

A Doctor's Oath

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Summary: Dr. Sam Lane has been called to save Superman's life when the hero is stricken with a mysterious Kryptonian illness. Sam starts to realize that there is more to Lois and Superman's friendship than meets the eye. A re-write and extension of the episode, "Home Is Where The Hurt Is."

Disclaimer: I own nothing. I make nothing. All recognizable characters, dialogue, and plot points belong to DC comics, the Lois and Clark producers, and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise. While I love the episode "Home Is Where The Hurt Is," during a recent re-watching, I realized that I am not totally happy with the way things were handled.

I've been wanting to write this one for a while now. I know there are other stories that are based on the very same episode. Hopefully, I have put my very own, unique spin on this story.

~~~~~ Superman ~~~~~

Dr. Sam Lane returned to the living room and flopped onto the couch. He was in his daughter's fiancé's apartment. The knickknacks around him spoke of a well-traveled man, each tribal mask or glass paperweight or pristinely kept book telling a story that was unique to Clark Kent. He'd have to ask about some of the items, one day when Clark was around. Right now, though, Sam looked around the apartment with unseeing eyes and blindly accepted the mug of coffee that Martha Kent pushed into his hands. He took a sip, wincing a little as the hot liquid nearly scalded his tongue.

"Thanks," he said automatically.

But his mind wasn't in the moment. It was in the bedroom - Clark's bedroom - where Superman lay, sweating, weak, and in pain. Sam's mind whirled as he went over the superhero's condition. At last, he spoke, breaking the fragile, tense silence that had fallen over the apartment.

"Everything points to a raging viral infection," he said at last, sighing in weariness and fear.

"Can you save him?" Lois' voice was small, frightened, and meek.

Sam looked at his daughter and saw how drawn and pale her face was. Tight lines of worry creased her brow. He hadn't seen a look like that cross her face ever before. His heart broke at the sight.

"I don't know. I haven't practiced in fifteen years. And his physiology is unlike anyone else's."

He saw the fresh tears welling in Lois' eyes. He reached out and squeezed her shoulder affectionately.

"When I was a little girl, I thought that my father was the most brilliant doctor in the whole world," she said softly. "Please. I need you to be that doctor once more. He needs you." Her voice sunk to a desperate plea.

Sam rubbed his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose in thought.

"Ok," he said finally. "I'll do whatever I can," he promised. "Let's keep cool wet rags on his head. His fever still isn't gone. I don't know how high we can safely let it get."

Martha turned to the kitchen and grabbed a large blue plastic popcorn bowl and began to fill it with cool water from the faucet. Quickly, she took the bowl into her son's bedroom, stopping only to get fresh wash cloths from the bathroom.

Sam had both of his hands on Lois' shoulders. "He's a lucky man to have all of you here for him."

Lois smiled sadly. "We're lucky to have him."

There was an odd catch in her voice that Sam couldn't quite place. Before he could comment, Lois kissed him on the cheek and turned, disappearing into Clark's room. Sam padded after her, all the while trying to formulate some way of saving Superman. When he poked in through the door, Lois and Martha were sitting on the bed, mopping Superman's feverish brow with cool rags. They were speaking in low tones to him. The superhero was awake and trying to smile at the two women who were tending to him. Sam thought that perhaps Superman's eyes strayed more often to Lois. When they did, Sam caught a vast tenderness in the way that he gazed at her.

*You old fool*, he chided himself. *You know that Lois and Superman are good friends. But was that look more than friendly? He shook his head. No, you're seeing things. You are under a lot of pressure here, Sam. Focus on the problem at hand. Focus. There has to be some way of saving him.*

He slid into the room, and Lois scooted out of the way. Sam checked Superman's vital signs. The fever was still very high. He'd gotten Superman to take some aspirin hours before in an attempt to reduce the fever, but it appeared to have done nothing. Sam reasoned that the man's metabolic rate had probably burned off the medication too quickly for it to be effective, but he feared to give more than two tablets to him. Who knew what the hero's body was going through as it continued to weaken.

