

Distraught

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Rated: PG-13 for major angst and drama

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Summary: Takes place almost two years after the end of season four. Lois has died six months prior to this piece while she was pregnant. Clark is in despair, and this is his first day back to work since she's been gone. Be warned — if you're looking for a happy ending, this isn't it. Check out the alternate ending "Despair" for a different tale.

A/N: WHAM warning. I wrote this in an extreme fit of depression, so only I can take the blame for the events that happened in this story. I don't however own any of the people or places represented in this story. They are owned by Warner Brothers and DC.

Clark screamed silently to himself while he rode the elevator up to the Daily Planet bullpen. How could this be happening? How? Everything had been going so perfectly up till now. What happened? Where did things go downhill? If he had a time machine, he would go back and stop it before the terrible event ever happened. But it was wishful thinking. Besides, he knew that even if it were possible, he wouldn't have done it. Not for the world.

Lois was dead. It didn't matter how, or why — none of it seemed as important as the fact that she was actually dead. Lois Lane — the love of his life, the woman of his dreams, his wife and lover, and would-be mother of his children — was dead. And it was all his fault.

He cursed the name of Superman with every word he knew and in every language he knew — even some in Kryptonian that he had picked up from his experiences on New Krypton. If he could kill Superman for what he did to Clark Kent's life, he would. And he would enjoy every second of it. For a few moments, Clark indulged in his fantasies of dividing into two people, throttling the life out of his super-self, and then just going on, living his life as a normal human being. Normal. A man with a job, a house, a wife, and a couple of kids. And maybe a dog — Clark had always liked dogs.

But in one fell swoop that entire dream was taken away from him. No wife, no kids — heck, no one would probably even let him watch a dog in his current state of mind, more less adopt one.

Adopt. The word sent a pang of hurt shooting through his heart. That's what they had been looking into, before the miracle happened. Adoption was what Bernie Klein had recommended for Superman — because Kryptonians wouldn't be compatible with humans. He and Lois wouldn't be able to have children of their own. Not that that stopped them from trying, but that stigma was a hard one to overcome. And with no adoption agencies willing to allow them to adopt — the future had seemed bleak for them.

Clark plastered a smile onto his face that everyone knew was forced as he walked into the bullpen of the Daily Planet — ignoring the fact that he was walking in alone for the first time in the six months since she had gone, the fact that everyone was looking at him with sympathy and understanding, the fact that Lois's desk remained stubbornly empty no matter how much he gazed at it. He was no necromancer, he knew. He couldn't conjure her up magically — he would give every power he had if he could, but he couldn't.

Clark basically sat at his desk, staring ahead of him blankly, wondering occasionally where his computer had disappeared to before realizing he was staring straight through it. Then he would shake his head, type up a few sentences on an article about Intergang that only made him think of Lois even more, and return to staring blankly off into space.

They had lucked out. By some trick of fate, they had been blessed with a child. Lois and Clark were going to have a child, a baby. God, the thought had brought such a smile to his face. To discover that Dr. Klein had been wrong, that he could have offspring after all — Clark had never been happier to prove someone wrong before in his entire life. Lois positively glowed with excitement — Clark couldn't contain his, taking short flights around the world to shout his joys to the empty Arctic air. Clark couldn't have dreamed of anything better — anything that would have made him happier.

They had waited to tell people until she was four months along, just in case. Those last three words shocked Clark back into writing his article briefly once again. Just in case, he thought bitterly. Just in case she had a miscarriage, just in case something went wrong. But they had reached that deadline long before anything suspicious began happening. And they had happily proclaimed to everyone the fact that they were going to have a baby. No one stopped to think twice about what more could go wrong still in five months time. Especially not Clark — not with Superman there to protect her. He would never let anything happen to endanger his wife or his baby.

If Clark could damn Superman to the deepest levels of hell, he would. In his mind, he already had. But some higher power held that in the balance.

Eventually, they had to go to Dr. Klein. The man had to know the truth anyways, if they were to have this child without difficulty or any... discrepancies on the doctor's part. They waited until Lois was five months along to see him, and he, too, was ecstatic to learn that he had been wrong. And to learn that Clark Kent was, in fact, the Man of Steel. The congratulations, the presents, the adoration and fawning over Lois — and even some over himself. He was going to be a father. Clark Kent, Kal'El, Superman was going to be a father.

Tears burned at his eyes and drew him back to his article once again. *Was* going to be a father. Not anymore. Now he would never be. He pounded furiously at the keyboard of his computer, as if that would help take his mind off things. It wasn't until he smelled the beginnings of smoke when he stopped and blew a quick, subtle breath onto the piece of machinery. He hated when he did that. It was so frustrating that modern technology couldn't keep up with his strength and speed capabilities.

Five months. Maybe, if they had gone in sooner, they could have prevented the horrible event. The entire ordeal might never have happened. They would all be together now, ooh-ing and awing over a little baby boy that had his father's powers and his mother's beautiful smile. If they went in earlier, maybe then Lois wouldn't have died, along with his son. Maybe Superman could have done something to save her.

"Um, CK?" Jimmy's voice interrupted his depressing train of thoughts and startled him back to the present time.

"Uh, yeah Jimmy?" He avoided looking the younger man in the eyes, in an effort to hide the fact that he'd been crying a bit. Not that it mattered really — Jimmy was one of his closest friends.

Jimmy didn't need to look his friend in the eye to know he was in a dark place. But he didn't want to aggravate him, either. "Um, Chief wants to see you in his office. Nothing big or anything," he added at the look of panic that flashed across Clark's features. "Just, you know, when you can —"

"No no, I can go now. I'm not really getting much done here anyways." Clark stood up with a sigh, quickly pressing the

controls to save the paragraph and a half he had written up on screen. He gave the young photographer a brief smile that showed more of his sadness than anything else. “Thanks, Jimmy.”

Jimmy clapped his friend on the shoulder. “No problem, Clark. And you know, if you ever need anyone to talk to, I’m there for you buddy.”

Clark’s expression fell, darkening his smile. “Yeah, I know.” He shuffled off towards Perry White’s office trying to muster up a smile for his boss, one that he couldn’t quite manage.

He knocked on the door frame. “You wanted to see me, Chief?”

Perry looked up, ready with a biting comment, when he saw who it was. His features visibly softened. “Oh, uh, yeah. Come on in, Clark. Shut the door behind you,” he added as an afterthought. Clark did as told and slumped into a chair in front of Perry’s desk.

Perry stared at the young man for a minute, surveying him. He looked pale, but at least he hadn’t lost any weight — or gained, for that matter. Strenuous times led to difficulties all around, he knew. He remembered going through that cycle with Alice, back when they were first trying to have kids, and failed. Of course, later on, they got their chance, but it had been an emotional roller coaster all the way around. Not that Perry could profess to having any idea of how much pain Clark was dealing with.

“Listen, Kent, I know you’re going through a lot right now — ”

Clark groaned, interrupting his boss. “Please, Perry, just don’t.”

He appeared startled. “Don’t what?”

“Don’t fire me. Not now, of all times. Please. I have so little to live for as it is. Dock my pay, let me work for free — but I need to work. I need something. I don’t have anything anymore.” He whispered his last words.

Perry’s expression was equal parts horror and confusion. “Kent, what the hell makes you think I was going to fire you?”

Clark’s eyes showed his confusion. “You’re not? But I really haven’t been writing well since... yeah, and the pieces I have turned in while on leave weren’t exactly front page material — not that I turned in much at all — what I have been writing has turned out rather poorly in my opinion — and anyways the way you started talking, it just sounded like you were going to let me go.”

Perry allowed himself a slight chuckle. He would never tell Clark this — especially not since Lois’s death — but he tended to ramble as much as she ever did sometimes. “Well, if that was my intention, then you’ve pretty well made my argument. But that wasn’t it at all. I was only going to ask how you were holding up. Your first full day back to work.”

