

# Earth's Calling

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Summary: For Jor-El and Lara, sending their defenseless newborn son out into the universe was both the easiest and the hardest decision they'd ever made.

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You'll never remember me.

I think that's the hardest part of all of this for me.

You'll never remember what I looked like. You'll never recall the sound of my voice as I sang you to sleep. You'll never be able to bring to mind any hint of the gentle way my finger has brushed over your tiny cheeks in such awe that you are here. You won't even remember my name.

Mother.

Someone will one day replace me as your mother. Some woman I'll never meet. Some stranger I'll never be able to choose for myself to raise and love you. She'll love you and care you for as her own. I have to believe that, otherwise I'm not sure I'll have the strength to take another step forward toward the small capsule which lays in wait to whisk you away from me, away from your certain death. This mystery woman — I have to believe that she'll be worthy of you, of the most precious gift I can give her, of the greatest responsibility there could ever be. Whoever she is, she stands to gain everything. In turn, I'm giving up everything. She'll be your mother and I will be nothing more than a vague concept in your mind — the shadowy, undefined figure you'll know must have existed to give birth to you.

Questions.

I know there will be many questions in your future. Who you really are. Where you came from. Why you were given up. Whether or not your father and I really loved you at all.

All I can say is, your father and I love you more than life itself. That's what makes this so difficult. For years, we prayed to be blessed with a child, begging the forces of the universe to see us as worthy of becoming parents. Our ecstasy at discovering you were on the way has no adequate description. From that moment on, our feet never touched the ground — we felt as if we were floating in our joy. And when you were born, it was as if we held the very sun in our arms, so bright and warm our lives became.

But our peaceful, overjoyed, loving family was never meant to last. Our planet is dying. It shudders and moans and cracks ever more frequently. I fear that we have days at best, hours at worst, before our world becomes extinct. Now we reverently pray to those same forces of the universe, pleading for them to bring you safely to Earth, to a new family, to a chance to have a life and grow into a man.

Krypton is dying. That's the hard truth of the matter. That's why our decision to send you to Earth is easy for us. If you stay with us, you will die with us. You, who have barely begun to live. You, who only a few short days ago smiled and laughed at us for the very first time. You, who would have one day gone on to rule this planet alongside your wife, Zara, if she and the others are

still alive, as they search for a new home for us — too late now, sadly. You would have been a good ruler — we would have raised you to be gentle and kind and fair to all the people of Krypton.

Will your new parents raise you as your father and I would have? Will they be good people? Will they see how special you are, the way that your father and I do? Will they realize how lucky they are to have you in their lives? Will they love you? More than anything, I hope they love you with the fierceness that I do. I hope they will celebrate with you all the things I never will.

First words, first steps. First teeth, the first time you roll over on your own. The first night you sleep through the night. The first time you eat solid food. Your first birthday. Your first day of school, your last day of school. When you shed babyhood for toddler-hood, your toddler-hood for childhood, your childhood for your teenage years, your teenage years for adulthood. Your new family will, I pray, see you fall in love and raise children of your own. Selfishly, I am glad that, at the least, your first smile and your first laugh have been ours to treasure. Because in these last final moments, that's all I'll have to hold on to.

And you? What can I give you to hold on to? What can I send with you into your new life as a memento of the world that was once yours? What can I give you to comfort you as your short life is torn asunder as you are sent off, alone, into the universe?

This blanket, of course. I made it for you just as soon as I knew you were a little boy. I can only hope that the love I put into it when I was making it somehow radiates from it to wrap you in warmth and love and gives you enough memories of me to comfort you and hold the loneliness at bay as you rocket toward your destination. You aren't yet aware of it, but the sigil it bears is meant to declare that you are from the noble house of El. It is a proud symbol, my little Kal, for the house of El has a long history of serving the planet of Krypton, many of the members — including your own father — serving on the Council of Elders.