So far, there was no real change in Superman's condition. Sam grunted to himself and made his way back to the living room. He needed time to think. But time was running out, he knew that deep down in his heart. Superman's face was ashen, and he could barely move. Pain was thick in his voice whenever he spoke. And that fever! Clark's bed was soaked in sweat. Sam was worried that Superman might just become dehydrated.

Martha came back into the living room, wringing her hands in despair. Lois followed her. Looking at them, Sam saw the depths of hopelessness in their faces.

"He's asleep again," Martha said quietly.

Jonathan stood from the dining room table, where he'd been sitting quietly, staring at the wooden table top.

"I need some air," he said, only sheer will power holding his voice steady. "Lois? Martha? Would you come with me?"

The women agreed slowly, none of them wanting to leave the apartment, each of them desperate to distract themselves for a few minutes. Lois got their coats, and they slipped out of the apartment with promises to be back soon. Before they left, Sam asked them to pick up some Gatorade. He wasn't sure if Superman's electrolyte balance was the same as it was for humans, but he didn't see any harm in trying to get the superhero to drink some regardless. They had to combat dehydration. Of course, they'd been making sure that he was drinking water, but

the Gatorade would help too. Lois promised to do so, eager to be doing anything to try and help.

Sam returned to his place on the couch, acutely aware that he was alone with Ellen. The silence in the apartment was painful. He stared at his hands, not knowing if he should try to talk to her or not. He didn't want to risk an argument with her. He didn't have to decide. Ellen turned to her ex-husband.

"Do you really think you can save him?" she asked, all hint of her earlier annoyance with him gone for the moment. She sounded sincerely scared. Sam hadn't heard that gentle of a tone in her voice since well before their divorce.

Sam shook his head. "I don't know. But I've let you and Lois - especially Lois - down in so many ways. I have to at least try. I've been a terrible father."

Ellen sighed. "I think we've *both* let our daughters down," she said, weariness in her voice.

Sam looked at his ex-wife with surprise. It was rare that she ever admitted having done any wrong in tearing their family apart. "I guess so," he admitted softly.

Another silence stretched between them. Ellen fidgeted on the couch. Sam savored the quiet, once again turning his thoughts to Superman. How *was* he going to save the Man of Steel?

"Where is Clark?" Ellen muttered.

"Lois said he was on an assignment," Sam reminded her gently.

Ellen shook her head, a bit of her fire returning. "He should be *here*. I thought he was friends with Superman. And doesn't he know how much Lois is hurting right now? She needs him, and he isn't here." Sam opened his mouth to speak, but Ellen talked over him. "I just hope Lois isn't making the same mistake I did."

Sam didn't have to ask what she meant. He'd always chosen his work over his family. Now Clark was missing when Lois needed him the most. *Was* Clark the type of man to abandon his loved ones in pursuit of his career? Sam didn't think so, but all the evidence at the moment said that he very well could be. As much as Sam hated to admit it, Ellen had a valid concern.

"Lois knows what she's doing," Sam said, failing to sound as confident as he wanted to.

"I'm not so sure," Ellen grumbled. "Don't get me wrong, Sam. It's not that I dislike Clark. But I'm starting to feel like he's putting our daughter second in his life. He hasn't even called to check in on things."

Sam said nothing. There was no point in arguing with Ellen. And he needed to focus on Superman right now anyway.

Sam wouldn't admit it, but he was scared. Sure, he'd treated beloved public figures before - athletes mostly. But never before had he treated anyone as important as Superman. And, he admitted to himself, he'd never seen Lois so dependent on him to do something before. It put a lot of pressure on him. He only hoped that he could pull off a miracle. He owed it to his daughter. And he certainly owed it to Superman - how many times *had* the man saved Lois' life?

The apartment door opened, and Lois and the Kents came back inside, several brown bags of Gatorade and Chinese takeout in their arms. Lois chilled the drinks in Clark's refrigerator. No one ate very much of the takeout. Lois pushed the food around her plate with a pair of chopsticks, picking at her chicken and

broccoli. Finally, she stood and left, disappearing back into Clark's room to check on Superman.