Perry circled around his desk, opened a drawer and pulled out a bottle of Scotch, along with two mugs. He began pouring the two cups full to the brim. “Now, I know things are rough now, and I’m not going to tell you if they’re going to get better or not — but what I will say is this: how can things get any worse? This is about as bad as it gets, and you’ve survived the last six months without L... in this condition,” he edited his words as he watched Clark’s form tense up when he nearly uttered Lois’s name. He pushed the mug over to him silently, which Clark picked up without thought and took a swig of it. Perry seemed surprised by the action — surely he would at least react to it. Instead he drank it as though it were water.

Clark wiped his mouth and released a short, bitter laugh. “Perry, you don’t even know the half of it. If you think what you know of the situation is bad, you won’t believe how much worse it can get.”

Perry grew wary as he watched the younger reporter over the

edge of his mug. He didn’t quite know what to expect from Clark — it seemed as though he should be past the period of time where they had to hide any knives and ropes from him. But still, Clark could paint himself into a very dark corner very quickly — and that part of him worried Perry. “Kent, you know you can tell me anything and everything on your mind. What’s worse? What don’t I know?”

Clark swore and raised a hand to his face, running a hand through his hair. Had he really just told Perry White that there was more to him than met the eye?

Perry’s features expressed his visible shock at hearing Clark swear and his reaction. “Clark?” he began hesitantly. “Clark, you know that you’re not to blame for any of this. Lois wouldn’t want you to feel this way — burdened in any way, shape or form — just because she died. There’s nothing you could have done — you’re not Superman, you know.”

“Ha! Oh, Perry, you have no idea.”

He arched an eyebrow at the reporter. “Then explain it to me. What on earth makes you think this is your fault? Lois wouldn’t want this — ”

“Lois isn’t here, Perry!”

His outburst had Perry floored. In that moment, Clark had become someone else completely. Not the Clark Kent he knew, that was for sure. His eyes were bloodshot and tinged with red, and his features became harsh and contorted with pain and rage. Then he turned into himself, placing his head in his hands and letting out an animal cry — a sob wrenched from the depths of a tortured soul. Perry noticed then just how haggard the man looked. He looked like he hadn’t slept a moment since Lois died, since his world fell apart. Perry noticed the stares people were shooting towards his office, curious and sympathetic alike. Quietly, he got up to glare at his reporters and close the blinds for their privacy. Finally he spoke.

“Clark, do you still have those numbers I gave you in your phone? Because if not, I can give them to you again, and you know you can call me or anyone else at any point in time — day or night — if you’re feeling down.”

“God! You just don’t get it, do you, Perry? I couldn’t save the two people — not even *one* person, who mattered most to me! What’s left for me to live for?”

“Clark, you know very well that that’s not true. You have plenty of things left. Besides, it’s not your responsibility to save anyone.”

He snorted. “That’s right. That’s *Superman’s* job. Save the world. Yeah, right. What a load of crap. Even he couldn’t save Lois.”

There was no mistaking the bitterness in his voice. Perry struggled to find the right words to say. “Clark, there was nothing he could have done either, you know that. She just died.”

“No Perry,” his voice came out broken. “It’s all his fault. All my fault. Doctor Klein told him he couldn’t have children — that’s why Lois and I wanted to adopt. No one would let us adopt. Somehow we were lucky enough to get pregnant — and then all the complications that came from it...” Clark’s large frame shuddered with his sobs. His glasses were wet from his tears, and out of frustration and rage, Clark cast them aside with enough force to cause them to snap in half and the lenses to break when they hit the wall. Perry looked at them in surprise — he was shocked he had thrown them that forcefully — then turned back to face his reporter.

The shifts in pronoun usage confused Perry, but Clark didn’t seem notice a problem with it. It was as if he was used to talking that way. He continued to rant, moving quickly from one topic to the next with little cohesion. “I’m just so sick and tired of it! Sick of it all! All the pretenses, the conversations behind my back, and the rumors — and don’t think I can’t hear them, I can. I can hear it all, all the time. I know what they’re saying. They don’t

understand it. And they can't. I can't let them, because if I did, it would be a greater letdown than anything else. And then everyone else in the world just stares at me, gawks at me, wonders what's wrong with me, why I seem colder than I used to be — and I can't tell them that I just lost my wife and child, that I wish I could die, even if it meant I would be leaving people behind that needed me. A world that needed me. Because people don't like to see their heroes fail — they need them to be strong for them when they can't be strong themselves. If they could but see me now, to know that I'm weaker and more screwed up than they could possibly imagine."

Through the midst of the long string of half-coherent babbling, Perry had a realization. More than that: a revelation, an epiphany. And it was heart wrenching.

Clark Kent was Superman.

The notion was at once both comforting and frightful. For one, he couldn't kill himself all too easily. That was a definite plus. On the other hand, so much more made sense — and devastatingly so. Clark, as Superman, saved the world on a daily basis. But he was helpless to the circumstances that took Lois's life.

And yet, after all of those discoveries, all Perry could manage to ask was, "Complications?"

Which launched Clark into another long wail of why Lois had died. Perry paled with the realization. Lois had been carrying, it seemed, a superbaby. While that should have been great for Lois — as he gathered something about a protective aura that Superman had and apparently extended to his offspring that should have protected her — somehow her human body couldn't handle the alien DNA within her. More than that, she became susceptible to things Kryptonians were along with natural human weaknesses — and that included a slew of diseases, one of which Clark had contracted previously that year, as well as kryptonite. So she became sick with both human and alien diseases, weakening her immune system to a point far below normal.

Then apparently there was kryptonite involved. At this point Clark was practically blubbing, and Perry could barely make out every third word, so his knowledge was shaky — except the fact that somehow he had been separated from Lois, as Superman, long enough for someone to be able to sneak in and implant some form of kryptonite into one of her medicines. All she had to do was take one dose, and she was doomed, their child was doomed — Clark was doomed, forever.

"Oh, Kent." Perry placed a consoling hand on his now star-reporter's shoulder as Clark finally broke down sobbing. "I'm so sorry. How long have you been holding onto that? Do your parents know?"

Eventually, Clark nodded. "Yes. And Dr. Klein."

A sudden thought occurred to Perry, and it escaped his lips before he could think twice about what he was saying, and the effect it might have on the broken man. "And Lois's parents? Do they know?"

It was like a slap in Clark's face. He paled dramatically, as if he wasn't pale enough already. "No," he whispered, throat closing up. "That's the other thing. I can't bring myself to tell them. Not now, after what I did to their daughter."

"Clark," Perry chided, a note of warning in his tone. "We've been over this. You didn't do this to her — it wasn't your fault."

"I promised him I'd never hurt her." A haunted look entered into his eyes as he rested his fingers against his lips, feeling them trembling.

"Clark."

"And now look. I got her pregnant, against all advice, and because of that, she's dead. My son is dead. I couldn't save either of them any more than the doctors could."

"You're only human, Clark."

"That's just it, Perry. I'm not. I'm not human at all. I should be better than this. I should have been able to save them."

"Clark."

"And now I'm the one doomed to live out my time on this earth. This stupid planet that's not even my own. I can't even call it my home. How does that happen?"

"Clark Kent! This is your home. I don't care who you might be genetically, or whether or not you're Superman. You're a great reporter, a great person all around, and I know for a fact that you were one hell of a husband to Lois."

Clark snorted.

"No really, it's the truth," Perry defended his statement. "You know, when Elvis told Priscilla that —"

"Please, Perry. I'm not in the mood." The sharpness in his tone couldn't be mistaken, and Perry White shut his mouth promptly. Clark's voice was as firm as when he was flying around as Superman, but Superman never had that hard edge to him. Perry realized in an instant that Superman had never experienced the true meaning of pain.

