

Enduring Power

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Rated: PG

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Summary: The love between Lois and Clark is stronger and more powerful than anything else in this world, or beyond.

Author Note: This story is dedicated to Chaise, the most important person in the world to me and the kindest, sweetest, most amazing soul the world has ever known, who was killed in April 2005.

CJ, you're always in my heart and I'll love you forever.

Lois Lane was the luckiest woman in the world. She was married to the sweetest man on this or any planet, Clark Kent. Her wonderful husband had given up the story of a lifetime, one practically guaranteed to net him a Pulitzer Prize, all for her when she fell ill after lunch at little café. Without a second thought about the story or the Pulitzer, Clark took her home. When they arrived, he scooped Lois up in his arms and carried her through the house up to bed.

Clark spent the next few hours tending to Lois and doing everything in his power to help her feel better until he heard a cry for help. Despite Lois' assurances that she would be fine on her own and that someone else needed him more than she did right now, he still felt guilty about leaving her while she was so sick.

After a moment of hesitation Clark spun into the bold red and blue spandex suit of his superhero persona and vanished, filling the room with a blast of wind. Watching her husband spin in and out of the Suit usually thrilled her, but today the whirlwind blur had a very different effect on her. The motion threw her stomach into a tailspin, and moments later she flew out of bed and raced to the bathroom.

Lois sat on the floor of the master bathroom by the toilet dispelling the contents of her stomach for an inordinate length of time before it finally settled enough for her to return to bed. Warily Lois rose to her feet and slowly made her way back to the bedroom. It seemed much further than usual, and when she reached the bed, Lois collapsed onto its surface, hoping that her nausea wouldn't drive her back to the bathroom for the rest of the afternoon.

A short time later Clark returned from the rescue that had called him away earlier, and as he entered the bedroom he spoke. "Hey Honey. Are you feeling any better?"

"Not really," Lois answered, not having the energy to say anything more.

Settling in bed next to his wife, Clark pulled Lois into his warm embrace and kissed the base of her neck. Her nausea didn't subside any, but Lois instantly felt better. Clark always had that effect on her, and she managed a small smile.

As the day wore on Lois remained in bed, too ill to be on her feet. She only ever got out of bed when her nausea bubbled to the surface and drew her into the bathroom. In her weakened state Clark was able to get her to agree to see a doctor in the morning.

Sunset followed by night finally fell after an extremely long, tiring day, and Lois hoped for a night of uninterrupted sleep. She was absolutely exhausted and sick of the nausea that kept her fighting and not always succeeding in keeping the contents of her stomach where they belonged. She was ready for this day to be

over.

Lois had tried to sleep all day unsuccessfully, but just a few minutes in Clark's arms lulled her into a blissful slumber. She didn't stay asleep for very long though. However it wasn't nausea that woke her. What yanked her from her peaceful dream was a loud crash, a crash that came from *inside* the house. Someone had broken into her home!

Immediately Lois realized that Clark's side of the bed was unoccupied. It wasn't all that unusual for Lois to wake up alone. It had happened several times before when Superman needed to make a night rescue but never when a rescue was needed in their own home.

Tossing the covers aside, Lois jumped out of bed and grabbed the nearest object she could use as a weapon and silently walked downstairs toward the source of the crash. It was too dark to see much of anything, but she was able to tell that the living room was in shambles, furniture was overturned and broken. What she couldn't see however was the intruder. Lois didn't want to call for help and alert the intruder of her presence. Instead hoping to catch the intruder off-guard, Lois quickly flipped the light on one of the lamps that wasn't shattered into tiny little pieces and scattered all over the floor. The sight that greeted her when the room filled with a soft glow absolutely terrified her.

A very familiar form dressed in red and blue lie crumpled on the floor. Unable to stand Lois realized something was very, very wrong.

"Clark!" Lois screamed, a crippling panic coating her voice.

With speed that could almost be described as super, Lois sprinted to his side and dropped to the floor. Lois lifted Clark's head into her lap, and she instantly grasped the severity of his condition. The first thing she noticed was that he was barely conscious. His skin was devoid of all color, hot to the touch and dripping with perspiration. Most worrisome of all was that he was fighting for every breath. Between each gasp for breath there was a period of time lasting several seconds during which he seemed to stop breathing altogether.

Lois' eyes filled with moisture, drowning them in a sea of unshed tears. When the pools in her eyes could hold no more, a tear carved a steam of anguish on her face as it flowed down her cheeks. Then like a dripping faucet the tear fell from her face to land with an imperceptible splash on Clark's cheek. As a second tear followed the pathway created by the first, Lois wiped the tear on Clark's cheek by gently stroking his face with the back of her hand.

Clark responded to her touch and tried to speak, barely managing to whisper Lois' name.

"Clark? What happened?"

"Kryptonite," Clark managed to say weakly. Clark continued slowly, pausing between his words, as he tried to maintain consciousness, "I... think... it's... on... my... skin."

A look of horror spread across Lois' face when Clark mentioned Kryptonite. She knew she had to do something right away. She couldn't lose Clark. Not now. Not like this.