Sam sighed and cleaned his dishes from the table. He opened a bottle of Gatorade - Lemon Lime - and poured it into a glass with a straw. He had to get Superman to drink. He softly padded towards the bedroom door. He stopped as he got near to the doorway. He could hear Lois and Superman talking. For some odd reason, he didn't want to interrupt them right away. It sounded like they were having an important conversation.

"I think we need to tell them," Superman was saying.

"No, no way," Lois argued. "Do you have any idea what kind of trouble you'd be inviting?"

"I know Lois. But I can't keep lying to them. Not if we intend on making a future together."

"Just a little longer. If you want to tell them when you're well again, that's fine."

"What if I don't get better Lois?" Superman stopped and coughed. "I heard your parents talking when you were out."

"What do you mean?"

"Your mom had a few choice words about Clark. How he should be here with you to support you. How he doesn't seem to be at all concerned with how you are hurting, and how his supposed best friend is dying." There was a bitter edge to his voice.

Lois sighed. "Of course she would have to go there. She's just stressed. We all are. Don't worry about it."

"It isn't fair to keep this from them," Superman pressed.

"Look, I never got the chance to discuss this with you before, but I had thought that maybe after the honeymoon, we could tell them the whole truth. You know. Pair the news with a happy occasion. But now - how can I sit here and pretend anymore? This might be the last chance I have to come clean. And *if* I...die, at least they'll know why Clark won't be there to comfort you."

"Maybe you're right," Lois said, chewing her lower lip in thought. "Maybe it is time. I guess I just don't want to add any more pressure to my father. But...it's your secret. If you think the timing is right...I'll back you up."

"No," Superman said, shaking his head infinitesimally. "It isn't just *my* secret. It hasn't been, for a long time. It's *our* secret. We're in this together."

Lois gave him a weak smile and squeezed his hand. Sam could see it reflected in Clark's mirrors.

"Ok," she agreed. "We'll tell them together." She leaned forward and kissed his lips softly. "I love you."

Superman's eyes had slid shut again as the fever caused him to drift into a troubled sleep. Sam turned and left the hallway, forgetting, for the moment, the drink in his hands. He felt sick to his stomach.

Lois and Superman are having an affair.

He stepped out on Clark's balcony, not bothering to grab his coat. He needed time to think. He didn't want to believe it. His perfect little girl had *kissed* Superman as he lay in her fiancé's bed! She'd told him that she loved him! His heart went out to Clark and his parents. Did they even suspect that Superman was stealing Lois away from them? If they didn't, it seemed like Superman was ready to tell them tonight. Would Clark be there for the revelation? He liked Clark, though he'd only met the young man a handful of times. Still, the reporter had struck him as

a good man, and he had seen how deeply in love with Lois Clark was on the previous night at Lois' apartment. His heart ached for Martha and Jonathan also. In the brief hours that he'd gotten to know Clark's parents, he'd grown to really like them.

Still, what Ellen had said make sense on some twisted level. Where was Clark now? Did he suspect that Superman was making moves towards Lois? Was that why he was keeping his distance from everything that was going on? But then again, if he did know, why would Clark allow Superman the use of his apartment while he fought the virus that was ravaging his body?

*Because Clark's a good guy,* Sam reasoned.

Still, where did that leave Lois in his mind? Sam knew that his daughter had always harbored a crush on Superman. It was clear as day in the articles she wrote about him, at least, it was if you knew Lois personally. She was a skilled enough reporter to make it appear as though she was merely professionally interested in the mysterious superhero that had been saving Metropolis (*and the world*, he reminded himself) for the past two and a half years.

Sam didn't want to believe that his daughter could be so morally debased as to actually have an affair with anyone, let alone with Superman. And he knew that she loved Clark. He'd seen it in her eyes the day before. He'd heard it in her voice whenever she spoke about him. So what in the name of God was going on?