Well, he was getting more than the allotted dosage of it now. A super-dose of it.

Perry sighed and took a seat behind his desk, noticing idly that Clark had drained his entire mug of Scotch in that one swig. No wonder alcohol had never appeared to affect him — he was Superman. Of course it didn't.

Perry shook his head briefly. "Clark, despite what you may think on the matter, I think you should tell the Lanes the truth about who you are. They'll be sensitive about it — they know how much you've been suffering, they're not gonna be too mad over it. Not yet, anyway. Besides, I think the more people who care about you that know you're Superman, the easier this will be."

"I know you're right Perry. And I am going to tell them. This week, actually — maybe today. But I just feel like I can't face them. Not knowing I killed their daughter." An unfamiliar expression entered briefly into his eyes.

"Clark —"

"You know what? I think I will tell them today. I gotta go, Perry. I appreciate this talk we've had — you can't believe how much I appreciate how understanding you've been, what a help you've been to me these last few months. I can't have been easy to put up with." He tried to smile, but it ended up in a sloppy looking grimace, and the look in his brown eyes revealed more pain and determination than Perry had ever seen in them before.

Perry heard his last few words and his heart dropped. "Been?" he croaked. "Clark, you know how many people care about you. You're not going to go do something rash now, are you?" At Clark's raised eyebrow, Perry explained himself further, so that there were no misinterpretations. "You're not going to try to, you know, kill yourself or something?"

At this, Clark seemed to genuinely smile, but there was something in his expression that looked guarded. "Perry, I'm Superman. I can't exactly go jump off a building or hang myself or something. I can't even stab myself — really, I'm pretty limited in my options." Perry's expression didn't change. Clark had not expressly rejected the idea, just danced around the question, like he always did when asked about him or Superman or anything else intensely personal. Clark sighed and managed to roll his eyes. "So no, I'm not going to try to kill myself."

Relief flooded Perry's features. "Good! Nobody likes having a superhero around that's suicidal." Clark's smile remained, but it dialled back a bit for a few seconds. He recovered quickly though, as he stood up, smile plastered in place once again.

He gestured to the wall where his glasses hit. "Sorry about the wall."

Perry noticed for the first time that more than the glasses had broken. The wall was dented where they hit, and three picture

frames lay on the ground, the glass broken out of them. Perry stared at it open-mouthed for a moment, before gathering himself. “Uh, don’t mention it.”

Clark’s very fake grin remained, hopefully masking at least some of his pain. He waved briefly as he opened the door to Perry White’s office and stepped outside, glancing at his watch as he went. Four thirty. Perfect amount of time. “Listen, I think I am going to head out a little early and talk to Lois’s parents. G’bye Perry, and thanks again.”

Perry nodded, still somewhat in shock as it all began to sink in with him. “Bye,” he called absently after him. It was good that the boy had decided to tell them the truth — and that he wasn’t going to do anything completely irrational. He might just be coming to terms with it all.

Clark walked out of Perry’s office, sans glasses, and marched strongly across the bullpen to his desk. He quickly pulled up his email screen and set for the delay in the send. He was pasting a document into the box and pressed the send button just when Jimmy startled him.

“Hey, CK. What was that all about?”

“Hmm? Oh, hey Jimmy. It was nothing, really. Just talking with Perry about things. Oh, and Jimmy, I’ve been meaning to give you some stuff back — I guess L-Lois had it... you know, b-before she,” he gulped.

Jimmy only nodded, clapping him on the shoulder once again. “Don’t worry about it. Take your time. And if there’s anything you need — anything at all, you know who to call.”

Clark nodded, briefly closing his eyes. “Thanks, Jimmy. You don’t know how good of a friend you are to me. If you want you can come by tomorrow or something after work and pick it up.”

“How about tonight?” Jimmy asked.

Clark paled in the slightest. “No, not tonight. My place is a disaster still. Give me a little time to tidy it up.” He smiled, and Jimmy shook his head at him.

“I’ll never understand neat-freaks like you,” Jimmy smiled. Then a slightly perplexed look crossed his features. “Hey, CK, where are your glasses? You look really different without them,” his voice had a reflective quality about it, as if he were trying to put his finger on something but he couldn’t quite get at the thought.

Clark shrugged. “I guess I left them in Perry’s office. It’s no big deal. I can make it home all right. I’m not that blind.” Clark stood up, quickly pulled up another document on his screen, hurriedly turned off the monitor to his computer, and walked off towards the elevator. “Bye Jimmy.”

Jimmy seemed confused — he was always under the impression that Clark was blind as a bat. That’s why he had never seen him without his glasses before. No, that couldn’t be true... He returned Clark’s wave half-heartedly, still a little lost about where he thought he had seen Clark without his glasses before. “See ya,” he murmured.

Clark stalked off to the elevator, feeling slightly liberated without his glasses. It was reckless, he knew, but what did he care? It didn’t matter anymore; nothing mattered anymore. He had made sure of that now. He entered the elevator with a smile on his face, nodding to the people he passed, saying his goodbyes for the day, and for once actually rode the elevator down to the lobby before walking out towards the Lanes’ home. Once in an alley, he changed quickly and flew off to their apartment, which luckily had a balcony. Not that it mattered — because it didn’t, he reminded himself. If he had to, he would ring their doorbell as Superman. But Clark wanted to get there fast. He didn’t have much time.

A smile, perhaps the first real one in a long time, graced his features.

Yes, Perry was right: things would be all right.

Perry sighed and straightened the papers on his desk. Taking a sip of his unfinished Scotch, he realized the gravity of everything he just learned: Clark Kent was Superman. Lois died because of some sort of kryptonite. She was carrying the first and only half-Kryptonian-half-human child in the world. *Only?* Where did that thought come from? Surely Clark would recover someday, meet someone else, perhaps try again. Or what about the other Kryptonians? Surely it wasn’t entirely impossible for them to have offspring with humans.

Wait a second.

Did Clark just say goodbye?

Clark’s words rang in his head. “*G’bye, Perry, and thanks again.*” Clark never said goodbye to him. It was always something along the lines of, “See ya, chief,” or, “Have a good evening.” Rarely Perry, and never goodbye.

Perry shook his head. Preposterous. Clark Kent wasn’t saying goodbye. He was reading way too much into that, because he was worried about him. After all, he had made Clark promise that he wasn’t going to go try and kill himself or something. Clark had said as much himself. There was nothing to worry about; he was just going to talk with Lois’s parents. Besides, the man was Superman, for God’s sakes! He pointed out that he practically couldn’t kill himself, even if he wanted to. Not to mention the fact that the world would be lost without its hero. No, Perry reassured himself, this was not the end.

Out of the corner of his eye, Perry spotted the wreckage done to his office, and more specifically, the pair of broken glasses.

All at once, Perry’s heart sunk and gut clenched up. *No...* Clark wouldn’t have left without his glasses. Surely it was some sort of mistake. No, he couldn’t have been that careless, unless he really didn’t care anymore, which he had practically expressed he hadn’t. *Oh no.* Clark Kent had just walked out into the bullpen without the most integral part of his disguise — and he did it on purpose.

Suddenly everything compounded in Perry’s mind. Clark Kent was above all else one hell of an actor. He never really lied, but misled people to believe what wasn’t necessarily the truth. He had led the world to believe that he was two different people. He had written articles about Superman when really he was the man himself. And he had said — adding on a clever story about how difficult it would be for him to do so — that he wouldn’t try to kill himself.

Try.

Perry could have face-palmed right then if the whole situation hadn’t been so serious. Instead, he jumped out of his seat and raced toward the bullpen. “KENT!” he shouted at the top of his lungs. Swearing under his breath as he got there and realized Clark was already gone, he ignored the looks of surprise he received from his employees at his hasty entrance. “CLARK!” He still called out despite the fact that he could no longer see the man. Perry turned frantically to Jimmy. “Olsen!”

