand was wrapped in a plaster cast to facilitate the healing of her dislocated thumb and broken little finger.

A small sigh escaped from Clark as he thanked the fates for sparing his wife once more. She had been lucky. Even though Lois had suffered several injuries, none of them had been too serious, or life threatening. Still, it had been a near thing. Given all the trouble she'd managed to get into over the years of their marriage, this had been one of the closest calls yet. He hadn't been there; she'd been on her own. He didn't like to think about it, but he couldn't help himself. It could have been his worst nightmare.

Superman had been needed in China to help out in a natural disaster. A broken dam had flooded a village causing nearly complete destruction of the small community and the surrounding countryside. There had been no saving any of the buildings, but his presence had kept the human cost down to a minimum.

Of course, the absence of her partner didn't stop Lois Lane from going out and following any leads that came her way. Just because Clark wasn't around didn't mean that Lois was going to miss staking out a certain warehouse in a less-than-respectable part of town when she got wind that the heads of a newly reformed Intergang were going to be meeting there.

Unfortunately, Lois' presence there had been discovered... and the chase was on.

From what she had told Clark, it had been a chase which would have done any action movie proud. She had sped away once it became clear that she'd been discovered, but they were after her almost immediately.

It was late at night, and the streets were totally deserted in that part of town. Still, Lois had very little of a head start and the avenues were tight. She could only go so fast if she wanted to stay in control of her Jeep. Besides, she had no intention of getting away.

She had given a silent prayer to the technology of the times. Everyone had a cell phone nowadays and Lois was no exception. She pulled her own cell out of her bag and quickly flipped it open. A wry smile crossed her lips. She wondered how many times Bill Henderson had cursed the day that he had given her his private number. It looked like this was going to be another one of those times. She quickly thumbed in the too-familiar number.

Lois hadn't been surprised to find that Henderson hadn't been in bed. Apparently he, like she, had a tendency to bring his work

home with him. Within a couple of minutes Lois had filled him in on her situation.

In an effort to ease Clark's mind, some time back she had agreed to have a GPS tracker installed in her car. That way he, or anyone else, could find her Jeep if, for any reason, Lois didn't show up where she was supposed to, when she was supposed to. It was at times like this that she was grateful for her husband's paranoia when it came to her safety.

She gave Henderson the information he'd need to track her Jeep and asked him how long it would take to get someone to her location. Unfortunately, with him not being at the station, it would take him at least fifteen minutes to get things set up and have several units rolling. Lois had gritted her teeth and just told him to hurry. She wasn't sure how long she could keep her pursuers on her tail without them actually catching her.

Bullets had been occasionally flying past, but as yet none had come close. She yanked hard on the steering wheel and took a corner on nearly two wheels before speeding down another empty street with the large dark sedan in hot pursuit.

It had been the longest fifteen minutes of Lois' life, but she had managed to stay ahead of those chasing her for the entire time. In fact, twice she'd had to double back to find her pursuers again when she had inadvertently lost them in the maze of dark city streets.

Finally, after what had seemed to be an eternity, Lois could see the flashing lights and hear the sirens of Henderson and the Metropolis P.D. Unfortunately, with the cavalry in sight, her attention to her pursuers wavered for just a moment. It only takes a moment for disaster to strike.

Just as Lois was taking one last corner, a lucky shot blew out a front tire. The steering wheel was savagely jerked out of her hands and the speeding Jeep slammed hard into side of a building. Even though the warehouse was an old structure in bad need of multiple repairs, it was still more than the two ton Jeep could cope with.

Lois was pitched through the windshield and rebounded off the crumbling brick surface like a dolly pitched against the wall during a child's tantrum. Somewhere, in the back of her mind, she knew that help had arrived, but she didn't remember Henderson's concerned questions, nor the arrival of the paramedics. The next thing she remembered was waking up in the hospital.