With an effort, he tried to push the thought to the furthest corner of his mind. That line of thought was doing nothing to save Superman. And as angry as he was with the superhero right now, he knew that he couldn't let the man die. Not if he could help it. It was, after all, part of the oath he'd taken upon becoming a doctor. To do no harm and to help those that he could. What kind of awful person would he be if he let his anger rule him and used it to justify letting a man die? No, he simply would not allow it. It was against the oath he'd sworn as a doctor. And it was against the oath he'd sworn to his daughter. There was time enough to be angry if Superman survived. And as it was, Sam wasn't sure that the man would survive to see Christmas morning.

An idea began to take shape in his mind as he thought over all of the articles and texts he'd read over the course of his career. The prospect frightened him, and he wasn't sure how he could make it work. But it was the only course of action that seemed like it had a chance of working. He shivered in the cold night air - the prospect of the treatment chilling him more than the frigid air. He went back into the apartment and took in the faces of his ex-wife and the Kents. The Kents were coming out from Clark's room. They all looked exhausted. Lois was still in Clark's room, it seemed.

He walked over, picking up the glass of Gatorade that he'd abandoned before. He knocked softly. Lois looked up and stood when she saw her father.

"He's getting worse," she asked, her voice thick with concern.

Sam stalled for a moment. "You were just a little girl when you thought I could perform miracles. Now you're grown up, and you know that miracles come at a price."

Lois nodded. "Yes."

Sam pressed on, forcing himself to say the words. "There is a treatment - a very controversial treatment. The idea is to bring the host body to the point of death. As the body begins to die, it can no longer support the virus and starves it out."

"Are you asking me to make that decision for him?" She slid her eyes back to the man laying on the bed.

Superman's eyes fluttered open. "You don't have to. The answer is yes."

"Ok," Sam said, his stomach churning in fear. He pressed the glass into Lois' hands. "In the mean time, get him to drink this."

Lois set the glass on the night table and reached for Clark's phone. She dialed the number for STAR Labs as Clark recited them from memory. After a moment, the phone picked up.

"Dr. Bernard Klein please", she said. Lois listened as the phone dialed into Dr. Klein's office. After a couple of rings, the doctor picked up. "Dr. Klein! Thank God. I hoped you'd still be in the lab. It's Lois Lane. Yes. I need a huge favor. Yes, it's very important. Superman needs access to one of the pieces of Kryptonite that you have stored in your vaults. No, this isn't a joke. Can you deliver it to 344 Clinton? Clark Kent's apartment. Right. Yes. I'll put Superman on so you can confirm his voice print."

She held the phone to Superman's head.

"Dr. Klein, it's Superman. Deliver it to Lois as she's asked."

His eyes closed again, as if speaking had been too great a strain. Lois hung up the phone and shook Superman. When he opened his eyes, she held the glass so that he could drink from the straw. He emptied the glass in four great gulps, then sighed.

A look passed between Lois and Superman. Ever so slightly, he nodded to her.

"Daddy, we need to talk to you and mom. Could you bring her in here?"

"Sure. Do you, uh, need Clark's parents too?"

"No, they already know."

Sam's stomach twisted into knots as he called Ellen into Clark's room. He wasn't sure he was ready to hear the truth.

"Please, sit," Superman asked as Sam and Ellen reentered the room. "This isn't going to be easy to hear. And it's not going to be easy for us to tell you this."

Sam escorted Ellen around the bed to a couple of chairs that had been placed there earlier.

"What I am about to tell you can never be told to another person. I need to know that I can trust that you'll keep this secret safe."

"Well," Sam said, "doctor-patient confidentiality and all that."

"Dr. Lane, this goes well beyond that. This...thing...I'm about to tell you, I am trusting you both to keep secret. I am giving you my deepest level of trust by telling you this. If anyone else ever found out about this, every life in this apartment would be destroyed."

Sam's stomach was flip flopping, and he fought the taste of bile in his throat. Superman was about to confess his affair with Lois.

"I think I know what you're going to say. But you have my solemn oath that I will never breathe a word of whatever you are going to tell me."

He glanced at Ellen. "I promise," she said.

Superman nodded slightly, looking relieved. "Thank you." Lois squeezed his hand in support. "I know you must be wondering where Clark Kent is. Why he's not here to support Lois during this...difficult time. How he can possibly ignore that I'm in his apartment...dying."

Sam said nothing. And remarkably, Ellen kept her mouth shut for once also.

