Whoever Said It Was Meant to be Easy?

by Rori Teagan

Summary

AU in which Jor-El doesn't help Jonathan bring Clark home.

"Love means never having to say you're sorry." "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard." ~ What's Up Doc
The day of the wedding Helen never shows. Guests arrive, caterers come and go, but no Helen, and eventually Lex is forced to call the whole thing off. ‘Thank you for coming, I appreciate the gifts and all you’ve done for me over the past few months. Yes, yes, I’ll be fine, really.’ There has never been so much good will directed towards a Luthor since, well, ever, Lex is pretty sure. Most of it is even sincere. There’s just something about being stood up at the altar that inspires sympathy.

After everyone has left, the Kents insist on helping him clean up, since Lex has sent the staff away along with the guests. They don’t seem to understand that the point was to get rid of everyone, and he’s too recently back in their good graces to risk...being blunt, which would be the only thing that would work, because honestly, subtlety is just not something the Kents understand. Maybe they’ve lived in Smallville entirely too long, where clichés turn literal and paranoia is just another term for being a touch under-appreciative of the potential for impending doom. Or maybe it's just a familial thing. Martha follows him with sad eyes, and Lex can feel the warm platitudes she’s biting her tongue to keep in, some even manage to escape. Jonathan is a little more successful with his restraint, but judging by the expression on his face, no less pained. Lex figures his saving grace is the fact he’s just not in habit of being nice to Luthors. Neither mention that along with the missing bride-to-be, their son has also failed to appear. Lex doesn’t bother to. It would have been nice if Clark had showed up, moral support and all that, but he doesn’t blame him. He already has two ‘too many’ Kents to deal with when all he wants is to fall into bed and forget this awful day has ever happened. He manages to hold it together until they finally, finally, depart five hours later. And when he does collapse into bed, only his alone now, he’s thoroughly pissed (oh Scotch, how beautiful are thee) and extremely maudlin. The next day he renounces love altogether and means it. Not like after Desiree. He doesn’t even realize he should feel lucky to be around in order to renounce it.

The shock has worn off, they’re disappointed in Clark for making the decision to destroy the ship all on his own. We’re a family, Clark, we function as a family. But they can’t say they don’t understand especially since...well it would be a little hypocritical because they’re so relieved that the decision has been taken out of their hands and the ship is gone. No more cryptic messages, no more wondering if their boy is going to just disappear one day, no responsibility for taking all that’s left of Clark’s heritage and trashing it like so much loose debris. It’s a wonderful feeling this no harm, no foul. So in the end Clark’s just grounded for a week; he did blow up the storm cellar. And that ends
that.

Or. No. Not that way.

The wedding happens. The honeymoon begins. Lex and Helen board the private plane; Helen offers Lex his champagne…He says… ‘I love you, Helen,’ a propos of nothing, while staring into her eyes. It’s the first time he’s said it without prompting, the first time she can remember he’s said it to her, plainly, simply, bare of the melodramatic garnishing he uses when he’s forced to answer in a certain way he doesn’t mean. You always know Lex is lying when he embellishes because his truths are given bluntly. No: ‘the woman I love’ or ‘of course you’re adored, Helen.’ Just ‘I love you’. Then he raises the glass to his lips… Helen knocks it away before he can manage his first sip. Oops. How clumsy of me. Lex stares at her a little funny, but soon forgives her when she distracts him with her tongue. They fuck for the next hour, instead of spending the time unconscious and scheming, respectively. She’s always wanted it all or nothing, ever since she was a little girl, concessions and compromises were things her mother gave not Helen, Not Helen Adriana Bryce, she’d sacrifice for no one. When you looked out for everyone but yourself you were the only one left behind. A hard lesson she’d had to learn at her mommy’s lap. No sacrifices, no compromises. But this…this wouldn’t be a compromise. She can have money, power, and love. And let’s face it, some pretty spectacular sex. She has more to gain if she doesn’t off her husband. It’s a good deal.

As for the Kents, they decide to remain through the whole ceremony, Lex looked so forlorn and abandoned up there when Clark never showed up. The poor boy, he’s been through so much and it isn’t as if he has friends to spare. His father didn’t even show up…although, knowing Lionel Luthor this is probably a blessing (without a disguise). Helen is also looking a little put out, but that’s probably given Lex’s lack of enthusiasm at his own wedding. So the Kents stay, and worry about Clark privately. ‘Please don’t let him have done anything stupid. Please.’ They hightail it back to the farm as soon as the ceremony is over, to find their storm cellar ….gone. In its place bits of wood and cement and a huge blast site. Thankfully the house is still standing, Clark is still alive, everyone is okay. They’re both too busy hugging Clark and being relieved to really yell. And that’s the end of that.


All the bad stuff happens. Well. Most of the bad stuff happens. Helen plots to kill Lex. Clark kills his little sibling. Dad does the yelling, ‘I’m so disgusted with you I can’t even breathe’ thing, and Clark takes off, shoves on the ring and rides out to the horizon on his father’s motorcycle…at ten miles per hour down a deserted highway. The part where this story deviates comes when the bike starts puttering on ‘E’. And Fuck.

There’s a moment where he contemplates running on foot, a lot more efficient anyway but he wanted a cool get away. Jimmy Dean and Rebel without a cause, was that too much to fucking ask? Really? He yanks the ring off in a fit of temper and throws it hard out into the fields of wild grass. And instantly deflates. As far as rebellions go this one pretty much sucked. He picks up the bike and returns home. Fuck it. Another time.

