

Whisper of Hope

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Summary: After a rough day at school, Clark Kent overhears a conversation between his parents.

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Author's note: I'd had this scene in mind when writing part of a longer story, and so I expanded it a bit and turned it into this short ficlet. Thanks to KSaraSara for a quick readthrough and help with the title. Enjoy!

Clark Kent sat as still as a statue, his eyes trained on the flickering candlelight illuminating the downstairs room below. His better-than-average hearing picked up sounds he shouldn't have been able to perceive, including the unsteady da-dum of his father's heartbeat and the rapid but rhythmic breathing of his mother. And his better-than-average vision caught small details, like the frown lines marring his mother's normally cheery expression and the gentle pressure of his father's fingers on her shoulder as he pressed her against his chest.

Clark hadn't seen his mother cry in a long time. But as his parents sat holding each other at the kitchen table, a quiet meal for two sitting half eaten and long forgotten on the good China plates — the ones Clark had thought they only used at holiday gatherings or for special occasions — he saw a tear slide down her cheek.

"I just want him to feel loved, Jonathan."

"I know, Martha. And he does. He knows we love him more than anything else on this Earth." His father's voice, usually steady and solid, faltered slightly as the older man brushed a kiss against his wife's cheek.

"Of course we do. But what happens when he graduates from high school next year and leaves for college? He'll be all alone. You know he's never felt like he fits in. No matter how much he tries, Jonathan, he's still... different."

Clark closed his eyes as he suppressed the urge to jump to his feet and sprint up the stairs. He shouldn't be listening; he shouldn't be eavesdropping. But he couldn't convince himself to move. He knew his parents worried about him, particularly his mother, and his rough day at school today, which had ended in a trip to the principal's office and a painful meeting between both of his parents and the school counselor, had not helped assuage her concerns. Clark hadn't done anything wrong, but more and more often, he'd become the target of what seemed like every bully in the school, probably because he refused to fight back. Unfortunately, today's run-in had caught him by surprise, and his slow reaction to Chad Peterson's strong right cross had resulted in two broken fingers when Chad's hand had struck Clark's jaw.

He shuddered inwardly as he remembered seeing the pained expression on Chad's face and hearing the murmurs of the crowd gathered around them. "*What the —* " "*Did you see that?* " "*Clark Kent, the freak!*" It wasn't the first time he'd heard those words, but it had hurt nonetheless.

"Martha, you know as well as I do that Clark is a strong boy, inside and out. He's grown up differently, because he had to. But because of that, he's learned compassion and kindness and control. He's learned to value life. He's learned to be caring and attentive and helpful and responsible."

His father paused to kiss his mother again on the cheek. Clark heard his father sigh and saw his mother raise her eyes up, blinking back more tears.

"He won't have it easy because he'll always have to be careful, Martha. Things like what happened today can't happen ever again. He won't let them. He'll be careful, we both know he will. But he will always, always be loved by us. And I know that he will find his way out there in the world. He will find someone to love and to spend the rest of his life with... have a family, if he chooses. He will, Martha. I know he will."

Clark felt his hands shaking, and he clasped them together to steady himself. The conviction in his father's words stirred a sort of longing in him to have exactly what his father had said. Someone to love, a family. Just like... just like what his parents had.

"He's the most incredible person I know, Jonathan."

"I couldn't agree with you more. And he will find someone who sees in him what we do. Probably not here in Smallville, and I know that's not what you want to hear, but..."

"No, he's meant for more than Smallville. I knew that from the day we found him, so long ago."

"He's meant for much more, Martha. So much more."

The two older Kents sat in silence, holding each other and watching the candlelight dwindle as the wick grew shorter and shorter. Clark, on the other hand, stood and snuck as quietly as possible back up the stairs to his bedroom, carefully avoiding the third step from the top, which always creaked loudly. He reached his room, crawled into bed, and pulled the covers all the way up to his chin.

His eyes closed tightly as his parents' words echoed in his thoughts. Ever since he'd realized just how different he was — stronger, faster, gifted in ways most people could never imagine — he'd know he'd have to be careful, responsible, in control, just like his father had said. He'd spent years now learning the limits of his abilities, testing them as he grew stronger and faster, and honing them to become more accurate and precise.

His goal had always been to control himself so he wouldn't inadvertently hurt someone, like what had happened today. His father was right — he would never let something like that happen again.

But his father's words had suggested even more than that, and the faintest whisper of an idea began to form in the back of his mind as the fog of sleep started to overtake him. A whisper suggesting that maybe these abilities of his — these *gifts*, as his mother liked to call them — could be... something more.

Something much, much more.

And with that thin whisper of hope, Clark fell into a deep sleep, dreaming, as he sometimes did, of soaring high up in the sky over a sprawling metropolis, the Sun at his back and the wind in his hair.

Something much, much more, indeed.

THE END