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Summary: The Kryptonian attack on Smallville has repercussions.

Story Size: 2,438 words (13Kb as text)

Special Content Warning: Please note that this story involves a non-graphic discussion of sexual assault. If that subject matter is not suitable for you, please choose a different story to read. Thank you.

Thanks, Laura, for your beta review and for encouraging me to post this story.

I push off against the creaking planks of my parents' porch and allow the white, wooden swing to rock. The sound is comforting, the gentle swaying familiar. I breathe in deeply to steady my thoughts.

I gaze out at the fields, watching the quick flashes of lightning bugs doing their typical June dusk dance. When I was a child, my mother told me that fairies lived in our corn fields, and as night time approached, they would sprinkle gold dust to keep our crops safe. Fireflies are magical creatures, a reminder of everything that is bright and joyful and pure — the very essence of childhood. Each flicker of their light is a memory, a piece of the heavens brought down to Earth.

I glance up at the darkening sky, and cold fear shivers down my spine.

How many nights have I sat on this porch swing, admiring the vastness of the universe with wondrous awe? In Smallville, the stars shine brightly — no light pollution to dim their natural beauty. The Milky Way is a ribbon of possibilities, daring our world to imagine what lies beyond.

I've always looked up optimistically, assuming that the universe at large is as wonderful as the world that surrounds me. My hometown is the center of peace in a swirling maelstrom of chaos, the kind of place where neighbors are friends who go out of their way to lend a hand when times are tough. No one bothers to lock their doors; crime is practically non-existent. The occasional kids who shoplift candy from the general store or get caught in cow-tipping pranks inevitably serve their community sentences with bowed heads and guilt-ridden shame. Petty offenses, really, but well-timed disapproving looks from people with long memories are enough to keep most folks in check.

A stifling breeze brushes hot air past me, but neglects to abate my chill. My eighteenth birthday is in a week, just three days before high school graduation; I should be used to Kansas in the summer. Born here, raised here ... I suppose I've always assumed that I'd die here, that I'd find a job in town, or marry my high school sweetheart and settle down on a farm, using my parents as role models for what my life should be. I never had a reason to challenge those assumptions. Maybe thoughts of going to college turned into dreams, but they never formed into actual plans; opportunities and the means to fund them are few and far between. That didn't bother me before, though. I wonder why.

My left hand unconsciously passes over my stomach, but I purposefully brace it against the edge of the bench. Plans change.

I haven't told my parents yet; I don't know how to. I tried — that day, I tried, but the words refused to form. Even just thinking

about it, my throat constricts like a gag choking me silent. It wasn't my fault — I know that — but ugly shame shrouds me in a way that feels as fluorescent as the fireflies, as if it's completely unnecessary for me to say a word anyway, because surely every person in this suddenly stiflingly small town must already know. Or maybe they've guessed, and their own rightful shame chokes them silent. They blame themselves for their abject failure, for not protecting me, for turning a blind eye to my pain.

I'm pregnant. I can barely whisper the words in my mind — it's beyond comprehension. I counted the days in my cycle, desperately reassuring myself with math that there would be no long term repercussions from that day beyond my shattered psyche. But math doesn't lie, the absence of my period doesn't lie, the plus sign on the test that I purchased at a drug store half an hour away from Smallville doesn't lie. Still, part of me refuses to believe the evidence. It just can't be.

I've known for a week. I've thought for a week. I've planned ... no, I haven't planned for a week, because I need a decision before I plan, and I haven't decided. I've sat on this porch swing every night for a week, and have inevitably retreated to the safety of my home without answering my own question. The twin bed of my childhood is safe, and I cling to my quilt as reality threatens to tear everything away.

I told my boyfriend. I invited him over and he sat next to me, rocking gently under the night sky. He knows it's not his; we've kissed and groped and gone further that I'd ever admit to my parents, but we haven't crossed that final threshold. We've been dating for four months, and had an unspoken agreement that we'd make graduation night extra special for each other. He was furious when I told him, called me unspeakable names. I begged him to listen, and I forced the truth past my constricted throat.

He was silent. He stared out at the corn fields as if he was the one who needed time to process all that had happened. Five minutes of unblinking silence, and I sat still beside him, giving him the power to break me. And with one look, he did. He stood up from the bench, then turned his face towards mine, and I remember the taste of bile that will always be associated with his look of revulsion, like I've been contaminated by a stain that can never be washed clean.

So here I sit, one of five. A statistic, a victim, a survivor. The innocent fireflies of my childhood buzzing in the fields before me, my unknowing parents in the previously happy home behind me, my blameless neighbors scattered in concentric circles around me, and the guilty party somewhere above me, threatening silently from the night sky.

Or, at least, I assume he's there, on his way back to Krypton, never to face justice here on Earth. But can I ever be sure? They look just like us — they could easily blend in. Why wouldn't they stay; they've tasted the power of gods, so what could compel them to leave? Not their non-existent sense of morality. Not our ineffective military. I pale at the thought that he may still be here, that for the rest of my life, I'll look at every stranger's face and wonder if that was the man who raped me.

The Kryptonians appeared without warning, capturing Smallville and enslaving its people. They demonstrated their devastating power by eviscerating anyone who questioned their commands. Corrupted super men, evil mirrors of the hero who has done so much good in our world over the past three years. They took whatever they wanted, whomever they wanted.