As for Lex, the pilot just can’t go through with it. This is Lex Luthor, what if someone found out? He docks, or lands, or whatever the hell it is planes do in the reverse of take-off, on the nearest island and Lex wakes a little stiff, a lot pissed, but at least nowhere near stranded or battered or…dead. Six hours becomes his record for shortest marriages ever. Five years later there’s a near thing with six hours and thirteen minutes, but that one was an accident. The reverend wasn’t supposed to be real.

Back home, rebellion aborted, Clark’s parents eventually forgive him, though they insist they never
blamed him to begin with. Yeah. Sure. Clark still sees the haunted look his Mom sports sometimes, and still feels that gut wrenching curdle in the pit of his stomach when his father told him the baby’s death was all his fault. Not in so many words, but growing up with Jonathan Kent the man with a look and a platitude for everything, his silence surmounted to more accusation than any utterance. No blame his alien ass. Eight months later his mom’s pregnant again, apparently whatever the ship did the first time wasn’t temporary. Clark’s happy for them, and even refrains from the knee-jerk ‘oh yuck, oh yuck, the visuals’ though it’s a close thing, because hell, it’s his parents, and he’s known how babies were made since he was eight years old and caught the Ross’ boarder collies going at it behind the storage shed, and Ewww. Life is a little less happy for awhile, and no one ever forgets the summer of 2003…but it gets better.


Lex tells Clark the night before his wedding is scheduled to commence that Helen has called it off. Instead of asking why and offering his condolences, Clark shocks him by exhaling loudly and blurring, "Thank God." All capitals. Needless to say, Lex is shocked and intrigued. His equilibrium is only slightly restored by the radish flush that immediately overtakes Clark’s face like an episode of invasion of the body snatchers. It’s further encouraged when Clark stumbles out a few rote apologies, mumbling something that sounds vaguely of remorse while ducking his head and staring resolutely at his sneakers. Ahh. Better. That’s the Clark he knows. Finally, after a little cajoling, Lex gets a straight answer and Clark admits he was beginning to find Helen a little suspicious, and besides she was all wrong for him. She was so old, for starters, which in fact she really wasn’t but Lex is willing to allow Clark that, he is a teenager, they’ve no concept of age. Though it is a bit disappointing, if Helen is old what the hell does Clark think about Lex?

"She’s older than you," he says, "like way older. By the time you’re ready for children she’ll be over the hill and you’ll have to freeze your sperm and get a surrogate mother and everything. And then think of the wrinkles. And saggy breasts, who likes saggy breasts?"

Lex, who despite his frequent (many and varied) attempts to pretend he is in fact an adult (for crying out loud and fuck’s sake) is really only three years (barely) out of his own teenage-dom and still has to suppress a snicker at the mention of drooping body parts.

"Hey, that’s my fiancé you’re talking about, Kent. Or was, anyway."

"Which is why I’m glad you considered the full ramifications of this before you decided anything too hasty."

Lex raises an eyebrow at Clark that manages to convey both amusement and suspicion. "You never had a problem with her age before. In fact, if I recall correctly you were the one who insisted I give her a second chance after the background check."

"Well, yeah! And I was right about that. She wasn’t working for your father, but still you weren’t talking about marrying her back then. Besides, I might not be the most observant person in the world, but despite what you say, Lex, even I can tell you don’t love her. You barely trust her."

"Helen and I…have--had an understanding. We do--did care for each other, Clark. Perhaps we all can’t have the type of Rockwellian marriages thus enjoyed by your parents, but I’m afraid that kind of love and commitment is lacking in the general populace, your parents are the exception not the rule. I count myself lucky to have found someone who understands--understood me."

"Look, I’m not trying to judge you or anything. I’m just saying. Care isn’t Love, Lex. "
Lex decides changing all his tenses in order to defend a marriage that’s not even going to happen isn’t worth it. He gives up with a small put-upon sigh, and something he’d never ever admit to as a pout, but Clark knows better even if his bottom lip never exactly protrudes…it’s more of an impression of pouting that works even better than the aforementioned ever would. Clark starts to feel a little guilty, Lex’s pouts-by-inference always do that to him, and he’s pretty sure Lex knows this, so he tries on a bashful grin and slaps Lex gently on the shoulder.

"But, hey, I am sorry it didn’t work out for you."

"Sure you are, Kent." He says so sullenly, so disappointed, that when Lex dumps a stack of papers in Clark’s lap and says, ”just for that, you’re helping me call all these people and apologize. And after that you’re helping me send the gifts back,” Clark can’t say no. They’re up all night and half the morning composing apology letters on Luthor stationary, sending e-mails, labeling and boxing gifts, and calling those who are in a time zone where cancellations at three in the morning Smallville time do not appear inconsiderate. After that Clark returns home and falls into bed; he doesn’t even think about the ship.

When Helen does show up Lex is too tired to deal with her. Thinking about the hundreds of calls -- hundreds of things -- that would have to be undone should the wedding be back on, Lex shakes his head, his eyes widening in horror. No. No, there’s no way in hell we’re getting married. Sorry, Helen.

Yes. Good. That one works. That’s the one. That’s what happened.

That’s it.

Only…

Only, of course it didn’t. None of those things happened. Too easy. Too redeemable. Too happy-ending fairy tale to be his life. Instead, what does happen…what did happen, was waking up to a throbbing headache located just behind his eyes, a dry coppery tang clinging on a too thick tongue, rubbery limbs weighing roughly five tons per cubic inch of flesh, and the smell of old vomit.

Any one of those things alone was enough to make him wish for the return of sleep (ahem -- involuntary oblivion, nearly the same thing), all of them combined made sure it wasn’t gonna happen.