“Yeah, Chief? Er, Perry —” Jimmy corrected, but his boss cut him off.

“Now’s not the time for that. Have you seen Kent?”

Jimmy seemed startled. Perry never didn’t care about what people called him. He hated the nickname of Chief — now especially more than ever since Lois’s death. She had coined the name, and it saddened him to think too much about it. “Yeah, Clark left about two minutes ago, why? He was just in your office, wasn’t he?”

Perry swore loudly. “Did you happen to notice if he was wearing his glasses or not?” he asked as he began rummaging through his desk drawers.

“Um, yeah. He wasn’t wearing them — he said he left them in your office. It seemed a little odd to me at first, but — is something the matter, Chief?”

At that moment, Perry opened a drawer and was confronted

with the sight of three extra pairs of glasses just lying there. He swore again and slammed the drawer shut with more than the necessary amount of force. Turning to the young photographer, not caring that everyone was watching him now, he asked his question. “Did you talk to him at all?”

“Well, yeah, of course he — ”

“Well? What did he say?”

Jimmy looked taken aback, trying to recall if anything important had been said. “He just said that he was just talking to you about some things — didn’t say what — and that he still had some of my stuff that he wanted me to pick up.”

“Tonight?” Perry’s eyes were hopeful.

“No, he said he had some cleaning to do before I came over — to come and pick it up tomorrow night.”

Perry visibly paled and continued his search perhaps with even more speed through Clark’s desk. “Anything else?”

“He said he appreciated how good a friend I’ve been to him lately. Chief, what’s all this about?” Jimmy didn’t like where Perry was going with this conversation.

Perry finally turned on Clark’s computer monitor, thinking that there might be something on there — anything — to prove his theory wrong. Like he had a dinner date, or moving plans — that this didn’t mean what he thought it meant.

The display made Perry want to throw up.

Two windows were open. The one in the background showed a sent email screen that listed whatever he had just sent — on a timer, Perry noted — to everyone in his contacts list. That on its own was unnerving.

The second window petrified him. It was an article about himself. Clark Kent. Superman. There was a picture of him as both men at the top, with his byline along with Lois’s next to it. She must have helped him write it before she died, perhaps as a joke, maybe as a security. But Clark had filled in the gaps. Perry began reading against his better judgement, knowing exactly what it would say.

“On March 19th, 2011, Clark Jerome Kent, known to the public as a famed reporter for the Daily Planet, and also alternately known to the public as Superman — the Kryptonian superhero that dedicated his service to the city — died by his own hand of Kryptonite poisoning. He left behind no heirs, only hope that the world would come to forgive him one day for his actions. His wife, Lois, preceded him in death, due to similar factors while pregnant with his half-Kryptonian child. Consumed with grief, Clark felt he could no longer handle the guilt of knowing that — ”

Perry stopped reading. He couldn’t stomach anymore.

It was an obituary. Clark Kent had left Perry his obituary — Superman’s obituary — to be found and used in tomorrow’s paper.

“Holy crap,” Jimmy whispered, gone completely white now. Perry didn’t realize the boy had been reading it until he heard him say that. The bullpen was silent, waiting for their reaction to judge what was going on. Perry straightened up, minimized all the windows, and logged off of Clark’s computer before turning to face the horror-stricken young man besides him.

“Come on, Jimmy. We’ve gotta go find him before he does something stupid.”

Jimmy just nodded, having no presence of mind to speak, and followed his boss silently. His best friend was Superman — that’s where he recognized him from. More importantly though, his best friend was about to make the biggest mistake of his life — and they had to find him before he did.

“Perry, what’s going on?” Gil shouted over to him as they ran for the elevator, waiting impatiently for it to come to them.

The doors opened to the elevator. Seeing that things couldn’t get any worse — and if they did, they would all know the truth anyway — Perry said the closest thing possible to the truth. “We

gotta stop Kent from murdering Superman and killing himself.”

The doors closed, but Perry knew the reaction the bullpen would have to that.

It was engulfed in complete silence.

Clark landed on the Lane balcony with a thump that startled the couple inside. He tapped on the glass gently, as Sam got up from his seat and opened the door quickly. Clark glided in effortlessly, landing on their plush carpeting noiselessly.

“S-Superman,” Sam began, flabbergasted. Ellen’s jaw hung open. “What are you doing here? How can we help you?”

Clark gave a sad sort of smile, one which revealed a massive amount of pain in his eyes. “Nothing in particular, I suppose. I just want to talk.”

Ellen gestured that he sit in the chair next to her. “O-Okay. By all means. Here, have a seat.” Clark obliged her, not without feeling acutely awkward. Briefly he ran a hand through his hair, then he sighed. This was the end of it — the jig was up. They had to know — they deserved to know. And maybe they would be so mad at him that they would kill him themselves.

Sam Lane spoke up, interrupting his thoughts. “I-I don’t mean to pry, Superman, but what is it that you’re doing here?”

“I used to go to Lois, you know,” he began quietly. He could see them flinch at the mention of their daughter’s name. “She would always listen to me, when I had to tell her about a failed rescue, or just get something off my chest. She was always there for me.”

There was a pause between them before Clark continued. Just power through... “I loved her. Not in the way the world was meant to think. I really, truly loved her, with all my heart — and I will always love her, up to the very second I die. Lois will always have a more than special place in my heart.”

There was a short silence between them before Ellen spoke up. “Why are you telling us this, Superman? I mean, Lois was married, and now she’s gone... what could possibly be your purpose?”

The silence that ensued allowed Clark to think for a moment. Last chance... no. He had to do this. For Lois. It was the right thing. He couldn’t let them be blindsided by this when they discovered the truth the next day. He took a deep breath before continuing. “I just wanted you to know... that it’s my fault Lois died. I should have been there more, I should have... I don’t even know what I should have done. I’m not sure there’s anything I could have done, but I could have tried to do something. Anything else to save her.”

This was obviously not what they expected to hear. Sam began. “Uh, Superman, none of it is your fault. You can’t blame yourself for every failed rescue — besides, no one could do anything about Lois, not even her doctors. It was nobody’s fault.”

“Nobody’s but the father of her child’s, right? ‘Cause he got her pregnant, and she couldn’t handle it and that’s what led to her die in the first place?”

This shocked Ellen out of her silence once again. “Now you wait one minute. Do not for one second blame Clark Kent for killing Lois. It was out of everyone’s control. They wanted to start a family, and they tried, and they did. It just ended... poorly. Besides, I thought you were friends with Clark.” Her voice was shaky and broken as she spoke, but she didn’t want to cry in front of the Man of Steel.

Clark smiled bitterly. “I’ve always said we were close. I never quite defined what that meant. And for the record, I can blame Clark Kent as much as I blame myself.”

“How could you? Superman, what’s gotten into you? What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong? My wife and child died, I’m the one responsible, and nobody seems to understand why! Dr. Klein told us we couldn’t have kids, we looked into adoption, and when

Lois finally got pregnant — that was the happiest day of my life! I never dreamed I could be so happy! But then the complications arose, because of the whole issue of mixing human and Kryptonian DNA, and then Lois got sick a lot, and then in the end because of the Kryptonian part within her, she was susceptible to kryptonite and someone — some villain that somehow knew everything about me and my life — slipped some type of liquid kryptonite into her medicine, and she died from it, and miscarried our son! If I hadn't been Kryptonian, or hadn't met Lois, or moved to Metropolis, or took a job at the Planet, or even if we just never decided to have kids — any of those cases, she might still be alive today, and I could be happy — or at least blissfully ignorant of this pain."