Superman continued. "There is a very real, very good reason for that. But please, I beg you, any anger or...whatever...that you have when I tell you this, you'll let me explain first. And if this treatment works and I do survive this, I'll answer any questions you have. There's just...too much...to explain now and not enough time." He took a deep breath before speaking again but the action caused his lungs to spasm in a fit of coughing. He had to take several deep breaths to recover. At last, he mastered himself again. "I don't really...know how to say this. It might be easier if I show you."

He nodded to Lois again and she turned. In seconds, she placed a pair of Clark's glasses on his face.

"Look closely and tell me who you see."

Sam shook his head. Why on earth was Superman wearing glasses?

"Wait," Lois said. She turned as grabbed a shirt from Clark's closet. It was an old Bills sweatshirt. She placed it over Superman's chest, hiding his uniform. "Now look," she said.

Sam did look and blinked as realization dawned on him. Superman looked exactly like a deathly pale Clark.

"Do you see now?" Lois asked.

"C-Clark?" Sam asked, incredulous.

"Yeah," Clark said.

"You're Clark *and* Superman?"

"Yeah."

Suddenly, Sam laughed. On the puzzled expressions that followed, he explained. "I overheard a little of your conversation earlier," he admitted. "I didn't mean to. But what I heard...I was convinced that you two were having an affair or something."

"Daddy!" Lois snapped.

"No offense, sweetheart. I just couldn't imagine why else you'd kiss Superman!"

"Oh. You saw that, huh?" Lois blushed.

Sam nodded. Ellen was just staring, wide-eyed.

"My son-in-law-to-be is an alien?" she squeaked.

"Mother!" Lois reprimanded her.

"Sorry," Ellen said, as though put out. "These things take some getting used to!"

"Lois," Jonathan called from the living room. "It's here."

Clark's father wheeled the lead case into his son's room while Lois took the sweatshirt and glasses off of her fiancé. She placed the glasses lovingly back on the night table.

"There's still time," she said, refusing to look at the lead box.

"I'm afraid there isn't," Sam said gently. "You don't have to watch if you don't want to."

"No," Lois said, and Sam was glad to see a glimmer of defiance in her eyes. "I need to stay."

Sam nodded and swallowed around the lump in his throat, tried to quiet the butterflies in his stomach. The pressure of the situation wasn't lost on him. He had the life of not only a national hero in his hands but also that of his daughter's husband-to-be. His hands shook as he unlocked the box and lifted the lid.

Instantly, Clark was writhing in pain. Sam watched in silent horror, unconsciously holding his ex-wife to him. He tried not to look at the pain dancing in the Kents' eyes. He tried not to look at his daughter's tears. He felt horrible to have even suggested such

a course of action. But still some part of him argued that it really *was* the only shot they had at saving him.

Long minutes passed as Clark tossed his head back and forth, as though the action could distance himself from the sickly green stone that was stealing his life. Sam wished that he didn't have to hear the grunts of pain that Clark was emitting. He wanted to retreat from the room. He didn't want to witness this. But he was Clark's doctor at the moment. He had an obligation to stay. He tried to force himself to emotionally detach from the situation, but whereas once it had occurred naturally to him, this time it remained elusive. He wished he could just walk over to the lead box and snap the lid shut, stop the entire procedure. But it was well past the point of no return now.

Slowly, Clark's movements slowed to the occasional spasm. His cries grew quiet.

"What's happening to him?" Martha asked fearfully.

Sam checked Clark's vital signs for what felt like the hundredth time that night. He sighed.

"He's passed out from the pain. But at least the fever is gone."

"I can't watch this," Martha said, turning her tear-stained face to her husband's chest.

"Come on, Martha," Jonathan said gently. "Let's go get you a cup of tea. Sam? Ellen?"

"Sounds great," Ellen said distractedly.

Lois refused to leave Clark's side. Sam sat wearily on the couch, gratefully accepting a cup of Oolong tea when Martha pushed it into his hands. Silence pervaded the room. The TV flickered with images, but the sound was muted. Sam stared at the images as LNN covered the breaking news, but his stare was mostly unseeing.

Time dragged past. It was well past midnight. Outside the apartment, a fire engine wailed in the distance. Someone needed Superman, but the hero lay in the other room, a chunk of Kryptonite slowly killing him.

"Daddy!" Lois' shriek nearly caused him to drop his empty mug.