Clark rolled slowly over to his left, his body fighting and resisting him the whole way. There, next to his pinky finger, was the little red rock that caused all his problems. Well, no, the rock that helped to cause all his problems. There it sat, smiling innocently at him. Clark tilted his head a tiny tiny bit, because anything more and he’d be smelling new vomit along with the old, and saw the ring band was still on his finger.

He began to laugh. First softly in tentative little hiccups then more insistently. Louder, longer, harder, until his body shook with it. And ow, ow, ow, that hurt. Hurt so much but couldn’t stop. Couldn’t – couldn’t stop. Because the perfection, the pure, beautifully cruel perfection of life’s total shittiness.

Taken to a distant plane of moral ambiguity because Smallville High was too cheap to provide an adequately made product and churned out meteor studded rings instead of ruby encrusted like promised; dropped back down to earth because Smallville High was too cheap to properly weld said rings. And Look Ma! A summer’s worth of mass destruction on a super-glue base, and you thought the no hands bicycle trick was neat.

He lay there laughing for what seemed an eternity, head throbbing, mouth dry, nose burning, feeling,
frankly, more human than he ever had before (based off of his Eric Summers experiences)… if pain equaled humanity. Or was it humanity equaled pain? Didn’t matter.

Everything hurt. His brain hurt.

His heart hurt.

The baby was still dead. The farm was still blown up. His parents still hated him. …

The baby was still dead.

And so was Lex.

Laughter turned easily to sobs; less a flip of a switch more a sideways scuttle, and hysteria by any other name would still smell of vomit.

Clark brought the flat of his palm down hard on the ridge of Red Kryptonite and ground it to dust in one blow. Nothing helped, not even that. Helen was right, he’d been trying the wrong color all along. Emerald was looking pretty good these days.

***+++***

Lex Luthor sat tensely on the Kent family couch, his fingers steepled, one leg bouncing bouncing bouncing (a nervous habit he hadn’t had two years ago) and repeated his mantra with further modifications. Each time he said it, it was turning less into a mantra and more into an internal monologue. His father did always say he loved to hear himself talk. Ha! The hypocritical bastard, like he could say ‘hello’ without it turning into some modern day Athenian drama.

But mantra, mantra.

He’d be benevolent. He’d be forgiving. Three months on a deserted island with none for company but his own hallucinations -- which although they made much more interesting conversationalists than oh, say, volley balls, the ‘you are so out of your fucking mind, you twisted screwed up boy, you’ factor more than surpassed anything Tom Hanks could ever even dream. And …where the hell was he going with that? Right, three months of ‘living off the land’ – as it were – and forced isolation could teach even the most devout disciple of misanthropy to be a little more appreciative of the human species. So what if it also showed him, in vivid, painful detail, the more…Freud-esque psychodynamic aspects of his inner-workings? Only instead of bedding his mother he wanted to beat the living shit out of his father. He wondered what that said about him and his competitive streak. I’ll take your Oedipus and raise you --- No, wait, wait. Oedipus killed his father too; the Greeks just had a solution for everything, didn’t they? A multi-purpose tale for all of life’s little miserable happenings. Oh well, as Seneca said, ‘There is no great genius without some touch of madness.’

He’d be the most forgiving, merciful, understanding, goodwill bastard this side of Santa Claus. Without the breaking and entering. He’d find out the facts before jumping to conclusions.

He would not kill his father. He would not kill his father. He would not kill his father. Especially not by way of heavy blunt objects dropped from excessive heights. And he certainly wouldn’t revel in the poetic justice a death like that would garnet. He’d also hide the gun again and he definitely would not shoot the evil, smug asshole. He wouldn’t.

And his wife? He’d forgive her too. He’d greet her with a smile, a big one, and he’d go to her, pull her close. "Helen, darling," he’d whisper into her hair, "miss me? After I almost died so heroically insisting you take our only parachute, you must have missed me.”
Then he’d wrap his hands around her traitorous, lying throat and choke the life out of ---

……

Okay. Okay. He had some work to do on his follow through. Nobody was perfect. Lewis would appreciate the effort.

Though he’d probably prefer the visual of Helen dying slowly of oxygen deprivation through manually forced asphyxiation. Lewis seemed to hold an unhealthy grudge towards Helen.

And…he needed to stop thinking of Lewis as a real person. Especially since he was now wondering if Lewis knew the word asphyxia was derived from the term ‘asphuxia’ or ‘a sphuxis’ meaning ‘to stop the pulse,’ or ‘to stop the heartbeat.’ And then he thought, if that’s to be taken literally it wouldn’t work. Bitch would need a heart before he could stop it from beating.

Really had to work on that objectivity before conclusive proof of guilt issue he was having trouble with. Even vultures deserved the benefit of the doubt.

He’d simply have to be calm and rational and serene as he told her, "I realize you take your new last name seriously, but sweetheart, you really have to stop trying to kill me. It’s inconducive to continued marital bliss." Maybe she just didn’t know.

Maybe the lying little viper just ---

Yeah. Had to work on that. Before greeting the wife. And while he was at it, it would probably be safer to avoid the father at all costs, near future or otherwise.

The kitchen door swung open on a shrill squeak and slammed shut with a dull thud, rebounding a couple of times. The sound of a jacket being shed, and thick work boots falling to the floor followed. Lex’s train of thought broke—split and careened and shattered into a million bite-sized pieces that rather resembled goldfish, the cracker, not the species—as he recognized the sound of Jonathan Kent returning home from town. It still hurt to tilt his head, or twist, or to shift at all, really, so Lex waited until the man rounded the bend from kitchen to family room before sitting up a little straighter. And wasn’t it sad when days were so desperate that the only one there to greet him, in his own family room, was a Luthor.