Acting quickly Lois mustered all of her strength to get Clark on his feet. However he was far too heavy for her, especially while she was sick. "Clark we need to get you upstairs, but I can't do it on my own. You're going to have to help me okay?"

With great effort and the help of Lois, Clark managed to get to his feet. Once he was on his feet Lois wrapped Clark's arm around her neck and wrapped her arm around his waist. Leaning heavily on Lois for support, they moved very slowly across the living room, up the stairs, and on into the bathroom from there.

If what Clark said about the Kryptonite was true, then she needed to get him in the shower to wash it off. When Lois began helping Clark remove the Suit, something caught her eye that she had missed before. The Suit was ripped and had holes in several places. For a moment the sight of the torn suit paralyzed Lois as

her mind conjured up terrible images of her husband suffering. A groan of intense pain snapped Lois back to reality, and she continued to help Clark shed the spandex suit as quickly as possible.

Lois, with a little assistance from Clark got the suit off and tossed it on the floor. She continued to support Clark, who could barely stand under his own power, as he entered the shower and turned the water on for him. After keeping a close eye on Clark to make sure he didn't collapse, Lois grabbed the suit off the floor. She had to get rid of it. Clark had been exposed to Kryptonite and brought it home with him. The suit was probably covered in Kryptonite, even if she couldn't see it. The suit was damaged anyway, so she wasn't going to take any chances. She would get it far away from Clark and destroy it. He had plenty of other suits, and Martha could always make him a new one.

When Lois returned after disposing of the suit, Clark was out of the shower and dressed for bed. He was looking better than he had when she first found him lying on the living room floor. He was able to stand and walk without help, but she could tell that he still wasn't quite himself.

Relief immediately washed over Lois. She rushed to Clark's side and threw her arms around him, resting her head against his chest as she cried. "Oh Clark, I thought I'd lost you."

Clark responded to Lois' tears by taking a step back and lifting her chin to look in her eyes. As he gently brushed away her tears with his thumb he softly spoke, "You haven't lost me."

Clark then brought Lois' face toward his until their lips met in a kiss that caused everything else to fade away. Lois melted into Clark's kiss and for a while she forgot about both Clark's and her own less-than-healthy condition. She was transported to a world that consisted only of Clark, herself, and the perfect love they had for each other.

Their lips parted just enough to let a sliver of air pass between them, but their magnetism drew them back together only a moment later. Lois and Clark went into the second kiss with a smile, and Lois wrapped her arms around Clark's neck. Clark in turn wrapped his arms around Lois' waist, pulling her to his chest to feel her heartbeat against his own.

The kiss ended when Lois and Clark's respective states of ill health made their presence known. Both feeling quite weak now, they supported each other as they walked slowly toward the bed. Neither was sure who was doing most of the work, but Lois felt like she had all of Clark's weight on her shoulders. The few steps to the bed seemed like a never-ending journey as she struggled to put one foot in front of the other.

For several moments Lois and Clark laid on the bed silently without moving. But Lois wasn't able to stay quiet for long, especially when one horrible, chilling word kept ringing in her ears, 'Kryptonite'.

"Clark, what happened tonight?"

Clark's story began with a bank alarm that pulled him from his slumber. He didn't get much further into the story when it had to be put on hold for Lois, who suddenly felt the turmoil in her stomach rise yet again, forcing her dash off to the bathroom for what felt like the hundredth time since lunch. She returned a few minutes later, but Clark wasn't able to continue his story quite yet.

When Lois resettled in bed she made a startling comment. "I knew I shouldn't have eaten that Double Fudge Crunch bar before bed."

Briefly Clark wondered if maybe the Kryptonite exposure was affecting his ears beyond his super-hearing capabilities. For Lois to be complaining about chocolate she had to be very sick, especially when that chocolate was her favorite candy bar. She was definitely going to that doctor in the morning.

After a minute to let Lois recover, Clark resumed relaying the events of the bank robbery he had left in the middle of the night

to stop. He told her about how this would-be bank robber had been more prepared than most. In addition to bringing a gun to stop any security guards or police officers who might try to stop him, he had also brought along a small explosive device that contained Kryptonite to stop Superman should he show up at the bank.

The mention of a Kryptonite bomb sent Lois into a state of extreme distress. Clark lovingly placed his hand on Lois' cheek to assuage her fears and explained that the crude bomb had been defective and had not exploded properly. Only a small percentage of the Kryptonite contained in the already small bomb had been released.

However that minuscule amount had surrounded and rained down on him, leaving him completely incapacitated, allowing the bank robber to make his escape. Clark continued quickly knowing the criminal's escape would worry her. "He didn't very far. As I was trying to go after him, I heard the police just outside the bank apprehend him."

Knowing that the man who used a Kryptonite bomb on Clark had been captured brought some relief to Lois, but the fact that her husband was still feeling its effects and stripped of his superpowers meant that some of the green poison had infiltrated his body. And that was a serious concern to her. Until all traces of the Kryptonite were out of his system and his powers were restored, she wasn't going to leave his side.

Clark finished telling Lois about what happened at the bank and his struggle to make it back home. Then with a quick kiss Clark said, "Don't worry. It's over now and I'm going to be okay."