Sam raced to the bedroom. Clark was not moving. He checked for signs of life. Behind him, the others crowded around.

"He's in a coma," Sam announced. He heard strangled cries erupt from everyone's throats.

"I'll stay with him," Sam said. He snapped the lid of the box shut, cutting off the Kryptonite's deadly attack on Superman. "I need to keep an eye on his condition anyway." He gestured that they were free to retreat back to the living room.

A weariness unlike anything Sam had ever felt seemed to be weighing him down. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the young man that lay on the bed before him. It was incredible, he mused. Not that Superman was sick - though of course the idea still shocked him. But Superman was Clark. Clark was Superman. His daughter was going to marry Superman. And he, Sam Lane, might very well be responsible for killing Superman. The knowledge was crushing. But, as much as he hated to admit it, he truly could not think of any other course of action that had even the slightest chance of working. Still, what if he killed Superman? Killed Clark? Would Lois be able to forgive him? Would he ever be able to forgive himself?

It was all too much. Sam buried his head in his hands and sobbed silently as he sat on one of the chairs. Eventually, he fell into a light sleep.

He awoke to a gentle hand on his shoulder. He looked up with sleep-bleary eyes. Jonathan stood above him.

"May I?" he asked, gesturing to the empty seat next to Sam.

"Please," he responded, his eyes snapping up to check on Clark's progress.

Lois was asleep on the bed, her head resting on Clark's shoulder. Her body was pressed close to his body.

"I'm so sorry about all of this, Jonathan," he said sincerely. "I can't imagine how hard this has got to be on you and Martha. I wish I could do more. But it's all up to him now." He looked again at Lois. "I'm glad my daughter found your son."

"So are we. She's a special girl, and we love her."

"You've got a special boy there," Sam said. "Even if he wasn't Superman."

It was still so surreal, sitting in Superman's bedroom, talking with Superman's father as though Superman was some ordinary guy. Jonathan seemed to understand where Sam's thoughts were.

"You know that he's just Clark, right? I mean, Clark *is* who he is. Superman is just a manifestation of the things that he can do. Superman is the disguise, not Clark."

Sam nodded slowly. "Yes, I think I do." He glanced out the windows. The sun was coming up. "Why don't you and Martha go back to Lois' place for a while? Get some rest. There's nothing to do but wait it out now. I'll call you if anything changes."

Jonathan seemed to consider it. "All right."

Lois had stirred and was looking at the two men. "I'll get you my keys."

"Lois, honey, I think you should come with us. I think Clark would appreciate it too."

Lois started to protest but stopped. Sam knew that she'd gotten only two hours of sleep, if that. To his infinite surprise, she relented.

After Lois and the Kents left, Sam took to pacing. He was drained but his fear made him restless. Hours ticked by. He checked on Ellen. She had finally fallen asleep on Clark's couch. He covered her with a throw blanket. He poured himself a cup of coffee. Retreating back to Clark's room, he slumped back into his chair and renewed his vigil, taking the morning's edition of *The Daily Planet* with him. He was halfway through an article on an impending transit strike when Clark began to stir.

"Lois?" he muttered as he struggled to fully awaken. "Lois?"

Sam grabbed the phone and punched in Lois' number.

Jonathan picked up. "He's awake," Sam said into the receiver, the smile on his face evident in his voice. Over the ear piece, he could hear the excited cries of Lois and Martha. Sam hung up with Jonathan. His heart was nearly bursting with relief and with pride. He'd done it. Superman was alive. Clark was alive. He hugged Ellen and was surprised when she hugged him back.

"You did good, Sam," she said, smiling at him.

When was the last time she'd smiled at him? He wasn't sure. Probably when Lois and Lucy were very young. Sam flashed her a smile right back.

Suddenly, Clark sat upright in his bed. A look of anxiety was on his face. He tried to stand, needing to grab onto the night stand as he did so. Sam was instantly at his side.

"Where's Lois?" Clark demanded. Then he clapped his hands over his ears. "What is that? Can't you hear it?"

"Now son, take it easy. You're still very weak," Sam tried to soothe him.

Clark shot away in a blur of blue and red. Sam blinked in surprise. He hadn't expected that, especially since he had just seen the man emerge from the brink of death. Ellen's shocked expression was a match for his own.