Sinking into the couch beside Lex, the man did an excellent job of suppressing all visible signs of his bitterness. Though…with Clark gone, Martha refusing to speak to him for as long as she was able, and the farm falling down around his ears…Lex supposed the man didn’t have much emotion left to spare, grief was busy consuming him. His shoulder’s slumped, hunched into himself, and Lex imagined the weight of his troubles was finally pressing down on that proud back hard enough to bow it.

"Any word, Mr. Kent?"

"None. Nothing. No one’s seen him, heard from him… How can one teenage boy just disappear off the face of the planet?"

His tone was resigned, soft, defeated, and Lex doubted it made any difference to him that they both knew Clark Kent was no ordinary teenage boy. If anyone could disappear…well…

"Mr. Kent, if you’d just let me---"

Jonathan straightened quickly, the expression on his face suddenly fierce. “No! We’ve already discussed this, Lex. No private detectives, no agencies! If my boy wants to come home he will, and
if not I’ll bring him home myself, I don’t need some *professional* to do my job for me!”

“It’s been three months…” That pleading whine did not just come out of his mouth, it didn’t. Couldn’t have.

Jonathan stood again, in one swift motion full of tight lines and hard angles. He shoved himself away from the couch and crossed the small room in three giant strides. “I *know* how long it has been. He’s my *son*; you think I’ve forgotten?”

Lex turned away frustrated. They’d had this same argument he didn’t know how many times over the course of his stay. It was just as apparent now as it had been two weeks ago that there was no changing the man’s mind. Stubborn ass, Jonathan Kent be thy name. What was that saying, pride goeth before the fall? Everywhere *but* Smallville. They were like Luthors that way, in the end pride was often the only thing left.

Staring off in space, jaw clenched hard, Lex went back to his mantra.
And in the end it's all that's left

Chapter Summary

Clark pulls himself from the brink of madness. Lex pulls himself from despair. Or is it the other way around?

Clark panted heavily and wrapped one arm around his ribcage while the other hovered over the mound of red dust. And he thought. Hard. Tried to think, tried to concentrate beyond the stabbing, hurting, searing...Every time he moved, his ribs speared through his chest. Couldn’t pay attention to that, had to concentrate on what he had to do and ignore it, try.

Because...

Emerald or turquoise or forest...so many ways to say green. Only one kind that really mattered and in a matter of minutes his life could be...changed.

He wondered if ‘his people’ believed in heaven and hell. Where did aliens go after they passed? He wondered how long it would take him to find out.

Clark shivered hard away from that thought. He couldn’t fall into the welcoming embrace emerald offered him. Not yet. Too many things were left undone. For all they’d suffered and done for him...his parents deserved a chance to say goodbye. He’d heard, on his travels through the seedier sides of the world’s largest cities, that not knowing was worse than losing. His parents didn’t deserve not knowing. If they even cared anymore. He’d killed their child, why should it matter to them if he lived.

He rolled to his stomach and shoved hard to get his knees under him, slid forward to bend in half, thighs pressed against his stomach, arms outstretched to maintain balance, head lowered...and then slowly he tried to rise. Sheer determination brought him to all fours; there he stopped. Everything wobbled and for a horrible instant he knew he was going to pitch forward, tumble face-first into the hard stone floor and crash there and he wouldn’t be able to get up a second time.

But he had to get up. So he just. Wouldn’t. Fall. Again. Simple as that.

Slowly he rose off his knees; carefully he got to his feet. Wobbling he took a tepid step forward, then another, and another, and another. And in this way, my young padawan, the alien inched himself further away from the Green Kryptonite, the Red Kryptonite, and the Broken Woman. Clark had to restrain himself from succumbing to the attractive pull of hysteria.

It was time to go home.

***+++***

Above the kitchen door (of the Kent family home) hung a weathered black and white, though peppered dirty gray through the years, clock in the form of a tabby cat. Every time it ‘ticked’ its tail would hitch to the left, just the left, wearily and then fall abruptly back to its starting position. Tick. Hitch. Drop. Tick. Hitch. Drop. Just like---well, clockwork. There was something painful about the swinging pendulum, the way the machine’s body seemed to hiccup and shudder in the grip of a
terrible hurt but managed to complete its mission anyway because it was determined, dedicated to its job with a fierceness Lex admired even while his spine shivered.

It was a dedication he’d never been able to apply in his life; no one and nothing had ever been worth getting hurt over and over again for…

Except…except maybe Clark.

Clark Kent with his ridiculous little boy haircut, and his sunshine smile, and his bashful grins, and his huge heart that bled sincerely for every wrong ever committed in the world, his sincerity like benediction, aloe, cold-cream on the blistering razor burn of Lex’s disillusioned ego. Clark Kent who was never there when you wanted him, but always there when you needed him. The teenage boy who led his life shrouded in more mystery than any adult had the right to have. Clark who was never what you wanted, hardly ever what you needed him to be, and yet…and yet…

Clark Kent with his betrayals, quicksilver disposition, see-saw swaying wants, contrary frigidity and warmth, and his loving acceptance mixed with inherent suspicion, and his lies, and his lies, and his lies. From day one there was little the boy could ask of him that Lex would not try to give. He owed him for each time Clark had saved his life; each time Lex repaid that kindness with a curiosity that only wrought disaster.

Lex owed Clark for loving him. For not being able to let go.

He owed him for every moment they reached that fork in the road where Lex could extract himself from the equation and give Clark the gift of balancing out, breaking even, bowing out of his life and reverting it to its former state of safe simplicity, every moment that Lex selfishly declined, turned left instead of right.

And now he owed him for knowing the one thing he should not.

Tick. Hitch. Drop. Lex admired its dedication, envied the ease in which it was committed. And how insane was that? Envying an inanimate object.