Stunned silence set in. Finally, Sam Lane broke the silence. "C-Clark?"

Clark laughed bitterly. "Yeah. Take a good long look at your son-in-law, because this is probably the last you'll even want to see him."

Ellen finally managed to get her jaw up off the floor. "Clark, don't you talk like this. You know better. It's not your... there's nothing you could have done to stop it," her voice broke once more, and she gently placed a hand on his arm.

Clark recoiled from her touch as if it burned him worse than kryptonite. He stood up, backing away from his mother-in-law, and, feeling too vulnerable without his regular clothes, spun back into Clark Kent's outfit — minus the glasses — leaving them in shock once more. "No, Ellen. There's nothing I could have done to change what happened. Nothing I can do. I just have to live with the consequences of my actions. I promised Perry I would tell you guys; now you know the truth about me. All the times I ran off, missed family events... why Lois died. It's all because of Superman. Lois and I were going to tell you once the baby was born — figured it would be best handled with good news — but then everything went to the crapper and I couldn't bring myself to face either of you, knowing I was responsible for killing your daughter." His face was contorted with pain.

"Kent, you did not kill my daughter." Sam Lane's voice was stern. He did not like the path this conversation was going down — it made him uneasy. As much as he'd like to be ticked off at his son-in-law for keeping such a valuable secret from them — especially since they were family — he knew anything he said could provoke a worse reaction. Besides, he believed the boy was truly distraught over this — that much was clear.

"Well I sure as hell didn't save her."

Sam's eyes widened, but Ellen was the one who spoke. "Clark, you made Lois happy. Do you think that if she knew the future she would have thought for one second that she didn't want to have that baby? It was as much her choice as it was yours. You wouldn't have changed it even if you wanted to. You should be happy just knowing Lois was happy — no, grateful, to have you as a loving husband, right up to the end. Nothing else matters, except that she was happy."

Clark looked like he had been hit with a ton of bricks. That hurt more than anything. They had been happy. For a moment he felt a pang of guilt over what he wanted to do. But then he felt the anger and pain swell within him once again. To think that Lois was happy... and to be miserable and in pain... that made the fact that she died at such a time of happiness so much worse. She deserved so much better than that, better than him. He didn't deserve to have such a noble, perfect, wonderful woman. He was a miserable, decrepit creature that couldn't handle this sort of pain. He was weakest when he was strong, vulnerable when he shouldn't have been, grounded in reality when he should have been high above the clouds.

"You're right, Ellen. She was happy. I didn't deserve a woman like Lois. I never did, and I never will."

"Don't be ridiculous, Clark. If there ever was a person who

deserved my daughter, it was you. I wouldn't have parted with her for anyone else — especially not now, knowing you're Superman. I didn't think anyone could possibly be more deserving than you, just being Clark Kent. But for God's sakes, boy, you're Superman!" The inflections in Sam Lane's tone proved he was still surprised by the revelation.

"No, sir. I'm not."

"What?"

"I'm not Superman. Superman is a myth. Soon enough Superman will go the path of legends, and the world will forget about him as they forget about everyone. Only time will tell..."

"Clark -" Sam began, but the Man of Steel cut him off.

"I didn't come here to be comforted, or hear people tell me it's not my fault. I don't care if it is or not anymore. I just came by to apologize, and to give you my thanks."

"Thanks? For what?"

"For raising a magnificent woman that I couldn't possibly have ever deserved, and for staying by my side when all of this happened. I'm sorry things turned out this way." Clark turned to the open balcony, and stood on the edge of it, looking out briefly, not bothering to change his outfit.

Ellen and Sam were equally flabbergasted. "What do you mean?" Ellen whispered, her fear evident in her tone and her eyes.

Clark turned back for a moment, locking eyes with her. And in that moment she knew exactly what was running through his mind, where he was going with this. It was as clear as day, and more obvious than Superman's brightly colored outfit — no, disguise. It was a disguise, after all.

"Clark, don't you dare. We love you, your parents love you, everyone who has ever known you in either the form of Clark or Superman has loved you. Lois wouldn't want you to do this. Please," she grabbed his hand as she approached him, noticing how limp and cold he felt. It was as if he really didn't care anymore — he had no strength, no will to live. She knew she couldn't stop him, even if she wanted to — nobody could, he was Superman. But it didn't hurt to try. "Please, don't do this."

The pained look in his dark brown eyes spoke volumes. "I'm so sorry," Clark whispered. Gently removing her grip from his arm, he stepped back and jumped from the balcony, flying away at an easy pace, without so much as a glance backwards.

Ellen slumped down to the floor, a wail escaping from her as she did so. Her ex-turned-new husband raced up to her, and upon realizing he couldn't stop her tears, just pulled her into a warm, firm embrace. He couldn't believe it, any of it. It wasn't possible. His son-in-law was Superman — and he was suicidal. The thought was scary of its own accord — the fact that he was Superman made it terrifying.

"We have to follow him," Sam said, voice firm. "We can't let him do this, he doesn't know what he's thinking right now, he'll pull through it. He's Superman."

Through her sobs, he heard his wife mutter, "He didn't even change. He flew off without bothering with the cape and the boots thing." Sam gripped her tighter. He had noticed that, too.

"C'mon," he gently pulled her to her feet, and went to search for his car keys. "We've gotta find him." The phone rang at that second, provoking a growl from the doctor before he begrudgingly picked it up. "Hello?" He hoped his voice didn't sound too shaken.

"Sam? Has Clark been by yet?"

He recognized Perry White's voice immediately, and what's more, he recognized the fear in it. "Yeah, he just left here a little less than a minute ago. Ellen and I are going to go follow him."

He heard Perry swear into the receiver. "We're looking for him, too. Where are you heading first?"

"I figured their apartment would be best. But we might be too late already. He was pretty reckless when he left here."

“How reckless? Did he walk into public without his glasses disguise like he did at the Planet?”

Sam grimaced. “Worse. He flew off our balcony in plainclothes.”

“Holy crap,” Sam heard Jimmy’s voice ring out in the background simultaneously as he heard Perry utter “Great shades of Elvis. We gotta find him, fast. We’re almost at his apartment right now — where else do you think we should try if he doesn’t show?”

“I’m thinking the only other places he would do this is at the Daily Planet — which he wouldn’t do, knowing you were looking for him — or maybe at Lois’s old apartment. Ellen and I were just talking about it the other day — it’s up for lease again. Or STAR Labs, maybe, but that’s less likely.”

“Not if he needs kryptonite to help him do the job. That’s about the only place that has it nowadays.”

Sam paled. “Can you call ahead to Star Labs and get them to lock down on their supply of kryptonite, and be on full alert for Superman? Ellen and I will be over there in a minute. Call me on my cell.”

“Will do.” They both hung up simultaneously, Ellen realizing as they got in the car just what it was they were doing, what the gravity of the situation was. They had to go save a superhero from his most dangerous enemy: himself.

Clark glided through the skies effortlessly, lazily, enjoying the feeling of his clothes and hair ruffling through the breeze. It had been such a long time since he’d flown this way... about five years, in fact. He relished the feeling, not caring that people were beginning to point and stare at him out of shock and curiosity. He was a free man. Free from the world, from everything that had held him here previously.

He checked his watch. He had about thirty minutes until the email sent. He smiled briefly, sadly, wondering how his parents would feel to learn of what he did. A sharp pang stabbed at his heart — but he only felt it momentarily.

He softly landed on the balcony to their — no, his — apartment. Lois was gone now. It was just his. And it wouldn’t even be that for long. The rooms were no more his than they would be the next family’s after they left. It was just an apartment.