Her husband may have told her not to worry, but that wasn't going to stop Lois from worrying about him all night and however long it took for him to become his super-powered self again. He had taken care of her earlier in the day, and now it was her turn to take care of him, even if she could still use being taken care of herself.

A stray, damp lock of hair on Clark's forehead caught Lois' eye as their kiss ended. Of its own accord her hand was drawn to brush the hair out of his face. As her hand swept across his forehead, Lois noticed that he was still a little warm.

Seeing Clark's fever as a chance to help ease his discomfort, Lois got out of bed to grab a cool washcloth. When Lois had again settled next to him in bed, she bent her hand down to kiss Clark's brow and draped the cool cloth against his skin. The small task was one of the few ways she could help Clark. She couldn't get the Kryptonite out of his system any faster, but she could try to make him more comfortable in the meantime.

The only other thing Lois could do for Clark was something he had done for her earlier, just be with him. Lois laid her head next to Clark's head and her hand on his chest.

Clark sighed in contentment and with strained effort turned his head slightly so that he could see Lois' face. "Do you think Perry will believe that we're both sick?"

"It would be a lot easier to believe if it wasn't our anniversary in two days. He'll probably think we're just getting an early start on celebrating."

The idea of starting their anniversary celebration a day early was an appealing one to Lois, if only she and Clark weren't *actually* sick. Maybe before the end of the day tomorrow they would feel better, and they could start their anniversary a few hours early. That would be nice too. Now that the idea was planted in her mind, Lois intended to make it a reality if she and Clark did indeed recover before the day was over. But sick or not, the day of their anniversary they would be celebrating their anniversary as planned.

"Yeah," was Clark's mumbled reply, clearly tired and half-asleep.

The room fell into a peaceful silence as Lois watched Clark

fall asleep in a matter of moments. While she listened to his even breathing, Lois stroked his face with the back of her hand and replayed the night's events in her head.

In her mind the images became more terrifying. Clark's words echoed in her ears, and her imagination painted a heart wrenching picture of her beloved husband lying on the floor of the bank vault, writhing in agony, coughing and gasping for every breath. She imagined him weakly whispering her name and calling for help he knew would never come.

Teardrops began falling on her pillow as she further realized just how close she had come to losing him, and the danger still loomed. Small traces of Kryptonite were still embedded in his skin. If the bomb had detonated as the bank robber had intended, Clark wouldn't be here right now. Lois reached up to her face wipe away the tears that continued to trickle from the corners of her eyes.

As if sensing her pain, Clark shifted in his sleep closer to Lois and wrapped his arm around her waist, holding her against his body. Slowly her tears began to dry up, and eventually her fears and worries dissipated enough that she was able to close her eyes and drift off back to sleep.

Morning arrived with dark skies that buried the sun behind thick gray clouds, and the rainstorm that arrived sometime during the night continued to fall over Metropolis. Without the sun it would be harder for Clark's body to battle the remnants of Kryptonite that had penetrated his skin when attempting to apprehend last night's bank robber.

Despite the lack of sun, Clark looked better this morning than he had last night, and his fever seemed to have broken, but his powers were still locked away, preventing his access to them. On the other hand Lois wasn't feeling any better than she had yesterday, if anything she felt worse. She barely had a moment to wake up before she was forced to sprint toward the now very familiar bathroom. This morning she also had a low-grade fever.

When Lois finally emerged from the bathroom, Clark had already gotten out of bed, dressed, and left the bedroom. She found him in the kitchen preparing breakfast.

"Do you feel like eating breakfast?" Clark asked when he saw her enter the room.

She was hungry, but the mere thought of food made her stomach churn. Lois shook her head as she sat at the table to watch Clark cook. "No, I don't think I could eat anything."

A short time later, Clark finished making breakfast and joined Lois at the table. "Are you sure you don't want anything?" he asked again, not wanting her to go hungry. Even without superpowers he could hear her stomach grumbling.

All of the food did look really good, and the taste she imagined it would have was even better. But her stomach still wasn't convinced. While her brain, with a little assistance from her taste buds, listed all the reasons why she *should* eat the food Clark had cooked, her stomach argued about all the reasons it was a bad idea. Finally the two warring organs reached a compromise when her stomach agreed that a piece of toast would be okay.

"Maybe just some toast," Lois said as she picked up a piece of the bread.

Following a few moments of eating in silence Clark spoke. "I called a cab to take you to the doctor. It'll be here in an hour."

"Clark, I can't leave you when you've been infected with Kryptonite."

"Lois, I'll be fine. I feel a lot better today. My powers will probably be back before the end of the day. But you need to go to the doctor."

She knew Clark was right, even if she wouldn't admit it. Clark was clearly recovering, slowly but recovering nonetheless. She on the other hand felt sicker than she had yesterday and made a mental note to never eat at that café again. She felt fine until she

had lunch there.

When the cab pulled up to the brownstone, Clark walked Lois out, holding the umbrella to shield her from the rain and opened the cab's door for her. Before she got into the taxi, Clark kissed Lois on the cheek and bid her goodbye. Clark continued to stand in the rain until after the cab pulled away, and she disappeared from view.