That's why we are still here, rather than with the floating palace. Your father, the Chief Elder, felt it was his duty to stay and attempt to find a solution to the quakes which constantly rock the planet now. He felt it his responsibility to try to convince those who had stayed here, rather than going with the palace, to evacuate Krypton. None have listened, including me. I could not leave him behind and you were not yet born when the band of colonists left the planet. We've heard no word from them, and I fear the worst has happened.

What else can I send with you? The space in your capsule is so limited. Perhaps this one small stuffed toy. You love this silly brown creature so well. I think your father said it looks very similar to what Earthlings call a "bear." Yes, I will add him to your ship. Perhaps he can abate the isolation for you and help you to feel less alone. Besides, you never could sleep without having him near.

The time to say goodbye is rapidly approaching. I wish I could freeze time and live in this moment forever — you peacefully laying in my arms, looking up into my face, the world mercifully quiet and stable for the time being. I wish I didn't have to say goodbye. I wish I could be there to see you grow into a man. But time is short and I have no way to escape our fate with you. Though I do not want to die, I am happy to exchange my life for yours.

Please Kal, hold on to the memory of me and how much I love you, even if that memory is buried so deeply you can never call it to mind. Please, when the time is right, and your father's messages come to you, realize how agonizing it was for us to send you away. Please, know that you were loved more than anything. Please, live a long and happy life, no matter where you wind up on that strange, distant planet your father has selected for you.

I love you, my son, my little Kal. From your first heartbeat to my last, I have known no greater joy or pride in my life than I have being your mother, and no greater love. Now you must go and spread that same joy and love to others. Be a light for others in darkness, as you have been the light of your parents' world.

Our time is up. The planet grows ever more irritable by the second. There is no more time to say goodbye. No more stolen moments of final cuddles to last us both our respective lifetimes. Nothing left to say except, I love you. Nothing left to me but my memories as Jor and I cling to each other as you streak away to safety in your ship and the planet gives one last tremendous, roaring shudder and explodes into oblivion.

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My son.

My little Kal.

I wish things could be different. I wish I was merely putting you into your cradle at night, kissing your tiny brow, the tip of your nose, your minuscule hands, and wishing you sweet dreams until you wake once more to eat, howling your hunger at us when we are too slow in rousing from our own slumber. I wish I was looking forward to seeing those small, quiet hours in the middle of the night while your mother and I rock you back to sleep. I wish I was anticipating the morning and whatever impressive new skill you master, even if it's just learning how to laugh even harder at the silly faces I sometimes make at you, or clutching your stuffed toys so tightly it seems hardly possible from one so small.

Instead, nothing but death awaits me. I shall have no more middle of the night feedings with you. I'll never see your happy, toothless smile again. My ears will never behold your enthusiastic laugh again. We will share no more mornings together.

Rather than spend a lazy day snuggling you to myself, marveling at how tiny and perfect you are, I'm instead forced to bundle you into a capsule that will whisk you away from your home-world and into vast coldness of the universe, trusting that the hyperlight drive I've placed in the ship will guide you safely to Earth, the world I've chosen for your new home. I know I'm doing the right thing. I *hope* I'm doing the right thing, sending you to the right place, trusting the ship's autopilot to do what I myself cannot physically do.

I've given your mother all the assurances. Earth is a planet so close a match to Krypton that it is uncanny. The atmosphere is perfectly suited to us. The inhabitants of that world look and sound just like we do, in all ways, though I can't speak much for how they might think, how their lives are like. I know you'll be able to eat and drink the offerings of that distant planet. But there is one thing that sets Earth apart from Krypton, and I don't know how it will affect you. Earth's sun is yellow, not red. The difference will not kill you, of this I am certain. If anything, I believe it may make you even stronger than you normally would have been. It may even have other unnatural effects on your body. Powers, if you will.

If my theory is true, you will have some rough times ahead of you. Times where it may seem like your abilities will be too much for you to continue on with. In those times, you must remember that you are stronger than any powers that might manifest. You are of the house of El, and that means you have an inner strength beyond measure. You will find ways to deal with the effects of the yellow sun. You will find ways to blend in seamlessly with your new home and new people.