No. It was more than that. Clark gazed around the room for a moment, drinking in the sight of his home — their home; it would always be their home. Briefly his eyes wandered to the shut door in the back, where he had locked it up briefly after Lois and the baby had died. Coming to a decision, Clark approached it, hesitating only slightly as he neared it. But then he steeled himself, and gripping the handle firmly, he tore the door off its hinges and stepped inside.

It looked just as it had when he had bolted it up. The walls were painted a bright, baby blue, with red curtains and pale yellow bedding in the crib. The bassinet was in there, too, white and lacy — and very empty. Clark released a sob as he surveyed the nursery. His child was supposed to be in this room, his son. Lois was supposed to be standing next to him, gazing fondly over the edge of the bassinet — or maybe he’d have grown into the crib by now, Clark didn’t know. And he never would.

He walked back into his bedroom and unlocked a drawer in his closet that held the key to his happiness. He pulled out the lead box and walked with it over to his kitchen. Pulling out a bottle of vodka, Clark poured himself a glass, almost full, leaving just enough room to add the necessary touch. He removed a vial of green liquid from the lead box, which sat open now. His head throbbed with a dull pain now. As he poured the contents of the vial into his glass, he took one last look at his old home.

Clark raised his glass as in the manner of a toast. “Goodbye, everyone.”

He drained the glass in one draught.

Perry pounded the keys on his cell phone as fast as he could, trying to get hold of Sam Lane as they ran up the stairs to Clark Kent’s apartment home. *Come on, pick up...* his prayers were answered on the second ring.

“Hello?” the voice came over, worried.

“Sam, don’t bother with STAR Labs.”

“Why not?”

“Dr. Klein said they had a break-in a little less than two weeks ago. Some kryptonite was stolen. He said they told Superman about it, but he brushed it off, like he wasn’t too worried. Something tells me Clark knows a little more about that than he let on.”

“Two weeks ago? He’s had it that long?”

“Apparently. We’re at his apartment now, I think he’s here. I heard a bunch of noise earlier — chances are, it’s him, and he’s... um, flew in through his apartment window or something. Why don’t you two head over here?”

“All right — hold him off for as long as possible.”

They hung up just as Perry and Jimmy reached the door.

Perry pounded his fist against it firmly. “Clark? Clark! Open this door, Clark! Let us in, or we’ll break it down and force our way in. Clark Kent, don’t you do this!” Vaguely in the background, Perry could make out the sound of a television on — it must have been loud, these walls were pretty thick. Unless he was using the noise to try to cover up some other sound... “KENT! OPEN THE DOOR!”

Perry was more than surprised when the door swung open, and he stumbled through it, running straight into Clark’s muscular form. Perry raised his eyes upward to look him in the face, as if he wasn’t quite sure this was really him.

“Clark?” he spluttered. The nod he got affirmed it. “Oh, thank God! Clark, don’t you do that to us! You had us all scared for you, son. Wh-what...” his voice trailed off as he entered the apartment, followed closely by a very silent Jimmy. Perry took in the tv, the empty alcohol bottle and glass, and the lead box with one swift glance. “What’s all this?” His heart sunk as he saw the contents of the box: inside was a gun sitting next to a pure, sickly green dagger. Perry didn’t need to ask what made it glow green.

He turned with a look of horror to face the young reporter. Clark, in turn, lightly shut his eyes in an effort to avoid his boss’s horror-stricken gaze and calm his own racing heart. He released a slow breath of air, finally opening his eyes to see Perry holding up the gun in one hand and the knife in the other.

“I’m sorry, Perry.”

“Sorry? Clark, how’s this even supposed to work? I mean, yeah, I get the knife, but the gun? Doesn’t really seem like it would, you know, do anything. Not that I’m saying it should, but — ”

“It’s loaded with kryptonite bullets. STAR Labs keeps them on hand, just in case.”

Perry whitened at both the statement and the cavalier way Clark had just spoken about it. Finally, for what seemed to Perry to be the first time all day, Jimmy spoke up. “How could you scare us like that, Clark? How could you even think of doing something like this to us? You sick alien scum! How could you treat your friends and family so horribly — how could you be so horribly selfish as to even think such a thing?”

Clark visibly flinched with every harsh word that exploded from Jimmy’s mouth. He suddenly felt very sick — he hadn’t realized what the effect might have on Jimmy, what it might do to everyone around him. If he had known it, he hadn’t listened to that voice of reason. Lois was his hold on reality, and since she was gone, Clark hadn’t found himself in a reasonable state of mind in a long time. Jimmy was like a younger brother to him — he didn’t want to lose his respect, or worse, for him to ever do

anything rash that might lead him to make Clark's same mistakes. Suddenly Clark felt his stomach wrench in pain at the thought. Or maybe it was the kryptonite.

Then Jimmy's fist connected with his jaw. Unexpectedly. Clark whirled as a sharp pain shot through him, and he managed to regain his balance dizzily. He stumbled backwards and leaned heavily against the countertop, trying with some notable effort to catch his breath.

He had never been punched before, really. Not like that — out of the blue. Not where it had any real effect on him.

Jimmy seemed to realize it at the same moment Clark had. He had just punched Superman. And Superman had fallen. His eyes widened. "C-Clark?" His voice was faint.

Clark opened his mouth to speak, but instead found himself bending over, retching and heaving. Too much pain. He collapsed to his knees, coughing up bile mixed slightly with his own blood. But what worried him more was the fact that it was greenish in hue. Green like the kryptonite, with a slight glow like it, too. When he finally was able to stop himself and catch his breath, his eyes were wide and full of fear.

"Clark," Perry's voice was barely above a whisper, and Clark had to take the effort to strain his ears to hear it. "What have you done?"

He looked up at Perry and Jimmy with eyes full of sorrow and misery. Tears leaked freely from them, both from being sick and the reality of the situation. "I'm so sorry," he repeated, voice nothing more than a quiet rasp.

Perry and Jimmy looked at him with horror. Perry shook it off first. "Clark, it's all right. There's still time. All we need to do is get you to a hospital, maybe pump out your stomach — something, anything. I'm sure they can get it out of your system — look, maybe you take an emetic or something, and it'll be over with soon enough. It doesn't have to be this way — Jimmy, get on the cell, call 911. Clark, you need help. Come on, we'll get you some water and wait for an ambulance to come —"

"Perry," Clark sighed his name. "It's all right. It's too late." He blindly grabbed for the empty vial on the countertop and pressed it into his boss's hand firmly. "It's too late," he repeated. "I'm... so sorry."

Perry didn't need to read the label on the vial to know what it was he was being handed. "Clark? Clark, no, don't do this — you know it's a mistake."

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, Perry. So, so sorry..."

"Clark! Stay with me. You're gonna pull through this — you've been through a lot worse than this before — you still owe me an article by tomorrow morning, remember?"

"Perry," the pain and fear was evident in his eyes. Superman's eyes. Perry shuddered. Clark's voice was unnervingly calm. "Give me the gun," he pleaded.

"No! Clark, did you just learn nothing from this situation? I'm not giving you the gun! Or the knife for that matter!"

"You would let me... suffer through all this... I gave myself options... for a reason. Please, just let me go —"

"NO! Jimmy! Where's that ambulance? At least ask what we should do in the meantime!"

Meanwhile, in the background, Jimmy could be heard speaking into the phone loudly, sounding as though he were on the verge of tears — or biting someone's head off. "Hello? Yes, we need an ambulance down here as fast as possible, we're at 348... um, Hyperion Avenue — what's the emergency? My friend's just poisoned himself, we need someone down here A.S.A.P if he's gonna live... yes, he did it to himself — why should that matter? ... I understand that, but my friend's in serious trouble... no, I don't think Superman will get here in time... yes, that's Clark Kent's house... yes, he's the one who's dying in here, now would you please send an ambulance... all right, then, what can we do in the meantime to help... what's the

poison? Uh..." he shot a panicked look over to his boss who looked just as nervous.