During the entire cab ride to the doctor's office, Lois felt queasy and immediately sought out the location of a bathroom upon arrival. She wasn't feeling much better a few minutes later when she began filling out paperwork about her visit, and she was suddenly very grateful that she was now sitting in a doctor's waiting room. If the doctor could do anything to help her, she would be thrilled. She'd had enough of constantly feeling like she was going to be sick.

While she waited for someone to call her name, Lois flipped through some of the outdated magazines that were lying around. None of them held any interest for her and only served to make the slow ticking of the clock echo in her ears. In Lois' opinion this waiting room definitely needed better magazines or maybe a copy of the Daily Planet.

Finally, twelve-and-a-half minutes after her scheduled appointment time, Lois was at last being called back to see the doctor. She then spent another ten minutes waiting for him to walk through the door of her room. Lois spent most of that time resisting the urge to snoop around to pass the time since there weren't even any boring, outdated magazines in the room.

"Hello Ms. Lane," the doctor announced in greeting. "How are you feeling this morning?"

The comment made Lois want to roll her eyes. She was sitting in a doctor's office for goodness sake! How did he think she felt? She bit her tongue to avoid making a snarky remark while the doctor busied himself with washing his hands.

By the time the doctor turned his attention to Lois, the question was forgotten. He moved on to specific questions related to the symptoms that brought her to his office, allowing Lois to relax and answer without the snarky tone. Many questions and many tests later, the doctor finally had an answer for Lois as to the cause of her nausea and other symptoms.

When the doctor returned to the room with the results of the tests he had performed, Lois noticed he had a curious expression on his face. It almost looked like he was... smiling. Lois couldn't believe it! Here she was terribly ill and he was happy? A moment later she was certain he was smiling when his face split into a wide grin that displayed all of his teeth.

Still smiling he said, "Congratulations Lois!"

"Congratulations?" Now Lois was even more puzzled. Her doctor was congratulating her on being sick?

She was still processing the information when the doctor continued. "You're pregnant."

"Pregnant?" The word echoed through her ears, and the reverberations traveled to her heart. Once it entered her heart the word grew warm and prompted a smile to blossom on her face. Suddenly she didn't feel so sick anymore. Nothing in the world could have made her happier than she felt in that moment. She had Clark had been trying to have a baby for almost a year, and now it was happening.

Clark was going to be ecstatic. Lois couldn't wait to get home and tell him. They would have even more reason to celebrate on their anniversary tomorrow.

The rest of Lois' time at the doctor was a whirlwind of both information and emotion. She was given a lot of material and was asked a lot of questions. Lois of course couldn't resist asking some questions of her own, shifting the authority in her favor as she conducted an interview of sorts. Before she left she made certain that she had all of the information wanted.

Lois stepped through the doors of the doctor's office onto the

streets of Metropolis just as the sun was beginning to peek out from behind the clouds. Her mind and heart were full, and she felt as though she were floating, the way her husband was known to do in moments of extreme bliss.

Walking on imagined clouds Lois headed toward home on foot until she could hail a cab. She didn't have to wait long. Lois had barely gone a block when one came her way.

Spotting the approaching cab Lois called out, "Taxi," and waited for it to pull up to her. Once she settled into the back of the vehicle and gave the cabbie her address, Lois started looking over the papers she received from the doctor again and pictured Clark's reaction when she told him the good news. She was briefly distracted when she heard sirens in the distance, and she wondered if she was missing a big story. But the moment passed in an instant as her attention was drawn back to the papers she was holding.

The biggest story was already in her hands. She was pregnant. She and Clark were finally going to have the family they had wanted for so long. Nothing was bigger than that.

Unbeknownst to Lois the faint sirens in the distance were part of a bigger story than she imagined and had she been privy to the full extent of the story, the sirens told Lois would have changed course. After robbing a jewelry store and shooting the owner in the process, a man fled the scene with the police in pursuit. Attempting to evade the police the man sped through the busy streets of Metropolis, driving erratically.

The rain which had only ended a short time ago left the roads of the city wet and slick. Speeding on the rain soaked roads while trying to escape capture by the police brought danger with it and not just for the criminal driving with reckless abandon but to the innocent citizens of Metropolis around him as well. Less than five later the car being driven by the speeding criminal spun out of control and skid across the slick asphalt into another vehicle that caused a chain reaction crash.

Automobile after automobile crashed into one another wreaking havoc on the street. Cars tried to swerve out of the way; others were swept into the chaos. The sounds of crunching metal filled the air. And at the end of the chain reaction crash was a taxi that slammed into a light pole.

Meanwhile back at the Kent brownstone Clark had moved over by the window once the sun came out to soak in its rays, hoping that it would help restore his powers and end the last residual effects of the Kryptonite that had invaded his body. He no longer felt sick or weak but had not yet recovered enough for his abilities to return. The sun filtering in through the window, beating down over him would hopefully speed up that process.

Clark was unsure how long he had been sitting in the window absorbing energy from the golden sun when his ears were suddenly filled with an onslaught of more than a dozen sirens and the cries of pain and panic from a symphony of people all emanating from a single location. His enhanced hearing picking up the trouble signaled to Clark that his powers were back and that something serious had happened.