***+++***

She is lovely in her terror like he’s never seen her before. And she is lovely, always, with that dark hair curling over her ears and those large expressive doe eyes, if nothing else Lex knows…knew how to pick them aesthetically. Can’t say much for the rest of his technique, unless he’s…he was suicidal, then of course no one…no one was a better judge of character.

Each tense change hurts all over again. Like that first time, that first newspaper clipping screaming Lex Luthor Lost at Sea, Luthor Heir’s Honeymoon Tragedy, Mrs. Lex Luthor The Only Survivor, he feels that small part of him, that alien part that can never be wiped out no matter how many Marthas or Jonathans, or Chloes or Petes enter his life; the part of him that moves a little too fast, tries a little too hard, and will never ever get used to ducking his head, hunching his shoulders, and blending in, no matter how much life necessitates it; he feels that part burn. A searing inferno that expands from the base of his stomach and claws its way up. Hand over fist.

***+++***

Clark was gone. Missing, dropped off the planet as suddenly as his adoption records (and nearly a quarter million worth of private investigation) revealed he’d dropped onto it. The Kents didn’t want Lex to look into it, but it’d been almost four months now and no one knew anything. No one knew anything.
He did his best to follow their rules, honor their wishes, obey and keep their trust, but Clark was
gone and no one knew anything.

So he hired private detectives, so he went the way of the Richard Nixons again, so he ignored their
pleas, forgot their kindness, stayed in their house and betrayed them behind their backs while smiling
and thanking and worshiping them to their faces.

So he plied his guilt with large gestures and extravagant gifts.

“Mr. Kent, I want you to take this,” Lex said, and he took the man’s weathered hands and wrapped
them carefully around a manila envelope. “It’s a deed to the farm, in your and Martha’s name,
completely paid off.”

“Lex, no, I can’t---” Jonathan’s words were immediate and unquestionably sincere but his hands
didn’t release right away.

“Please,” Lex said, intoned low, “I want you to have it, it would…it would mean a lot to me. After
the plane went down, I made my way into one of the broken wings.” From his pocket he extracted
the very first heirloom he’d ever received and appreciated. “This compass, your wedding present,
guided me to safe harbor. The least I can do is help you keep your farm. Because…if it’s not too
presumptuous of me, I just hope you can eventually think of me as… part of the family.”

Jonathan’s expression softened, nothing overt just a loosening of his jaw, a harshness fading from his
eyes, and his grip tightened. “We already do,” he said, “you already are.”

And why…why did hearing that now only feel like pain?

***+++***

"I loved him! I swear to you I did!" She screams at him with her beautiful mouth a perfect wide ‘o’,
lips peeled back from teeth, her cheeks flushing rose, pupils dilated. Beautiful. The fire spikes blue-
white; he seethes inside, wants to take that beauty and crush it. Pull it to his chest and let it melt there
until it runs down his hands and through his fingers and slips away. And then he’d spit on it. Burn it,
bury it, mix it with detergent and pour it down the sink. Until there is nothing left of her, nothing.

“Please! I didn’t – I didn’t hurt him, Clark, you have to believe me. I wouldn’t--”

Tears spill from her eyes; large, liquid… they look real enough. And maybe they are, maybe so. But
even so it means nothing. Bitch. Lying Bitch. He wonders if she cried for Lex like this, pled for him
like she was pleading for her own life.

"Liar!" His voice is hoarse and dry, crackling brittle, “if you loved him you wouldn't have jumped,
you would have stayed up there with him! You wouldn’t have chosen your life over his. Love! You
don’t know the meaning of the word."

“No! I let it happen because I loved him, Clark! Can’t you understand that? Not in spite of. Because.
I left for him.”

Clark shakes his head rapidly, back and forth, back-and-forth, denying. You don’t love like that.
People. Don’t. Love like that, not with pain and suffering and…and…deceiving. Not with dull
bladed knifes hidden behind their backs just waiting for the chance to stab and stab and pry your still
beating heart out of your chest. That isn’t love, that much pain and betrayal can’t be love. What she
felt for Lex was selfish, it wasn’t—wasn’t--

Love wasn’t selfish. Not like that.
Please not like that.

Not like him.

He reaches for her, doubling in half as he does, trying to reign in the sizzling heat while he paws for her to move closer. She slips away terrified, his hand brushes over smooth soft skin, cool to the touch, for an instant and then she’s clear across the room, scrambling with sheaths of cloth tangling around her ankles, clutching frantically at the door.

Clark takes his time going for her. He has time; the door won’t open because he’s already locked it by bending the knob down until the metal wove itself into the wooden flesh. She rips at it with jagged edged nails anyway, no longer pastel lavender, sensibly painted and delicately filed for function. No, now it’s chipped and brittle and torn, blood welling at the corners he can smell from here…along with her fear, he’s never smelled anything sweeter nor more nauseating in his life.

Inside still burns, bubbles, as he moves closer, some brunette red-veined combination of Quasimodo and Igor tumbling towards the fair lady Helen. She abandons the door and flees towards the window, slides around the desk and bumps into it, sweeps everything to the floor clumsily. All this havoc he’s created and still he hasn’t even touched her yet. She stands suddenly and braces her back against the window while she shivers.

“You didn’t deserve him,” Clark pants softly, no energy for anything more, everything going into moving closer towards her. And closer and closer.

Her knees give out abruptly and she falls to the floor, landing hard on her ass in a swirl of sensible gray suit and elegant brown curls, her hands fold neatly in her lap, knuckles clench white-gray, trembling.