"FOR GOD'S SAKE! CALL IT WHAT IT IS! IT'S KRYPTONITE!" Clark's voice echoed through the room, loud enough for the person on the other end of the receiver to hear him.

"I'm sorry. Did he just say Kryptonite?"

Jimmy winced. "Y-yes. It is kryptonite. It was, um, in liquid form, and he drank it, I assume. What should we do for him?"

"Sir, this service is for serious emergencies only. Unless your friend is Superman, I'm afraid I'm going to have to disconnect your call. You should not be pulling pranks on 911 operatives—"

"HE IS SUPERMAN!" Jimmy screamed into the phone.

"And unless you want to be personally held responsible for the death of a superhero and mentioned by name in tomorrow's edition of the Daily Planet, I'd suggest you get all help possible and now! Have I made myself clear?"

Perry and Clark both looked at Jimmy with surprise. Perry had no doubt that this boy would one day be running the Daily Planet, and his heart swelled with pride. Clark's did too, but he found his mind occupied with more pressing matters. Finding Perry distracted, he took advantage of the moment and scrambled for the gun sitting on the coffee table in the living room.

Jimmy had continued listening to the woman on the other end of the line when he saw Clark make a break for the weapon. "Clark! NO!" Jimmy launched himself towards the culprit, and tackled him to the ground a couple of feet away from the gun. Wrestling him to the ground, Clark let out a frustrated and pained shout as Jimmy pinned him there, wishing he had enough strength in him to toss Jimmy aside and reach his goal.

Perry took over the phone call. "I apologize for that, ma'am. What is it you think we should do about him... ? Yes, Perry White, editor in chief of the Daily Planet... No, ma'am, I'm afraid the situation is quite serious... look, miss, miss — please. I already have a suicidal superhero on my hands, I don't need you hyperventilating too. Just walk me through what we should do like you would with any other patient. Should we use an emetic or something... ? All right, we'll start with that. Please stay on the line with us... thank you."

At that moment Lois's parents burst into the room, finding the things going on inside quite chaotic. The door to what would have been the nursery was ripped off its hinges, Perry was talking to a 911 operator on the phone, and Jimmy was struggling to keep Clark pinned to the ground.

Sam did a double take. Clark was pinned to the ground. And the more Sam looked at him, the more he realized how terrible Clark looked. From a doctor's standpoint, Sam knew something was wrong just by Clark's facial features — though the fact that Superman was being held to the ground by a squirrely looking photographer should have been a tip right off the bat. He heard Perry mention something about an emetic, and he put two and two together.

Clark had poisoned himself.

"Clark," his wife's voice was breathy to match her shocked expression.

Sam cleared his throat and easily took charge, the doctor in him coming to the fore. "Jimmy, stand back. I can take care of him." He turned to his son-in-law, hoping to death that he really could take care of him. "Clark, what have you done?" he muttered, more to himself than anyone else. But Clark heard it anyway.

"I already... said my good byes... please just let me go. Let me be... with Lois." He struggled to wrench himself free from Jimmy and his father-in-law's grasps, breathing heavily.

"I can't let you do that. You know I can't. And I know how unfair life's been to you — but can't you think for one second about everybody else? Don't you think it's been hard on me, and

Ellen, and Perry and Jimmy? How is the world going to manage without you?"

"The world lived without me for years before I ever came onto the scene. I always knew I shouldn't get their hopes up."

"Think about us then. Don't you have any idea how hard it must have been on us to bury our own daughter?"

Sam immediately recognized the mistake he made with the flash of hurt that entered into Clark's eyes. Wrong words. "Yes, Sam. I know exactly how it feels to bury one's own children. And to bury one's wife. In the same day, in fact. And it's hell."

Another fit of coughing and vomiting accompanied this, which shook Clark's entire body.

Sam's heart plummeted at his words, but he forced himself to look at it through the eyes of a doctor to his patient. "Jimmy, where's that emetic?" He hollered just as Jimmy raced back in with the medicine. Sam reached over for the medicine and, applying more than the necessary dosage, tried to force Clark to drink it — but the man's mouth remained firmly shut.

Clark pressed his eyes shut as firmly as his mouth. He wasn't called the Man of Steel for nothing. Sam's words about losing a child provided him with just enough willpower to remain staunchly determined to fulfill his purpose. He struggled against his father-in-law, channelling all of his power.

Sam didn't realize what he was doing until he was already four feet off the ground.

"Ah!" He allowed a brief scream to escape his lips as he toppled off of his son-in-law and onto the floor. "Clark, you get back here!"

When Clark was sure he was well out of arm's reach for any of them, he opened his eyes. "No. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, for all of you. But I can't stay here." He glided gently over towards the balcony, and looked hesitantly over it. He saw the approaching lights and sirens as the pulled up to his apartment building.

Perry watched his friend, reporter, and who he'd proudly call his second son as he floated gently above the balcony, the red and blue lights playing on his complexion alternately. In the colored lights, which reminded Perry slightly of Superman's — Clark's — costume, he saw the raw emotion on his face, the haggard sharpness which defined his features. Perry listened intently as Clark briefly shut his eyes once again, hearing the pounding of footsteps coming up the staircase, approaching the door to apartment, then bursting in. The paramedics and police officers crowded behind them in the room, but when they saw Clark, floating there, contemplating the jump, silence engulfed them once more.

Glancing back at their faces, Clark didn't care that he now had a captive audience. All that mattered were the four people in front, who stood there pleading him silently with their eyes. Begging him not to do this.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed, throat dry.

"Clark, no!" Jimmy's voice could be heard ringing out across the apartment.

Clark jumped over the edge, dropping several feet through the air before wobbling and balancing out. Drat. He'd thought that would be it for him. He flew through the sky, oblivious to the shell-shocked state in which he left his apartment as they watched Clark Kent fly off somewhat drunkenly. He didn't get more than ten blocks away before he came crashing down to the ground, surprising several passersby as he fell. He had clipped a tree on his way down, and torn his dress shirt so that the Superman suit shown through just a little bit, as well as having a slight trickle of blood on his temple from a branch. He made for a quite disturbing sight as he lay there, groaning and wheezing.

Clark coughed up some more blood as he struggled to his feet. Several pairs of arms wrapped around him, reaching out to help him. Once he stood, however, he brushed them all off.

One of the women standing near him had her jaw hanging

open and mouthed, "S-Superman?"

"Are you all right, Superman?"

"What are you wearing?"

"Superman, what happened?"

Clark struggled to regain his bearings as the questions swirled around him. He raised a hand to his forehead briefly. Finally he spoke. "Um, does anybody have a cell phone I can borrow?"

The man nearest to him handed over his quickly, eyes wide.

"Here," then he added shakily, "Are you okay Superman?"

"No. I'm not... okay. For the record, I'm wearing my clothes... and you can read about what happened... in tomorrow's edition of the Daily Planet. Now please," his voice broke on the word, "Please... just leave me in peace. You can stay," he pointed to the man who lent him his phone. "I'll be done with this... in a second... But as for everyone else, I would appreciate... my privacy, thank you." Several people dispersed, a few walked only a short distance away. Clark didn't care. He flipped open the phone and dialed the number he knew by heart — which he would have known regardless of his eidetic memory.

The phone picked up on the third ring. "Hello?"

"Mom?"

"Clark? What's wrong? You sound strange — you're not hurt, are you? Are you all right?"

"Mom, calm down, please. Is Dad there?"

"I'm right here Clark. I always am, you know that."

"Just... I'm just calling to tell you... that no matter what happens... I want you to know... that I... I love you guys." Tears stung at his eyes once more, and then he briefly spat up some more fluids.

"Clark?" His mother's voice sounded terrified. "Clark, what's going on? What are you talking about? Are you with anyone right now? You know I don't like it when you talk like that."