Even though he had been quite sick and his powers had just now been restored, Clark immediately jumped to his feet and spun into the suit of his superhero persona. Superman was back, and he was needed. He had to go. He had to help. Without another thought he zipped out the door in a blur and took to the skies.

Superman landed at the scene of the multi-car pileup a minute later and was overwhelmed by the sheer size of the accident. The whole street was clogged with the wreckage of at least half-a-dozen vehicles, each with a varying degree of damage, from those with broken headlights and dents to those that were smashed beyond any hope of repair. Twice as many emergency vehicles surrounded the mangled mess of cars involved in the accident. The flashing lights of police cars, fire

trucks, and ambulances bathed the scene with their glow. Even the sidewalks were unpassable, as a crowd of people gathered to get a good look at the accident site.

Superman immediately sought out the police officer in charge of the investigation to learn what he could about the cause of the pileup and what he could do to help. By this point most of the people hurt in the accident were already getting the medical attention they needed. The paramedics working on freeing one of the people still trapped in their car had the situation under control and didn't need assistance.

Suddenly police officers and firefighters were calling his name. They needed Superman's help to reach an automobile that was pinned between a light pole and another vehicle. The cab, which sustained the most damage, particularly the back end, was the only other car that still held people who needed to be rescued. Finally he had found a place to lend his help.

Using his incredible strength Superman pushed the empty, disabled vehicle away from the cab and pulled the driver's side door open. He was relieved to see that the cabbie's injuries weren't as bad as he had feared when he laid the man on the stretcher, so the paramedics could get him to the hospital.

Superman's attention was then turned to the last person still trapped in the cab. The passenger door was mangled and required super strength to pry open, or rather pry off as the case was. Once the door had been pried off its hinges and discarded, he peered into the vehicle. Inside the back of the cab, a woman lie slumped over the seat barely breathing.

Leaning into the backseat Superman gingerly lifted the gravely injured woman and pulled her from the wreckage. In his arms the woman's face, previously obscured by her hair and the way she had been lying in the cab, was now visible. In an instant Clark lost all feeling in his body, nearly collapsing in a heap onto the asphalt below. A boa constrictor powerful enough to rob even him of his breath coiled around him tighter and tighter. A dagger fashioned from Kryptonite pierced his heart and shattered it into microscopic shards. The person most severely injured in the massive crash was his beautiful, beloved wife, Lois.

Cradling Lois in his arms, Clark held back tears as he lowered her to the ground. Not wanting to put her on the uncomfortable, wet road, Clark held Lois in one arm while he used the other to rip his cape from his back and spread it out over the ground. He then gently laid an unconscious Lois on the red fabric.

Still holding back tears Clark examined Lois' battered body, the cuts and bruises and the sight crippled his spirit. Of its own accord Clark's hand glided toward her face and with a gentle, loving stroke, he brushed the hair from her eyes.

Clark's tender touch surged through Lois's body and pulled her back to a state of consciousness. When her eyes slowly fluttered open, she weakly whispered, "Superman?"

"Lois?" Clark responded with great urgency. "Lois, I'm so sorry. I should have been here sooner. I should have protected you."

Still whispering, Lois replied, "Clark, this isn't your fault. You were sick. You didn't have your powers. Please don't feel guilty about this." After a brief pause of silence Lois continued. "Superman can't save me. But Clark can. That's who I need right now."

The meaning of Lois' words was clear. She couldn't talk to Superman the way she would be able to talk to Clark, not out in public with a large crowd watching. Gingerly scooping Lois and the cape she was lying on into his arms, he lifted into the air and flew his wife off somewhere they could be alone, somewhere more comfortable than a rough, wet street.

Home is where Lois would want to be, so that's where Clark took her. He took her up to their bedroom and with great care, laid her on the bed. He then met with Lois' request. He gave her

Clark, spinning out of the Suit and into Clark's clothes. Once he was again dressed as Clark, he sat on the bed by Lois' side.

"I'm here Lois," Clark said taking her hand.

Smiling weakly, while tears trickled from her eyes, Lois told Clark what she had been so excited to tell him before the crash. "We were going to have a baby, Clark. That's what the doctor told me. That's why I've been so sick. It wasn't food poisoning. We were going to have the family we wanted for so long."

Learning that Lois was pregnant, Clark's own eyes became wet with tears. He was no longer just losing one life but two. He would mourn the death of his wife and their son or daughter who would never be born. He was losing everything he ever wanted, and he was powerless doing anything about it.

"I'm sorry I won't be here for our anniversary tomorrow," Lois continued, feeling a sense of guilt that she was leaving Clark at such a time and knowing how hard tomorrow would be for him. "Your gift is in the closet. I want you to have it."

Lois' breathing became shallow, and her heartbeat slowed to almost nothing. Death was trying to pull her away from Clark, but she was far too stubborn to let it take her. Not yet. She had been fighting against her demise ever since the cab she had been riding in slammed into a light pole, and she would continue to fight until she finished what she had to say. Lois wasn't going to leave Clark without saying goodbye. She refused to do that, no matter how strong the pull of death was.

Lois spoke more slowly now, as she began to fight for breath, but her words contained no less emotion. "Clark, please don't let my death destroy you. The world still needs you. Both sides of you. The reporter and the superhero. I want you to go on with your life."

