

# Cold and Blood

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Rated PG

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Summary: He desperately wants to save her, but she won't be saved. Is it really too late? A response to Queen of the Capes' opening line challenge.

Story Size: 1,600 words (8Kb as text)

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It's cold. I taste blood. Somewhere it registers that I must have bitten my tongue the last time I fell. It doesn't matter. Not much matters anymore. The lights are starting to flicker. The explosions are coming closer and louder. Soon even the air will be gone.

Lost. It's all lost.

I hear booted footsteps and look up. He looks broken, like everything else. He sees me watching him, and he straightens his shoulders. He's doing it for my sake, I know. Being my hero one last time. He strides forward just like he used to. The silk of his cape swishes around his ankles in that same majestic way. The famous crest shines from his chest. But his eyes betray the truth. He sees me kneeling on the floor, blood trickling down my temple and dripping off my chin, and he knows. He knows he's too late.

He's going to try anyway. His mouth takes on the grim lines of a fierce determination. "Come on," he tells me, "I've got to get you out." He's using his Voice of Command. The one designed to inspire confidence in everyone around him. It works with most people. It used to work with me.

"It's too late for us," I tell him. I hate that I have to say it out loud. But I need him to focus on the one he *can* save.

He wants to argue, but he can't bring himself to lie to me. It's his worst nightmare, I know. To be too late, to fail me.

He's always loved me, even before I realized it. When I was pining after him with adolescent hero-worship, he loved me. When people started questioning his motives and I defended him with my writing, he loved me. Before I started to realize that there was a man beneath the famous crest, that maybe that man could use a friend, he loved me. He just couldn't show it.

That crest. How I idolized it. It stood for everything good in the world. For truth. For justice. For putting the common good ahead of personal gain. For honesty. I've written reams about that crest. I'm probably the world's expert on it — its origin, its history, and the man who wears it. I haven't written everything I know, but I've written a lot. Not that it helped in the end.

Yes, I idolized it. But that was before I saw for myself what it costs him.

He's not supposed to show emotion. He's too powerful. Or rather, he used to be. He needed to appear always calm, steady, in control. And he couldn't afford to be seen playing favorites. As if everyone didn't already know. As if he hadn't given everything he had, everything he was, to serve the whole world.

In the end, even that didn't matter. After everything he'd done for all of them, in the end they turned their backs on him. The whole lot of them. He'd invested his whole life in the greater good. He'd proven himself trustworthy time and time again. But when the stakes were highest they didn't trust him to save us all one last time.

So they abandoned him. Abandoned us. Did what they thought they had to do, even though it only bought a small

chance at survival for a few of them, and a bitter one, if that. And they left him to the fate he tried to save them from.

"I'm sorry," he starts.

"No," I cut him off. "Don't you dare be sorry. You've done nothing to be sorry for. Nothing."

"If I'd been stronger, smarter, faster, if that bastard hadn't got his hands on that damned green crystal ..."

"No! You did everything you could. Everything!"

Another explosion erupts and he leans over me to protect me from the falling debris.

"I can still get you out." He follows my glance to the dark head cradled in my elbow. "I can do it; I can get you both out. You've got to let me try. Please, Lmmph..."

My name is muffled on his lips by my own hand. I can't let him finish. I know his heart is breaking, but if I let myself break with it I will have truly lost everything. There will be time for breaking later. If there's any time at all.

"Please. You promised," I remind him. It's a dirty trick on my part. He always keeps his word, and we both know he won't break it now. He will keep his promise, though it costs him his heart. And, though we're already losing all we had, all we ever hoped to build together, I won't let him off the hook. I can't.

"I said if it came down to you or him. I'm not convinced it has yet. Let me ..."

"No. There's no time. You can't be sure that we'd both make it. He has a better chance alone." I'm stroking that thick dark hair that lies against my breast, grateful that the subject of our argument isn't conscious enough to hear us fighting over him.

"I love you. I've always loved you." Here, at the end, there is no longer anything we can't say to each other.

I reach my free hand to stroke his face. "I know. I've always known. And I love you, too."

He glances at the figure lying across my lap. "But I've lost your heart to him, haven't I?"

"Don't be ridiculous. He's part of you; you're part of him. How could I love one without the other? It's not a matter of choosing between the two of you. It never has been."

"No. It's between him and you," he growls.

"Yes, but that has never been a choice. You knew that from the beginning." I say it in the gentlest tone I can, but he has to hear it. He has to listen to me. "You have my heart. You always will. But he ... he *is* my heart."

My heart. My life. My world. And, no matter what happens to me, he must live.

In a flash, for just a heartbeat, I see another woman in my mind's eye. I think she's blonde, I notice irrelevantly. And I desperately want to hate her. I want to tear her eyes out with my jealousy. Because she will have the love that should have been mine. I need her to love him. If he gets out of this alive, he's going to need her love. But I know what will happen, what has to happen. He loves me now. Right now I'm his whole world. But I won't be there to love him after this. She will, and how can he not learn to love her in return? He needs to love as much as he needs love.

Another tremor shakes the floor under me, and I'm back in the present.

"I care for him, too." It's a whisper, as if he's almost ashamed to admit it, but this, too, is something that everyone has always known, if never spoken aloud. He's supposed to be above base affections, but we all know better.

Gently he lifts my beloved from me, carrying him easily, laying the dark head against that damned almighty crest.

"Come, then," he beckons me with his chin. "We'll save him together."

It's cold. I taste blood. I don't care. Everything in the world that matters is walking before me, one cradled in the other's arms. I pray. Not for me, not for us, but for him. And, in the end,

I whisper my last prayer to him:  
“Live, my little Kal-El. Live!”

THE END

Bottom dweller’s note: Thanks to Queenie for the opening two sentences. You successfully poked the muse. And thanks to Carol for the quick beta in the midst of a very busy week.

I am aware that in some canon Lara was a scientist, but there is also canon in which she was a historian, and that is the background I chose for this story.

I’m assuming for my back-story that the relatively paltry amount of information that Clark got in his globe, as opposed to the immense AI program and database of the crystals which the movie Clark got, was the result of an enemy getting a hold of Jor-El’s master crystal — you know, the green one ;-). There is canon in which Jor-El had hoped to save both Lara and Kal-El. I’m assuming here that he had to go to Plan B after his Plan A was sabotaged. The presence of plotting enemies would also explain why Jor-El did not send his son off with the colony that eventually became (boo ... hiss ... ) New Krypton.

Queenie’s muse-prompting beginning (It’s cold. I taste blood.) is so delightfully provocative and so potentially universal, it spawned a flurry of drabbles and vignettes as a challenge on the message boards. I hope the other authors will also submit their pieces to the archive. We can have a whole collection. And, if someone else wants to take a shot at them, it’s never too late. So come on, who’s cold and has a tinny taste in their mouth now?

Thanks to my GE, LabRat.