

# Aftermath

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Rated: G

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Summary: After the events of the New Kryptonian takeover, Clark struggles to come to terms with the fallout from Lord Nor's reign in Smallville.

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Lois entered the alley, her heart in her mouth. Ahead she could see the tumbled bodies of Nor and Ran — with a flash of red and electric blue protruding from underneath. She rushed forward, struggling to drag the dense Kryptonian bodies off of Clark. Finally succeeding, her heart lurched. The beautiful brown eyes that were normally full of warmth and humour were fixed and staring. Frantically she ran one hand down his neck, the other over the S-shield that adorned his chest, searching for a pulse and finding... nothing.

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Lois awoke with a start, shivering in the aftermath of the nightmare. Keeping her eyes closed, she willed the after effects away, repeating to herself that it was just a bad dream.

Slowly she opened her eyes. The cold grey light that precedes the dawn was filtering into the room, turning everything monochrome. Momentarily disoriented, she looked around before recognising it as Clark's bedroom. He must've come home.

They'd been going over wedding plans the night before when he'd heard a report of a stricken cruise ship near Washington, D.C. Unwilling to leave- she wanted to spend as much time with him as she could- she'd fallen asleep on his couch waiting for him to return. Clark must've moved her to the bed when he got back.

She slid out of bed and padded barefoot out to the living room.

Clark was sitting at the dining table clad only in a pair of boxer shorts, his hands wrapped around a mug and his head bowed. Lois suppressed the sensual jolt that arose at the sight of his muscular form. They'd had quite a few steamy encounters on Clark's couch since the departure of the New Kryptonians a little over a week before, but right now he looked... dejected.

Gently she touched him on the shoulder before sliding into the seat beside him.

He looked up.

"Hey... What are you doing up? It's early."

"I could ask you the same question."

He shrugged. "Couldn't sleep." He looked back down at the mug in his hands.

"Was the cruise ship bad?" Lois asked.

"What? Oh, no. It just got stuck on a sandbank. I got it free. There were a few bumps and bruises but nothing major." He took a sip of what she could now tell was the oolong tea he liked. "The harbour pilot has a lot of explaining to do, though. He'd been drinking. I got you the story."

Clark lapsed back into silence. Lois studied him in the increasing light. He was fully recovered- at least physically- from the duel with Nor if he could drag cruise ships off sandbars, but this silent, nearly morose Clark was new to her. If the cruise ship rescue wasn't bothering him, she had a fair idea of what was.

She got up from the table and poured herself a cup of coffee from the pot Clark had evidently prepared before resorting to tea. Sitting back down, she broached the subject he'd been shying away from.

"How's the rebuilding going?"

He looked up at that, flashing her a quick smile before letting out a sigh.

"Slowly," he admitted. "There's only so much I can do to help, and Nor and his thugs did so much damage."

"I'm sure the people of Metropolis appreciate Superman's help." Putting down her coffee cup, she laid her hand on Clark's arm. "Clark, you mustn't blame yourself for what Nor did."

"I can't help but feel responsible, Lois. And I just can't shake the thought..." he trailed off, staring back down into mug in front of him.

"What thought?"

"That Trask was right."

"Clark," she said sharply. "Jason Trask was a twisted, paranoid, xenophobic psychopath. Nothing that he thought about you was right in any way."

The smile he flashed her way this time was devoid of any mirth. "But he was right about one thing. I was the front man for an invasion. I just didn't know it. If I hadn't been here, the New Kryptonians wouldn't have had a reason to come to Earth."

Lois had been right; he'd been brooding about the havoc Nor and his flunkies had wreaked in their short stay. What troubled her was that his thoughts had turned negative enough to find any sort of truth in Trask's paranoid ravings. Something occurred to her.

"The people that Nor killed in Smallville... Did you know any of them?"

He nodded, his shoulders drooping even further. "Every single one of them." He was silent for a long moment. "All of this, because of me. I'm lucky that anyone even trusts me to help fix the damage. Even our own government..."

"No." Lois shook his arm. "It was not your fault, Clark. You are not responsible." She watched his face closely, looking for a sign that she was getting through to him. "Do you know what the people of Earth saw?"

"What do you mean?"

"While you've been helping with the rebuilding, I've been talking to a lot of people about what happened; I thought maybe it'd make a good feature. And every single person I've spoken to has said the same thing; that they were glad you were here. Clark, the New Kryptonians weren't just looking for you, they were looking for a new home planet. Chances are, if you hadn't been here, they would've come anyway. And there would've been nothing- absolutely nothing- the people of Earth could have done to stop them from taking over. What everyone saw was you, standing up against your own people to save humanity- and risking your own life to do it."

He sat back in his chair; from the expression on his face she could tell that she'd just given him something to think about.

"Earth is lucky to have you, Clark," she told him quietly.

He was looking less dejected now, his shoulders straighter and his brow less furrowed.

"Feeling better?" she enquired.

He nodded, half a smile on his face. "Yeah." He picked up his mug and finished the last of his tea in one swallow. "I might try to get some sleep before we have to get ready for work." He stood and pulled her out of her chair, wrapping his arms around her and holding her close to him. "Thanks, Lois."

She leaned back so she could look up at him. "You're welcome. And I don't want to hear any more of this 'Trask was right' garbage, okay?" She shook a mock warning finger in his face.

He laughed and kissed her quickly.

"I promise."

After he'd disappeared into the bedroom- where he'd get at least some sleep, she hoped- Lois sat back down at the table to finish her coffee. It would take both of them time to deal with the aftermath of the advent of the New Kryptonians, she knew. After all, she was still having nightmares, and she was pretty sure that Clark hadn't slept more than a few hours since they'd left. But they'd made a beginning; now, they could turn their attention to something more positive – something that she'd doubted they'd get a chance to do.

They had a wedding to plan.

THE END