Clark didn't say anything. He couldn't. Words didn't exist to him now. Lois was dying. Nothing else existed to Clark except for that heart shattering knowledge.

Death was kept growing stronger and more powerful with each passing second, and Lois couldn't fight it much longer. It was time for her final goodbye. She had very little strength left now, but she still found the power to raise her hand the few inches needed to reach Clark's face. As she stroked his cheek, Lois used everything she had to lift her head from the pillow. Clark cradled her in his arms as she brought her face closer and closer to his until she was able to press her lips to his for one last kiss.

The kiss was brief and lasted just for a moment, but it was filled with all of Lois' love. When their lips parted, Lois opened her mouth to speak. Only super-hearing allowed Clark to hear Lois' words. With her last breath Lois whispered, "I love you, Clark."

As Clark responded to his wife's words, saying, "I love you too, Lois," she closed her eyes. Clark heard her heart stop beating, and the silence echoed in his ears. Her body fell limp in his arms. Lois was gone. The woman he loved with all of his heart was dead.

Cradling Lois' lifeless body in his arms Clark broke down and started to sob. The few minutes he'd had with Lois before she took her last breath, and her heart beat for the last time had been far too little. The tears rained over his face leaving a trail of pain in their wake. His cheeks became stained with grief that he couldn't wash away. What was remained of his heart would be forever scarred.

Clark wept until there were no more tears left in his body, and his eyes dried out. With a gentle touch Clark laid Lois' head to rest on the pillow and spent several moments just gazing at her as he looked upon his wife for the last time. Soon all he would be left with would be memories.

Memories of Lois would become his greatest treasure. Memories of her smile, of her eyes. Memories of her voice and memories of her touch. Memories of her love. Every beautiful

memory of Lois would be kept close in his scarred heart.

All too soon Lois was gone, and Clark was alone. The spot where she had lain in bed was now vacant and only the depression of where her head had rest on the pillow remained.

For a long time all Clark could do was stare at the empty bed. He would never again feel her warm body next to his at night. He would never again hear her heartbeat as she drifted off to sleep. The silence would be deafening and the bed would be cold.

The rest of the day was agonizingly slow. Each tick of the clock felt like an eternity. That night Clark couldn't sleep. He couldn't even lie on the bed. The absence of Lois was too strong.

When the sun rose on the following day, Clark felt infinitely worse than he had yesterday. He and Lois should be celebrating two years of marriage today, but instead he would be planning her funeral. A day that should be joyful and filled with love would now forever be associated with death and the loss of family. October sixth would no longer be a day to look forward to but one which Clark would always dread.

Despondent Clark never left the couch where he had spent the night listening to the silence that drowned him in despair. He didn't eat, neither breakfast nor lunch. He didn't go to work, neither his job at the Daily Planet, nor his job as Metropolis' resident superhero. He just sat there as yesterday's events burned in his mind, over and over in every moment, never ceasing, never fading.

In the midst of the silence, the phone started to ring, and the sudden sound reverberating through the stillness of the house nearly jolted Clark through the roof. But that still didn't get him up off the couch. He didn't want to talk to anyone. He just wanted to wallow in his despair, but the ringing persisted.

Finally Clark surrendered and stood to answer the phone. On the other end of the line was his mother who was calling to wish him and Lois a happy anniversary. Martha, perceptive as ever, immediately picked up on the fact that something was wrong. When she inquired as to what was bothering her son, she expected him to say that he and Lois had a fight. Instead, she received the devastating news that Lois had died yesterday and that she had been pregnant.

A few hours later Martha and Johnathan arrived at the brownstone to support and comfort him in his time of need. The moment they stepped through the door Martha threw her arms around her son in her warmest, most loving hug, the kind only a mother could provide. "Oh Clark, I'm so sorry. What happened?"

Clark hadn't said much over the phone, so once everyone was settled in the living room he told his parents the whole heartbreaking tale of how Lois had died. As he told the story tears welled up in his eyes as the pain came flooding to the forefront of his mind and the tragic images burned his retinas.

Martha squeezed his hands, and Johnathan laid a hand on Clark's shoulder giving him strength. Without them Clark never would have been able get through the story. Without them he would have drown in a sea of his own tears.

When Clark finished explaining what happened Martha asked him if he had told anyone else yet. He had been so grief-stricken that he had forgotten about that. Clark began mentally compiling a list of everyone he would need to tell of Lois' passing. Perry and Jimmy at the Daily Planet. Her mother and father. Her sister.

Clark wasn't looking forward to making the calls, but he knew it had to be done. Reluctantly he picked up the phone and dialed the number he was most familiar with, the Daily Planet. That call had been hard enough to make, and it only got more difficult from there, especially when Clark had to tell Lucy about Lois' death. She was devastated to learn that her sister had died and started crying over the phone.

Clark already blamed himself for not saving Lois' life, and Lucy's tears made him feel even guiltier. Of all the people in the world, the one life he couldn't save was that of his wife.