I barely resisted. He probably viewed that as tacit consent, as if I was willingly giving what he was stealing away. Or maybe he'd have preferred it if I fought — struggle would have excused his infliction of pain. I'll never know why he did it, and I have no desire to understand his mind. I know my own, though; I know how paralyzing fear feels, how it causes the mind to fall blank as a coping mechanism necessary to endure the seconds, minutes, hours. I know how impossible it is in that moment to analyze

anything other than the certainty of impending misery. Time stretches and thins, moments transform into infinity as powerlessness gives way to inevitability.

I remember my dazed confusion when his assault ended. It was as if my brain refused to immediately recall how the Kryptonian guard had snatched me from the group of terrified townsfolk being held captive in the park, and how they all turned their heads away from my screams, and how he dragged me around the corner of the block, behind the row of stores that line the main town square, and how he asserted his will. When he finished, he strode confidently away without a word, as if he was well-acquainted with using women as nothing more than playthings and then leaving them in despair. But I...and again, my brain shuts down and I'm at a loss for words.

How do I explain emptiness? There's a moment in time at the top of a roller coaster when the cars start to race down the track — anticipation and excitement are bound in a bubble of fear that lurches and floats from the pit of my stomach and radiates throughout my core. That black hole only lasts for a second before chaos reigns and the world rushes by in a frantic pace that's impossible to process. The ride ends, but I'm not sure how I ever managed to get on in the first place.

Maybe that's why I stayed silent, why I kept the secret of what happened to me. Why I wandered away from the town center and walked miles through Kansas cornfields until I reached home. Why I collapsed onto my bed, promptly falling asleep, only to be awakened by a shout of relief from my concerned parents as my mother gathered me into her arms. How could I shatter her illusion that I was safe, that I'd ever feel safe again? How could I tell her the truth and risk seeing the eyes of a woman who has failed at her most fundamental priority in life: protecting her child? Why should I unleash my burden and share that pain with people who don't deserve to bear it?

I feel slightly nauseous, though I'm not sure if it's due to my memories or the result of the event I can't stop remembering. Or maybe it's the manifestation of doubt, indecision urging me to consider my choices.

I could stay. Graduate from Smallville High; let this uncertainty grow within me through the summer months. Hide isolated in my parents' home during the snowy winter, and when springtime comes, give birth to my mixed-heritage child — my child, because it certainly will never be his. I could live out my life in this quiet little country town, marry a nice farm boy, raise my child while ignoring any whispered innuendo about how she came to be, and do my best to love someone who shouldn't be thought of as merely a product of hate.

Am I strong enough to make that choice? Do I have the necessary capacity for love; can I ever look at him and not see the half of him that will forever haunt my nightmares? Will the DNA inside my child build another super man, one with Kryptonian power that can be used for good or evil? Should I cast the die and bet that my guidance can give the world a new Superman, or will my weakness roll snake eyes and lead to the next General Zod? Who am I to hold the fate of humanity in my hands?

I could leave. Graduate Smallville High, then pack up my trusty used car and head in any direction away from here. Get a waitressing job in a diner off the interstate and anonymously build whatever life I can as a single mother. At least my child would grow up without the stigma of being born nine months after the Kryptonian domination of Smallville and the associated questions that would inevitably arise.

Am I the only one facing this choice? I blanch at the thought that I'm not the only one of five, that other ones are in the concentric circles that surround me. Sisters in a statistic that is far too large, that never seems to shrink, that only changes by face and by name. A shared silence that rarely takes voice, because the words are too hard to say and fall on deaf ears anyway.

I could give it away. Graduate Smallville High, and then drive my car far away from here, hiding away from questions I don't want to answer. There are thousands of women in the world who want a child, who would love this child regardless of biology. Instead of selfishly keeping what I never wanted, I could bless my child with two parents who would view his or her life as a miracle rather than a curse. But could I risk giving up the unknown, allow new parents to unwillingly consent to accepting a half-human hybrid? Who knows what challenges my child will face; who knows what unknowns potential parents would want to adopt?

I could end this. Graduate Smallville High, race my car to a doctor's office hours away, and then never look back. Go to a community college, supporting myself with a full time job. Get an associate's degree and move to a big city — maybe even Metropolis, where my constant nightmares would at least be tempered by visible evidence that not all Kryptonians are selfish and cruel. My life does not need to be defined by a choice I never made.

Would it be that simple? Could I ever forget? Would I ever wonder if I made the right choice? Are any of the choices right, or is the right choice merely the choice that's right for me? Are there paths forward that I can't see? Am I limited by my Smallville upbringing, by the narrowly defined world I live in? If life stretched further than fields of corn, or it sounded like something other than the creaking of an old wooden porch swing, would there be a wider swath of possibilities?

The dark of the sky deepens, and the fireflies end their nightly mating ritual. Their bioluminescence blinks out of existence, and with it, magic disappears from the world. I'm no longer a child; fairies don't exist. I am one of five, but I have a name — I can reclaim it and attach whatever I choose: wife, mother, college graduate. Past will always be present, but the future awaits, beckoning brightly like the stars shining down from above.

I stop the swing of the bench and stand, looking defiantly at the universe beyond. The Kryptonians are gone, but humanity remains. I have made my choice. Is it the right one?

Only time — only life will tell.

THE END