Clark shuffles his way over, the heat in his stomach blossoming up his neck and curling its way to his jaw. It’s different now, a throbbing not just a searing, a pulsating lingering pressure that builds and builds the closer he gets to her. “You didn’t deserve him but you wouldn’t leave him alone.”

“I didn’t deserve him,” Helen repeats, enunciates each syllable slowly, her tone could be no more incredulous if Clark had suddenly broken into song to announce his undying passion for her. “I didn’t deserve him. I loved him, what did you do? What do you know about anything? You think that ring makes any difference? You cowardly little freak, you should have went for Green, it’s more your color.” She begins to laugh and Clark realizes the closer he gets the more his legs refuse to work, the hotter the fire flares, the shakier he is and if he was not quite so high on Red Kryptonite he would have recognized these effects earlier. Helen’s fist opens to reveal the green rock she cradles in her lap, her brown doe eyes snap up and suddenly they’re not so sane anymore.

***+++***

The first day he arrived back in Smallville he ended up at the Kents’. It wasn’t a conscious decision. He didn’t set out for there after confronting his father, he somehow just…found himself suddenly in front of a little yellow farmhouse. Drawn there, pulled there, his legs pumped the gas, his arms directed the steering wheel, his brain wasn’t asked for input.

Maybe that should’ve frightened him. Should still frighten him.

Lex was too tired lately for fear.

He sat in their driveway trying to force those same mutinous limbs into driving away. But they
wouldn’t. Fletcher Christian and HMS Bounty all over again on dry land.

And then suddenly there was a shout, and then there were arms around him and people hugging him and Mrs. Kent—Martha was crying, and Mr. Kent was clapping him on his back tentatively and it was wonderful, everything he never dared to imagine, even during his worst (or maybe best) hallucinations on the island but…there was no Clark.

Later there was peach juice on the front porch, Martha curled up beside him like some small frail thing, so fragile and thin and broken beside him, but protective anyway. Her hands fluttered anxiously against him, over his arms, patting comfortingly at his shoulders, smooth against his face. Mr. Kent sat on his other side, his own hands resolutely clenched in his lap, but his eyes were shining at him like he remembered them always shining at Clark, in that way that was a barely tempered love…and pride. And he didn’t ever remember seeing that look directed his way before. He couldn’t quite look back. So instead he concentrated on the man’s hands and how they were trembling slightly, reaching and then pausing with gentle flicks of movement, like they wanted to touch but they weren’t sure if they could.

Stories from both sides poured out of them, mourning and tears with peach juice and oatmeal cookies, and was this love?

"You’re staying here,” Martha said, her voice finally just now in this one sentence mirroring that unbreakable woman of yesteryear, “don’t even bother trying to argue, Lex, if your father’s behind this you’re not safe returning home right now. You’re staying here, with us." Her eyes were still red and puffy from the loss of both her children on the same day. That alone nearly broke him. He could still remember how his own mother looked the day they found Julian---

But no, he couldn’t stay. He was intruding, being here, now, in their hour of vulnerability, his own body exhausted, bruised, and covered in healing sunburns. He couldn’t. Before Lex could summon the will to deflect her too generous offer Mr. Kent clamped a hand on his shoulder.

"Martha’s right,” he said, “you stay here, son, rest up, regain your strength."

It was the son that got him. Blindsided him and made his eyes sting like no physical hurt could. Under the pain of blistering skin breaking all over again beneath the rough touch of Jonathan Kent’s farmer’s hands, all Lex heard was ‘stay here, son.’ Son. He’d never heard it quite like that before. His father said it often enough but it was always wielded in large arcs like some blunt weapon that took force to get its point across. It was never as innocent as Mr. Kent made it in that moment. So it was decided for him. He’d stay. Discomfort, Intrusion, and all.

When Lex is completely honest with himself, someday, he’ll realize it wasn’t empathy or words or exhaustion… It was just nice to feel wanted.

***+++***

Her fingers wrap around the ring and she yanks backwards. To both their surprise, the jewel gives, and she falls on her ass as it pulls free from its metal base, promptly dropping from shocked nerveless fingers.

And its gone now, his one last reserve…of composure, of strength, of blissful denial. His last defense is gone and he doubles over, body wracked with pain, its not really much surprise that most of it has very little to do with the green Kryptonite she still has clenched in her fist. He could blame it on the rock but the piece is so small that all its really been able to do thus far is weaken him, make his limbs heavy and his pulse faster, tighter. This isn’t from the Kryptonite, he wishes it was. Why did this always sound so romantic, so mysterious in novels? The hero sobs with his grief, incapacitated with
the pain of his loss. It wasn’t so romantic now, vomit spewing from an unwilling mouth, stomach heaving and clenching and desperately trying to escape along with his breakfast.

She has the decency to wait until he’s done before she slides behind him and wraps her arms around his waist, damp hair pressed into his spine.

“Let me tell you something about love, Clark.” She’s sniffling and shuddering, her chest heaving violent lung-fuls of putrid air with each breath, he can feel it beneath his own shudders, and has there ever been so much pain? But her voice is calm through the trembling, and her grip on the Green Kryptonite is sure.

“It’s bullshit. It’s never freely offered, and it’s never enough. People say they love you and then they still fuck you over. They still lie, they still hurt you, they still make you compromise, they still make you hand over everything you are so they can spit on it, grind you into the dust and then walk away. I don’t compromise, Clark. Helen Adriana Bryce does not compromise on anything.”