~~~~~ Superman ~~~~~

That evening, everyone stood around in Lois' living room. It was Christmas Eve. Outside, snow was gently falling. Carolers meandered down the streets, stopping here and there in front of the brownstones. Lois and Clark filled Sam and Ellen in on what had happened that day. It seemed that some guy, a Joey Bermuda, also known as The Handyman, had rigged Lois' microwave to explode. Clark's super hearing had picked up the sound after it had picked up Lois calling to him. Clark couldn't quite explain how he'd been able to zero in on Lois while still in a coma. In any case, Baby Gunderson, Sam's android, had caught the exchange between The Handyman and whoever he was working for, and Superman and Lois had gone and busted him.

Sam insisted on giving Clark a brief examination. It really was remarkable. Clark showed no signs that he'd ever even been sick. Clark explained that sunlight helped to repair and recharge him, so he had spent several hours high above the earth and clouds just floating and allowing the sunlight to do its job. In fact, Clark was feeling so good that he kept popping into the kitchen to help as Martha and Jonathan prepared the meal. Sam almost laughed aloud when he caught Superman, of all people, looking for his mother's opinion on whether or not the mashed potatoes were too lumpy still.

Lois placed the last of the ornaments on the tree - a star that Clark had given her on their previous Christmas together. Sam plugged in the two trees and in a blast of blinding light, managed to short the circuits.

"Ok, no one panic," he heard Clark say in the dark, laughter coloring the edges of his words.

"Baby Gunderson, if you don't mind," Sam said as he plugged the trees into her ears.

The apartment lit up once more. Clark was standing behind Lois, his arms wrapped lovingly around her. She seemed to melt into his body. Sam realized that he'd never seen his little girl so relaxed before. In that moment, he realized something else. He didn't need any of Clark's explanations about the whole Superman disguise. Sure, he was curious, and he asked questions anyway. Clark proved to be true to his word and seemed happy to answer whatever Sam and Ellen asked. But Sam knew that didn't *need* answers. Clark was a good guy, and he made Lois happy. That was all that really mattered.

"Ok, presents or a game of *Monopoly*?" Clark asked after they'd spent some time admiring the tree and after dinner was eaten.

"Presents," Lois piped up. "You get cranky when we play *Monopoly*."

“Lois,” he said, gaping. “I left for five minutes to stop an out of control bus, and you sold my railroads to Jimmy. You were supposed to *protect* my assets.”

Clark smiled at her. He passed out the gifts that his parents, and he had brought over that evening. The last one he handed over was to Sam. Sam was surprised, to say the least. He tore the paper from the slender box and opened it. His breath caught in his throat.

Inside the box was a medal depicting St. Luke. It was meant to be carried in a wallet.

“I don’t really know if you’re a religious man,” Clark said. He sounded almost apologetic. “But St. Luke *is* the patron saint of doctors. I just wanted to say thank you. If it hadn’t been for your help and treatment, I wouldn’t be here tonight. It took a lot of guts to do what you did. I owe you my life.”

Sam was speechless. All he could do was smile. “You’re welcome. I’m just glad that I could help,” he finally managed to say. “It’s beautiful.”

“Clark, where did you get that?” Lois asked.

Clark blushed a little. “The Vatican. I flew over there this afternoon. They have a really lovely shop right outside, and I picked this up. I, uh, got it blessed while I was there.”

“Let me guess. The Pope?”

Clark smiled nervously.

Lois swatted his arm. “Really Clark?”

“What? He heard I was in town and asked to see me. It’s not like I planned it! So I told him what happened, and he offered to bless the medal. What was I supposed to say? No thanks?” His voice was that of the long suffering, but his eyes sparkled in amusement.

“So you just told the Pope, hey guess, what, I almost died? I thought we weren’t spreading that around.”

“Who’s he going to tell, Lois?” He held her even tighter to his chest. “Oh, wait, what’s this?” He pulled a surprise gift from the breast pocket of his jacket. He handed it to Lois. “Merry Christmas, Lois.”

Sam watched as his daughter unwrapped the small box and withdrew a diamond heart necklace.

“Clark, it’s beautiful. But it’s too much. You must have spent a fortune on this!”

“Actually, remember when I had to run out of the newsroom last week and stop that riot in Africa? Well, I found myself in a diamond-rich area and was inspired. I paid the landowners for it. Carving it into the heart...now there’s where the real challenge was.”

Sam watched as Clark plucked the necklace from Lois’ hands and clasped it around her neck. He couldn’t help but smile as he saw the look of pure love and happiness on his daughter’s face. He smiled again as Lois wrapped her arms around her fiancé and kissed him happily.

Yes, Clark would make a fine husband to Lois. In fact, Sam wouldn’t have it any other way.

THE END