I haven't told your mother of this. There is no need to worry her over what we cannot control. We have no other choice. If we had months or years more to search for a suitable planet with a red sun, I would do so. But we don't have that luxury. So, I beg your forgiveness in advance, for sending you to a world where you might be able to camouflage yourself amongst the people

who populate the place, but never quite be just like them. My greatest hope is that, if my predictions are true and you truly *do* develop extraordinary abilities, that you never use them for evil purposes. If you use them, put them to use for the greater good, my son. I have faith that you will, that good people will find you and raise you to be an upstanding citizen of Earth.

That's why I've chosen the sleepy-seeming farmlands of middle America for your ultimate destination. My hope is that the gentle, honest-seeming people of that simple land find you and raise you the way your mother and I would have. That, and the open lands of that place — called Kansas — are far more accommodating for your capsule to land, much more than the crowded cities with their lofty buildings which reach into the sky, not unlike the major cities of our world.

I wish it didn't have to be this way. I wish I could go with you, or better yet, find a way to fix this planet of ours so that it is once more a safe, stable place for us all to live. My heart is heavy, knowing that I will never see you grow up into a man. It tears me to shreds inside that I won't even have another day with you, or another hour. You must go, and go soon. I fear any delay might cause us to be off guard and too late to send you out of harm's reach. I could not bear it if I inadvertently sentenced you to die alongside your mother and me.

Still, surely I can steal one last moment with you, to hold you, to touch your delicate face, to burn the image of your perfect little being into my mind, treasuring the weight of your tiny frame in my arms. And as I gaze at you, I draw strength from you — the strength to do the one thing I'd never imagined I would have to do, to let you go, to send you off into the harsh and unforgiving deadness of the space between planets. The strength to trust that the onboard computer will speed you to your destination as swiftly as it can and land you, unharmed, upon the strange new world that will be your forever home. The strength of hope that you will be loved and treasured by the family who takes you in as their own.

Your eyes lock with mine and you smile at me. It's almost more than I can bear. It nearly unmakes me and melts my solid will. But the lapse is momentary, just long enough for the planet to quake again, longer and stronger than it has yet. That's all it takes to snap me firmly back into the moment, and to once more steel my resolve to send you away from this place, this soon-to-be graveyard. But that doesn't stop my tears from welling as I give you over to your mother one last time, hoping that this last stolen moment will be enough to see her through until our time is up. Yet nothing can stop the rivers of tears from streaming down your mother's cheeks, though I can see how hard she is trying to keep it together, to be brave, for all of us. It reminds me, yet again, why I love her so much. It makes me hope that you've inherited that inner strength from her.

It's time now. Time to put you into your ship, to say goodbye, to send you off to your new life, to get you away from this roiling, unstable planet. It's time to let you go and for your mother and I to face our deaths as calmly as we can. There is nothing else to do now. No hope that we can heal our world or save the people who have stayed behind in stubbornness or blindness.

My little Kal.

I send you forth with a heart torn in two. Heavy, because this is the end, my last, final glimpse of you. But full of hope too, that you, at the least, will live on. A last son of Krypton, perhaps, but a son of Krypton nonetheless. Where you are going, you will be different. You may feel, at times, like an outcast. But you will never be alone. Lara and I send our love with you and the proud heritage you carry in your Kryptonian genes. You will make our strength your own, and, in time, perhaps use it to help the people of Earth. Some will fear you, some will embrace you, if you do. Some will laud you as a hero, others will revile you for your

goodness. Some will stumble as they strive to attain the ideals you may one day choose to set as a shining example for humanity. Give them time and be patient with them. I may not know much about Earth, but I do know that, like the people of Krypton, most of them are genuinely good. They will find ways to join you in the sun.

So I cannot regret sending you away to them. I wish only that I could see you aid the people of your new home-world in bettering their planet. And I wish you could know just how much I love you.

Go now, my son. Earth's calling for you.

THE END