Superman was a failure. It was his fault that Metropolis lost one of its top citizens, award winning investigative reporter, Lois Lane. It was his fault that Sam and Ellen Lane had lost their daughter. His fault that Lucy had lost her sister. His fault that his wife was dead.

That guilt had caused Clark's super-senses to shut down. Ever since pulling a dying Lois from the cab's wreckage yesterday, his ears quit picking up calls for help. His feet were weighted down with lead shackles, rooting him to the ground. There was no chance of defying gravity, either subconsciously or willfully.

Unlike the exposure to Kryptonite, feelings of guilt over Lois' death hadn't physically taken away his powers, but that event had buried that part of himself which was triggered during an emergency under so much pain that sounds of distress no longer reached his ears. He didn't care. Superman was a failure after all. Metropolis deserved better than some so called superhero that couldn't even save his own wife. No, the world didn't need 'Superman'. The world needed a real hero.

Clark's musings of guilt were interrupted by the sound of his mother's voice. "Honey? Honey? Are you okay?"

Apparently his mother had been trying to get his attention for some time and had grown concerned with he didn't respond. He wasn't okay, but he didn't want to tell his mother that, nor did he want to lie. So he simply gave what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

Martha knew her son better than anyone and wasn't fooled by Clark's attempt at a smile, but she decided to let it go. There were other more important things to be concerned with right now. So instead she repeated her earlier question which Clark hadn't heard over the inner turmoil that had consumed his mind.

His mother's question reminded him that although he had finished making all the necessary calls to Lois' friends and loved ones informing them of her untimely, tragic death, more unpleasant tasks still lay ahead. He hadn't yet made any arrangements for Lois' funeral, and as much as he didn't want to think about a funeral, he knew it had to be done. He was glad his parents were here. He was really going to need their support through this. He knew he would never be able to do it alone.

The first order of business Martha suggested was to pick out a dress for Lois to be buried in. The seemingly simple task proved daunting. Lois looked so beautiful in everything. Choosing one dress that Lois would wear forever would be nearly impossible.

As Clark was looking through the closet for a dress something caught his eye. Tucked in the corner of the top of the closet was a shiny silver package with a bow on it. It was his anniversary gift from Lois. Clark reached up and pulled the beautifully wrapped gift off the shelf. Holding the gift in his hands felt like holding a piece of Lois, a piece of her heart, and he forgot all about looking for a dress. Instead Clark moved over to the bed taking the present with him and sat down.

When Martha came up to see if he had found a dress yet and to announce that she had finished making dinner, Clark was sitting on the edge of the bed holding the unopened gift in his lap, staring at it as though he were mesmerized by the shiny wrapping.

"What's that?" Martha asked upon noticing the gift in her son's hands.

"It's my present from Lois for our anniversary."

Martha sat next to her son on the bed and wrapped her arm around his shoulder. "Are you going to open it?"

"I can't," Clark said setting the present on the bed and standing.

Martha didn't say anything. She just rose from the bed and gave Clark one of her warm, motherly hugs. "Come on dinner's ready. Let's go eat. We can finish this later."

At dinner even though his mom had prepared all of his favorite foods and he hadn't had a bite to eat all day, Clark barely touched his plate. Rather than eat, Clark just mindlessly swirled his food around the plate with his fork. Very little actually made its way to his stomach. His grief filled him, leaving no room for anything else.

Shortly after supper Martha and Johnathan left to get settled in at their hotel, promising to return in the morning to help with the funeral arrangements. Clark was then alone again with only the memories of Lois to haunt him and keep him company. Those ruminations of Lois drew him up to the bedroom and the silver gift he'd left on the bed.

Clark still couldn't bring himself to open the gift, but just holding it made him feel better. After a while the gift in his hands reminded him of another gift. His anniversary gift for Lois. Setting the present in his hand down Clark went to retrieve the present he'd bought for his wife from its hiding place.

Clark returned to the bed, gift in hand and sat down to open the present Lois never got to see. Inside the small box was a pair of silver earrings. She may have never gotten to see the earrings, but Clark had decided that she would at least get to wear them.

Those earrings also helped Clark to finally choose a dress for Lois. He pulled the chosen dress from the closet and laid it out on the bed next to the box of earrings. Laying the dress on the bed would keep it from wrinkling, and it could stay there all night. If he slept at all tonight, he wouldn't be sleeping there, not yet. It was still too soon.

The rest of the evening was spent drowning in the silence of the house that used to be a home, and the ghost of Lois flooded everything around him. Her scent filled his nostrils. Her voice echoed in his ears. Her presence was everywhere but nowhere.

The persistent chime of the doorbell rang through Clark's ears, and he realized that at some point he had fallen asleep on the couch. Morning had arrived and so had his parents. As promised they had returned to help him plan for Lois' funeral.

Many agonizing decisions, tears, and a lot of heartache later, all of the arrangements had been finalized, and the funeral was set for Sunday afternoon. On that day Clark would say goodbye to Lois forever.

Sunday arrived with a beautiful sunrise against a crystal clear blue sky. There wasn't even the faintest hint of a cloud in sight. The weather was also unseasonably warm for the time of year. It was a beautiful day to hold Lois' funeral, and Clark was sure she wouldn't have it any other way.