Clark forced himself to focus back on the present, and his sleeping wife. She was going to be alright... this time. But what would happen when her luck ran out? What would happen if she came up against something she couldn't handle when he wasn't there?

In a way, the situation was ironic. In the early days of their marriage they had discussed his being Superman and how that was going to affect their marriage. Lois had wondered how she was going to take his need to fly off at a moment's notice to save someone, or something, whether it be the entire world, or just a cat up a tree. Now that she knew, really knew, who Superman really was, and how important that person was to her, she wasn't sure if she could take the constant worry every time he had to leave. The wondering what he was doing, if he was in trouble, would he be coming back?

They had discussed it, and Clark had used the analogy of a police or fireman's spouse. There was always the possibility of them running into dangerous situations. Situations which could cause them injury, or even death, but that didn't stop them. They knew they had a higher purpose than the normal working Joe, and they accepted the risk. As did their families. Lois knew that she couldn't change who or what Clark was, nor did she want to. She also knew that she couldn't stand not having him in her life, so she had to take the good with the bad.

As it turned out, over the years those concerns for his safety

became less and less of an issue. It didn't matter that some deranged bad guy was always trying to eliminate Superman. The truth of the matter was, if they didn't have Kryptonite handy, they didn't stand a chance. But now that didn't even seem to be much of a problem.

Dr. Klein had speculated that a finite amount of the crystalline remnants of Clark's home planet had been pulled along in his space ship's wake to make the trip to earth with the baby Kal El. As the years went by and Superman survived the many attempts on his life by means of that Kryptonite, the available supply dwindled. With each failed attack, another piece of the deadly crystal was either destroyed or locked away where no one could get at it.

While he wasn't willing to think that there was no more Kryptonite out there where the bad guys could get hold of it, it had to be getting much harder to find and secure. Clark, as Superman, hadn't run into any of it in the last two years. Perhaps all of the Kryptonite had been accounted for?

Lois suddenly began to moan and move about in the bed. Clark instantly realized she must be having a bad dream. Perhaps she was reliving her most recent miraculous escape also.

Shrugging off his pants and shirt, Clark slid into bed next to his wife and enfolded her into his arms. Her mild thrashing suddenly ceased, and her body instinctively snuggled up against him. A slight smile creased Clark's lips.

The ironic part of their marriage was that the roles had become reversed. Lois still worried about him when he was gone for an extended period of time, but it was more about his mental state. He was actually the spouse that found himself worrying about the safety of his life partner. His activities as Superman didn't allow him to always be by her side when she was 'on the job'. But that didn't mean she would patiently wait at home, or at her desk, until he could get back. She was Lois Lane, and her sense of purpose and dogged pursuit of truth waited for no man, or Superman. It was one of the reasons he loved her so fiercely, even if it was a cause for his major concern for her safety.

People often shouted accolades at him and called him a hero. But he was no hero. He had unbelievable advantages over normal folks, and he only did what anyone would do given the great gifts he'd been given. People like the police, firemen, and rescue workers were the real heroes. They went to work every day knowing that they could risk serious injury or death, yet they went anyway. They never wavered in their purpose or in the doing of what they saw as their duty.

His wife was like that. She saw herself as someone who was charged with shining the light of truth onto crime and injustice. If in the commission of that charge she had to place herself at risk, she never hesitated. She could have sat on the sidelines and waited for stories to fall into her lap like so many others in their profession did. But she wouldn't. She knew how important it was to expose the evil in the city, and by doing so, to help put an end to it. She knew that she fought for a cause bigger than one person, bigger than herself. In every sense of the word, she was a hero.

She had a hero's heart.

Clark was pulled out of his musing by a tender kiss to his jaw. He shifted his gaze and saw Lois looking up at him, a coy smile on her face.

"You were miles away. What were you thinking about?"

Clark smiled. "I was just thinking about how much I love you, and how lucky I am to have you in my life."

"Ooh, I like the way you think." She giggled. "Suppose you show me exactly what you mean."

So he did.