Tears and snot run down her face in equal amounts, blood from where she’s bitten through her lip crusts over, he knows without looking, feels it against him indiscriminately, her sweat mingled with his. “That was my mother’s job,” she says, “never mine. And I’m not going to do it for anyone, especially not some poor bald gay little rich boy who’s too chicken shit to admit he’d rather a cock out of reach than a pussy in hand. Love, Clark? I don’t know the meaning of the word? Fuck you. Your little friend didn’t care about anyone or anything other then getting his daddy’s attention, spending his money on expensive booze and fast cars, and making cow-eyes at the local delivery boy. Lex never loved me, he couldn’t even say it without embellishing. Fuck Love.”

She releases him to slip around his back and fall gracelessly into his lap, hugs him to her chest, presses even closer, bends to breathe in his ear this final piece de resistance.

“Lex is better off dead,” she whispers, hot, foul air ghosting over his jaw, “I’m glad he is. I’m glad I’m the one responsible for it. My only regret is I couldn’t stay up there and watch it happen.”

“You’re a lying bitch is what you are,” Clark growls between clenched teeth, around a solid presence of concentrated pain and he can’t blame the Red Kryptonite now, maybe he never really could. “If anyone deserves death it’s you.”

Her face mutates into something ugly, harsh and twisted, her eyebrows and nose and mouth all migrating to the very center of her face. He doesn’t know what happens after that, all he sees is a blinding white light behind his eyes, a terrible jolt of something…something like lightning striking his body again and again. And all he hears is screaming, screaming. Then there’s nothing. Less than that.
Chapter Summary

The end is often just the beginning

The first time Lex found Clark, truly found him, it ended in a mutual saving, search and rescue on both parts; simultaneous and equal though time delayed; an equal partnership of give and receive. I’ll fish you out of the river if you take me down from the cross. A camaraderie of biblical proportions without those pesky little things like betrayal and lies…no, wait. There were those too.

The second time equality would be balanced not by an act of reciprocal rescue, but instead by intent and repentance. Lex knew something he shouldn’t and paid for it by giving something he promised he never would again. It was worth it; once again they were balanced; especially important in a relationship far too often tipped to one side of the scale or the other.

The third time….the third time Lex knew he would lose count. There would only be Clark in his arms needing him, and who could keep track of who owed whom when Clark needed him. But that was later and there would never be a third if it weren’t for the second, if he didn’t get the second right. He only had once chance at this, and Fuck! He’d do this right, he had to.

Jonathan Kent hovered over his son’s hunched form, both their bodies still as stone, two like statutes carved out of granite. Clark might as well have been biological for all the resemblance between the two, same stubborn crinkle in the brow, same defensive cock to the head, Jesus this wasn’t going to end well.

Through it all Martha hadn’t let go of her son since Lex’s discovery earlier that morning, her arms wrapped around his stiff shoulders.

"Do you know what you’ve put us through,” Jonathan asked, voice as unforgiving as his body, “We’ve been worried to death, Clark! How could you? After everything that’s happened how dare you take off like that? Your mother didn’t need another worry."

Lex watched Clark’s face crumble in on itself, his eyes slowly shuttering, the mask of vacancy closing in, chin tilted in defiance, and wondered if Jonathan was cruel or just blind.

"Mr Kent…"

"Lex, son, this doesn’t concern you. Clark needs to start taking some responsibility for his actions."

While Clark took responsibility, Lex took a moment to process that, the pure irony of Jonathan Kent calling a Luthor ‘son’ in one breath, while admonishing his own child in the next. And maybe he was wrong. No, not maybe, definitely, Jonathan used the word ‘son’ just the same as Lionel, it was a weapon whose missiles sometimes relied on the need for approval and others on insecurity. They were more alike than either would comfortably admit.

Maybe it was a paternal issue. Maybe a little internal switch was pulled the day every man became a father that changed them from normal decent human beings to uncaring insensitive assholes. Well…no…maybe not, Lionel had always been, and always would be, a big hairy bastard.
Either way, Clark felt the irony too; Lex could tell by the way his expression dulled a little more, turned blank and glassy, until his presence receded, pulled in, drew away. He remembered what it was like when all you could do was take your mind away …or cry.

Martha finally raised her head and stopped him before Lex was forced to, and thank you Martha because no matter what they said (no matter how many ‘sons’ were tossed around) Lex really didn’t want to test his permanence in this family, the ease in which he could be discarded, because no matter how much he had to get this right…he also couldn’t bare to lose them.

“Jonathan, please, not right now.”

She released Clark with one more kiss to his forehead, carefully brushed messy locks back into place and rose on steady legs. Had he ever really believed this woman was fragile? “Come inside whenever you’re ready, Clark. We’ll be waiting.” As she passed she took Jonathan’s wrist into her hand and tugged him along, her eyes watching Lex the whole way with a look that verged on begging: Keep him here, please, do your best.

***+++***

Clark knew leaving a second time, without the help of red kryptonite, with only the support of his own will, without the pain of shame and guilt as a distraction…he knew it would be hard. Beyond that. A terrific terrible that would equate to slowly whittling away his soul sliver by careful sliver. It wasn’t anymore than he deserved, penance for what he’d done to them...for what he would do. He knew Mom would be full of tears, and Dad would …Dad would…Dad would have emotions ready for him.

Anger, and Disappointment, and more of those childhood nouns that still frightened him and typically were enough to dissuade him from trying anything ‘questionable.’

He knew this and knew what to do to counteract it. Because he had to leave again, because there were no other options, it was the only thing that was safe for everyone, he couldn’t stay. He’d make himself think of the baby that would have been but was no more, the child whose life his alien nature had cut short. For every tear of relief his mother cried he’d be sure to remember four others she’d shed because of him, two for the past, two for the future, four more than she had any right to cry.

He knew how to deal with his parents, what to say to keep his will from crumbling, how to say it. There were charts, and graphs, and loopholes for every possible twist of scenario. He knew what he would do should he arrive and find himself no longer capable of leaving again.