One-by-one all of Lois' friends and loved ones arrived to pay their respects to the woman they loved and admired, who was taken from the world far too soon. Tears abound as Clark, Martha, Johnathan, Sam, Ellen, Lucy, Perry, Jimmy, and all the other guests present bid goodbye to the one and only Lois Lane. A woman, a reporter, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a friend, who had left her mark on the world during her short time on Earth. She may have been gone, but she would never be forgotten. She would live on in the hearts of all those who knew her.

Just as they had arrived the crowd of mourners dispersed one-by-one until only Clark remained. He wasn't ready to leave yet. He wasn't sure he'd ever be ready to leave. Leaving meant that Lois was really gone. And Clark just wasn't ready to face that truth yet.

Hours passed as Clark sat by his wife's grave. The sun moved across the sky and fell below the horizon as day turned to night. Finally, reluctantly, Clark rose to his feet and slowly, solemnly, walked out of the cemetery. His heart, however, remained there.

Clark continued walking through the cool night air until he reached the front door of the brownstone. He definitely wasn't going to take a cab, not with the images that would conjure in his mind. And the idea of flying never even occurred to him. In fact Clark hadn't flown or used any of his powers since the day of the

accident. So he walked.

The house felt even emptier now that the funeral was over, and Clark had nothing to cling to. There were no more choices to make, no more preparations to be made. Lois had been buried. His parents were heading back to Smallville in the morning. He was truly alone now.

For the first time since Lois' death, Clark chose to sleep in the bed they shared. Lois felt so distant now, and he knew he would feel closer to her there. Lois' presence was strongest in their bedroom, and while before it had been too strong for him, it was exactly what he was seeking now.

The silver-wrapped gift from Lois still lay on the bed on her side, and Clark decided to leave it there as he slept. Clark pulled down the sheets on his side of the bed only, leaving the present undisturbed and climbed into bed. As he drifted off to sleep, Clark played with the ribbon adorning the box.

The morning sun filtered in through the bedroom window, hitting the silver wrapping and reflected the rays into Clark's eyes. The bright rays dancing across his face pulled Clark from his slumber, and his gaze immediately fell upon the still unopened anniversary gift in front of him.

Clark took the gift with him when he went downstairs, but he still didn't open it. The beautifully wrapped silver box contained the last gift he would ever receive from Lois. Opening it would bring an end to the last piece of Lois he had yet to experience. He wasn't ready for that yet. Instead Clark set the present on the coffee table where he could see it.

Throughout the day the gleam of the silver wrapping paper caught his attention. The way the sun reflected off its shiny surface made the unopened box very inviting. As the day progressed, Clark's curiosity increased. By mid-afternoon the shimmery package had Clark's full attention.

Clark picked the box up off the coffee table and spent a few minutes admiring it. Then slowly and carefully, so as not to tear the paper, Clark started to open his anniversary gift. It had taken him until a week after Lois' death and their anniversary, but he was finally ready to unwrap the present.

Once the still-intact silver paper had been removed, Clark carefully folded it and set it down on the coffee table. He then lifted the lid on the box. Inside a card rested on top of colorful tissue paper that masked the rest of the box's contents.

Lois' handwriting on the outside of the envelope cut straight to his heart, and a single tear fell from his eyes. Clark traced the letters with his fingers and was filled with emotion. Opening the envelope and removing the card brought with it more emotion as Clark read the message inside, including a personalized one written in Lois' hand.

Clark, the best thing that ever happened to me was meeting you...

And that was as far as Clark got before he became overwhelmed with emotion. It was several minutes before he was able to resume reading. Lois' words from beyond the grave continued to penetrate his heart and reminded of the words she had spoken in her final moments.

"Clark, please don't let my death destroy you. The world still needs you. Both sides of you. The reporter and the superhero. I want you to go on with your life."

Those words replayed through his consciousness as he opened the rest of his present. Under the colorful tissue was a crisp, white button up shirt and a tie with a wild pattern that was just his style. Lois' gift to him was Clark Kent. She had given him a piece of himself back that was lost when she died.

Lois wasn't finished giving yet. A desperate cry for help suddenly penetrated his ears. For the first time since the day his wife had died Clark's super-hearing had picked up a cry for help. He was startled by the sudden sound until familiarity set in. Lois was giving him Superman as well.

Clark rose from the couch and spun into the Suit. The period of dormancy since last transforming into Superman made the motion a bit awkward, which he was sure Lois would have teased him about. Imagining Lois' playful teasing brought a smile to Clark face as he took to the skies defying gravity, another first since her death.

Clark was going to honor Lois' last wishes. He was going to go on with his life. He wouldn't ever forget Lois or all that she meant to him. But he wouldn't spend his days in a dark corner either. He was going to be the reporter and the superhero she wanted him to be. Superman would make the save, then Clark would take the story to Perry at the Daily Planet, and he would wear the shirt and tie Lois had bought him.

As he flew toward the source of trouble, an image of Lois looking down on him with a smile entered his consciousness. One day he and Lois would be together again, and when that day came, he wanted her to be proud of the man he had been in her absence. He was going to make that happen. When he and Lois were reunited he wanted to see that smile on her beautiful face.

THE END