"Clark, go to Perry or Jimmy or Lois's parents or something," his father's voice sounded strong, but he couldn't completely eliminate the fear from it. He hated when Clark pulled these calls on them. "Everything will work out fine. You'll see. Just wait, be patient —"

"I'm sorry, Dad. I'm really, so, so sorry, to both of you." With his next set of coughs, Clark knelt onto the hard cement beneath him, holding the phone up with one hand as he braced himself with the other. Clark sniffed and briefly wiped his face on his sleeve before returning to speak in the phone. "I'm so sorry. I love you guys. No matter what happens, you know that, right?"

"Clark? What's happened? What did you do?"

"Why are you coughing so much? Clark, please, don't let this happen—"

"You need medical attention, son. Where are you now?"

"Clark — don't you do this. Don't talk like that. It's all gonna be okay — just talk to somebody—"

"I'm... in the middle of... a street. There's people... here. They see... they know what's happening to me."

"CLARK JEROME KENT. You need to call 911. Now"

"No," he mumbled. "Perry already did... I ran from them..." another fit of coughing and spewing, this one more violent than the last. Finally, he whispered his last words to them. "I'm so sorry. I love you."

Clark let the phone clatter to the ground as he wretched once more onto the sidewalk. God, how was it even possible to vomit this much? Was it just part of having superpowers — super-sickness, too? His head ached, his stomach ached, his whole body ached all over.

The man whose phone Clark had used scrambled wide-eyed to pick up his mobile device and pressed it to his ear frantically. "Hello? My name is Frank, Superman just borrowed my phone, and now he's puking on the ground — what should I do?"

Clark's shouts of pain covered over the noise of the phone, and the man switched it over to speaker phone so he could hear

better. “I’m sorry. What did you say?”

“SAVE HIM. Have someone call 911, they should have been nearby — he said he flew away from the paramedics once already — please just save him. Save my baby boy. Please!”

“I’m sorry, who are you?” the man asked, confused, as he gestured for someone else to call 911.

“I’m his mother. Now please, *please* help him. He must have some kryptonite in him — are there any open wounds?”

Frank stood, floored at this knowledge. “N-not really. He has a scratch on his face, but it doesn’t look... infected. He keeps... throwing up. I don’t think that’s normal, is it?”

He heard the woman’s voice beginning to hyperventilate at the same time as a man’s voice began to swear. “He’s ingested it, Martha. What are we supposed to do?”

“I DON’T KNOW! I DIDN’T PREPARE FOR THIS! I NEVER THOUGHT OUR SON WOULD *ACTUALLY TRY* TO COMMIT SUICIDE!”

Frank’s throat went dry as he watched the superhero’s heavings decrease and listened to the arguing over the phone. “Suicide?” he whispered. He reeled. In the distance he heard the sirens approaching, noticing with increasing nervousness how still Superman had become.

“AH!” The hero collapsed to the ground and rolled onto his back, letting his eyes slip shut against the pain, against the world. All of the noises began to fade out in Clark’s ears, to be replaced by a steady sort of throbbing of blood in his eardrums. His chocolate brown eyes flickered open for a moment to meet the stare of his helper, who gazed down at him with a look of sheer terror. Briefly he noticed the crowd around him, all staring with a similar expression of fear and worry. He pointed to the phone, which the man brought nearer to him. “Mom... Dad,” he breathed. “I can’t... I miss her... too much... I love you... I’m... so...s-sor-ry...”

Clark’s last sight was the shock of the crowd at his words and a group of policemen breaking through the ranks of the crowd, headed up by Bill Henderson. A flash of recognition passed through the Inspector, and Clark could only manage to shake his head lightly before shutting the sight of the world out of his eyes forever.

Perry White held his head in his hands, occasionally rubbing at his eyes hard. Jimmy sat next to him, completely silent. Both men stared blankly ahead, contemplating the subject matter at hand.

Perry just couldn’t believe what had happened. It was insanity. Clark had poisoned himself, tried to shoot himself, jumped off his balcony, and flew away, hoping to die in peace, away from them, from their questions and the guilt. To try to die without interference. He shut his eyes briefly. Clark had kept his promise about one thing.

He hadn’t tried to commit suicide. He had succeeded.

Tears flowed from his ducts, but Perry couldn’t care less who saw him. The whole world was in mourning — he especially, of all people, shouldn’t be worried about what people might think.

Sam and Ellen stood in the corner of the hospital waiting room — cleared out just for the friends and family of Clark Kent — Sam’s arms cradling his wife’s sobbing form once more. They had all cried at some point or another. And Sam knew the crying would only continue with the arrival of the Kents from Smallville. They had gotten on the first flight out of there, the second they had heard the police arrive and take Clark away.

They had tried everything, done everything they thought possible to save the Man of Steel, but it was too late for him. Inspector Henderson declared he had died before they even reached the hospital — more likely, he had died the moment after they got to the scene. No matter how many lifesaving procedures they managed to perform — let alone if they was performed

successfully — there was no hope for him. The kryptonite had affected him irreversibly, and there was no bringing him back to life.

Jimmy had never felt more depressed in his life. First Lois died, along with Lois and Clark’s baby boy, and now Clark kills himself. And to top it all off, he not only killed himself, but he killed Superman. Talk about two birds with one stone — he had taken out two flying men with one radioactive chunk of rock. Jimmy didn’t think metaphors came any closer to the truth than that.

By the time the Kents arrived, it had sunk in for all of them. Superman was dead. Clark Kent had killed him. A literal double suicide.

Tears and grief abounded — and throughout it all, Perry White found himself shouldering an immense burden — one that he wasn’t sure anyone else felt, except perhaps Jimmy.

They all could grieve. Perry had to print this.

He was acutely, painfully aware of the situation, but he couldn’t ignore something like this: it was more than newsworthy — it was perhaps the next story of the century. And the Daily Planet had to stay on top of the news — especially considering the amount of inside information they had regarding the situation. Nor did Perry believe for one second that he couldn’t publish that Clark Kent wasn’t Superman. It had to be everywhere by now — he flew around in his regular clothes, spoke to his parents on the phone with everyone watching... but Perry didn’t want to put any of his friends or family into a more awkward situation.

While the two sets of parents grieved together, Perry decided to broach the topic with Jimmy. He only hoped the kid would hold up all right. “Jimmy,” he began, “I know it’s a terrible thing to be thinking about at a time like this, but...”

“What do we print?” A slight, wry smile worked its way over Jimmy’s lips.

Perry smiled. Jimmy would make a great newsman yet. “Yeah. Exactly. I mean, I’m not exactly in the mood to dedicate an entire newspaper to Clark Kent right now, but we can’t not acknowledge it.”

Jimmy seemed to think about it for a moment, mulling over the options in his head. Finally, he spoke. “We go with the original source, Chief. We’re gonna run Clark’s obituary, the way he wrote it. Then maybe tack on an additional few paragraphs about last night’s events, with a little bit more insight than any other paper could have, without compromising ourselves or the Kents or Lanes too much. Stick it on the front page, and run it in the morning edition. If anyone else wants to write more up for tomorrow, let them, and run it. But we’re the source material — we could print things about him from now until the end of the world. Nobody’s gonna challenge us.”

Perry’s heart swelled with pride, even in such a sad time. Tears threatened to spill over once again, and Perry’s voice sounded gruff when it came out. “Thank you, Jimmy. You’re a great journalist, and a great friend.”

Jimmy smiled despite his sadness. He didn’t know which thrilled him more — the fact that Perry White had just called the young photographer a journalist, something he’d been striving to achieve from day one at the Planet, or the fact that he’d called him his friend. “Thanks, Chief,” he whispered. Perry patted him on the shoulder good-naturedly, and they both turned their attention back to the scene at hand.

THE END