He…just hadn’t counted on this.

There were no contingency plans for Lex. For several uncountable seconds all Clark could think was, You’re dead You’re dead You’re supposed to be dead.

Clark was the first one to break the silence, and for once he didn’t obsess over whether Lex had meant it to happen that way or if he simply couldn’t find anything to say. For once it didn’t really matter. "I heard about the plane crash. Went to your funeral and everything. Saw your name on the headstone…”

Lex tilted his head slightly to the side and kept on watching him with that steady scrutinizing gaze that he never entirely lost around Clark. Oh, sure, there were times it was more pronounced, just like there were times when he could barely feel it. When Clark wasn’t so sure Lex was even interested in him anymore, muchless dedicated to figuring him out, weighing and measuring and burrowing his way into Clark’s life with his eyes alone. But even in those times, when he was busy with some
other mystery he’d never fully lost that look, it never completely went away, like if only Lex could decode this one puzzle …he’d have every answer—every thing— he’d ever wanted within his grasp.

Like Clark…Clark…could give him that.

God, there was no contingency plan for Lex.

***+++***

His heart was doing that slow torturous lope inside his ribcage again; he’d forgotten that feeling while Clark had been absent. Although at one point it had been a pretty consistent rhythm. He had to remind himself how to slow it down, swallow his anticipation – of what exactly? He never found an acceptable answer to that—and a curious fear joined with something that felt a little like…a little like longing.

But that didn’t make sense. You’re only afraid of wanting something when you shouldn’t want it in the first place.

…but maybe it did.

“Dad has always been a little bit of a drama queen,” Lex replied softly from his position twelve feet from the doorway, two from Clark, all exits in sight.

Clark nodded and let his head droop down.

If the boy chose to flee he still wouldn’t be able to stop him, but it was nice knowing where everything was just the same.

“So where’ve you been, Clark? We looked practically everywhere.”

Clark shrugged half-heartedly, whispered into his collarbone small and pitiful, “you looked for me?”

“Of course I did. So did your father and your mother. Everyone missed you.”

Lex eased forward slowly, one careful step at a time. Closer and closer until he got right next to Clark. Until he could slide down beside his best friend -- despite lies, despite the age difference, despite social status and fathers and all the other million reasons why they shouldn’t be anything more to each other than formal acquaintances.

Clark’s head snapped up abruptly like he could hear those reasons now, and he began to shift away. “I can’t stay. I didn’t come back for this, I just wanted to say goodbye, let them know I still loved them. I’ll always love them …I can’t do this, Lex. You have to let me go, okay? You have to.”

“No.”

“Please. I don’t belong here anymore. I’m no good here, I have to go.” His voice was small, defeated. His solid 6’4 frame curled into itself, around itself, until it projected the image of someone impossibly small, tiny and child-frail.

It was heartbreaking.

“There’s no…no reason for me here anymore. I just…there’s no reason. No one needs me here, I have to go.”

“Clark.” Lex sighed and leaned closer until the heat between them meshed, melded into flesh. “I need you, Clark. You can’t think like that because I need you.”
“No you don’t--”

“Yes. I do. I need. I--” He swallowed hard, bared his vulnerabilities again to this gentle giant, again and again and forever and forever. Anything for Clark. He’d do anything but let him go. “I need you here to help me. It’s hard sometimes, just focusing. So long on the island with no one …I get lost in my own mind. It’s constantly running and it’s so hard to stay on track. Who’s going to help me stay on track if you just quit on me, Clark?”

***+++***

How could he answer that? How could he possibly answer that?

“So you see, you can’t quit on me,” Lex said. “I won’t let you.”

No contingency plans here.

They gravitated closer to each other, heads and hands and breath drawn as they talked, as they whispered, voices pitched so low it was hard to hear over the pounding of both their hearts.

“I can’t, Lex, I--”

“There’s a Chinese saying -- ‘when you save a person’s life, you’re forever responsible for that person’ you’ve saved me so many times Clark. Physically…Emotionally. I—I couldn’t be the man I am now without you, I can’t—I’m yours Clark. Who will I be without you?”

Everything I touch turns to shit, everything I’m around ends up broken.

“I won’t let anyone hurt you, Lex, not even me.”

“The only way you could hurt me is by leaving.” Lies. Liar. There were more ways, they both knew.

“Clark…”

But maybe this would be worse. He hadn't thought of that, hadn't planned for it. He already knew that loving someone meant you did what was best for them even if it hurt you, but what if what was best for them was the thing that hurt them the worst? Was it still best? Or was it just running away.

Clark tumbled, broken to the ground and Lex followed without hesitation. There was never any contingency plan for Lex.

“There’s so much…so much I have to tell you,” Clark whispered.

Lex cupped his face between strong, wide palms. Held him steady. “I’m ready to listen, I always have been.”

“And after, you have to decide if it’s still true, if you still need me.”

Lex held on tightly until Clark gripped back. And then he kept holding on even after that.

“I’ll always need you. Don’t you get it yet, Clark? The stuff of legends, remember?”

“I don’t remember any legends that end with happily ever after. And…fire and brimstone isn’t romantic, Lex, it just hurts.”

“Then we’ll have to start our own tradition.”
“Promise?”

“If you do. I promise if you do; I’ll believe you, if you do.”

Clark exhaled a loud long breath. Nodded once in a short choppy motion, then again stronger.

“I promise.”

Lex nodded back and pulled Clark’s head down to him by shaggy black hair. “Then I believe you,” he whispered into his mouth. “Then I believe you.”

They kissed and each second their mouths remained pressed together was benediction. For the first time in a long time...Clark believed too.

~~Fin~~

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!