

Through My Eyes (Superman)

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Summary: No one sees you quite like your family does. A look at Superman's life through the eyes of his daughter.

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Disclaimer: I own nothing. I make nothing. All characters, plot points, and recognizable dialogue belong to DC comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise. The first two-and-a-half lines came from a *Complete the Story* book as a story prompt.

It was odd to be in a room full of people who all seemed to look up to my dad like he was some kind of hero. A part of me wanted to see him through their eyes just for a moment. I tried to picture him as they did — just an alien superhero, separate from them, above them, different in every way. Non-human. They couldn't know what it was like, to *not* view him like that. To see him as the sometimes flawed, very human, normal man he'd kept so well hidden behind the flashy Spandex of his uniform. To see him for who he truly was — a loving and devoted husband and father.

Oh, I *wish* I could have seen him as just Superman. It would have made that day *so* much easier. The day when I had to say goodbye. The day I had to bury my father.

But I couldn't. Because he was never "just" a hero to me. Even back before I knew that Superman was what my father did in his spare time, the caped superhero was a family friend. I always knew that my mom and dad were close friends of his. I knew that they were the ones who'd been there from Day One, covering Superman's colorful arrival into the world, documenting everything he did to make the world a better place, defending him when the world seemed to turn its collective back on him. And sometimes, on special occasions, Superman would come and visit, and with a knowing nod from my mother, he would take my brothers and me on short flights. They were never more than just that — short flights, usually over Metropolis. We never watched the sun set from the top of the Eiffel Tower or anything like that, even though we all begged and pleaded with Superman to extend the flights and prolong our bedtimes.

It was great fun for us kids, to be friends with the hero everyone looked up to. It made us celebrities, in a sense, amongst our classmates. Even now, at my advanced age, I can remember the look of awe on their faces when we would introduce Superman to our classes for brief visits.

Then, one summer day, Superman stopped being a hero, and, instead, morphed into my father.

I was ten, and it came time for mom to sit me down for "the talk." Most kids get handed a pamphlet or sit through an awkward conversation about their changing bodies and the powerful new urges they would soon be experiencing. I wished — at the time — that I'd been so lucky. Instead, I got a double whammy. Not only would I soon blossom into a woman, I would also, in all likelihood, be developing super powers. Super powers that my father and two older brothers possessed and had completely hidden from me. It was a lot to take in, for all the obvious reasons.

For a few weeks, I was livid. How *dare* my family keep such secrets from me? Didn't they trust me? Were they waiting until I

started to fly before telling me? But, gradually, I came to realize that there had been no choice. Had I known these things as a child, I would never have been able to keep the secret, which would have put my entire family at risk. And the idea of gaining super powers would have terrified me, tainting my happy childhood.

Looking back, I guess it shouldn't have surprised me to find out that I was so biologically different from my peers. I hardly ever fell ill, for one thing. And those few times when I did fall victim to a nasty cold had been mostly in my toddler years. Then there was the fact that I never got hurt. All the cuts and scrapes and bruises that my friends suffered during gym class or recess or weekend get-togethers just didn't occur. In my blissful ignorance of my unique DNA, I'd never really thought about it, or, if I did, I'd chalked it up to being careful or just plain old dumb luck.

With my new knowledge, however, everything began to make sense. My anger melted away and I became grateful that my parents chose to tell me when they did. By the next summer, my body flung itself into puberty with a vengeance. And as my body changed and matured, my abilities began to manifest. Soon, I possessed all the powers of my father. In fact, my powers came so fast and furious that they typically manifested at an earlier age than they had for my father and brothers. Dad always joked that it was because I was the daughter of Lois Lane. Mom always laughed and good-naturedly teased him back.

In those moments, the love between them outshone the sun.

In any case, I've always counted myself lucky, in that my dad and brothers went through the process of controlling their powers first. Their patient lessons chased away the fears that I had as each new ability made its presence known. I was able to find the balance I needed, the control that such powers demanded, with ease. And I made some amazing memories along the way. Even now, well into my golden years, some of my fondest memories are those times alone with my dad — his gentle, loving talks guiding me as I figured out how to fly, or control my heat vision, or worked on tuning my super hearing in and out.

Actually, if we're being honest, out of all of those moments, the ones spent flying were always my favorites. Like Dad, I found the sense of freedom gained by leaving the world behind to be both simultaneously exhilarating and peaceful. It was so different, to be flying under my own power, instead of being in my dad's secure embrace. Still, I loved those moments, when he would gather me in his arms and whisk me away into the clouds. So, once in a while, I would ask him to take me flying the way he did when I was a child. Each time, I saw this look in his eyes. It spoke to me of sadness at seeing his daughter growing up and of pride over the woman I was becoming, of fatherly love and of gratitude to have the close bond we shared. I was always sure to cling to him extra tightly on those flights, and he always responded with a silent, comforting squeeze.

Yet as I grew, I remained conflicted about my powers. Should I hide them from the world, the way my dad had in his early years? Should I, like both of my parents, choose a more conventional route in making a difference in the world? Or should I choose to make it known that Superman's daughter was joining the fight to protect the world from whatever evil would befall it? Eventually, I settled on concealing my powers and entering the world of politics. And while I don't like to pat myself on the back, I've always been happy with the positive changes I've helped to bring about in the world. Metropolis was the first city to effectively eradicate homelessness while I was mayor. And our school system soared to top of the charts.

People have always asked me who inspires me, who are my heroes, if my family's relationship with Superman shaped my world views. And I've always told them that I am, one hundred percent, a product of the upbringing my parents gave me. It was *they* who instilled the morals and values I've always kept so close to my heart. *They* are my heroes. Because they were the ordinary

people who gave so much of themselves and did so much good for people, all *without* the help of special powers.

Ordinary people.

My dad always tried so hard to be ordinary. But he never was, not to me. And it wasn't because of his Kryptonian lineage or the abilities that came along with it. It was because of all the times he went above and beyond for his family. It was every time he made it a priority to make it to Chris' soccer game, or Michael's cub scout meeting, or my volleyball match. It was every time he was late coming home from work because he'd stopped to pick up ice cream for dessert, or a new comic book for my brothers, or a new stuffed animal for me when I was young. It was all the times when he got home from a rescue, still caked in grease or smoke or blood, only to shower in mere heartbeats, then patiently spend the night helping with homework or a science fair project. It was all the times he was there to tuck us into bed, read us a story, and kiss us goodnight. It was the way he remained helplessly in love with my mother, though all of us were aware of how easy it would have been for Superman to have anyone in the world he might fancy.

And yet, for all of those moments when he was extraordinary, there *were* flashes when he truly was a flawed, ordinary man. My brothers and I were no strangers to being accidentally embarrassed by him, particularly during our teenage years, when *everything* seemed like an embarrassment. In hindsight, it was adorable how he and Mom remained so much in love — like two teenagers, always holding hands, always kissing one another.

Then there were the sports games and field trips he had to miss, due to work obligations or super responsibilities. I know he always felt so awful when he couldn't be there, but none of us ever blamed him. There were times when I know he paced the house all night long, shaken to the core by some tragedy he'd assisted at, or a rescue that had gone horribly wrong, or near-miss with Kryptonite. He never spoke of them to us kids, not even when we were adults, but I'm certain he shared everything with mom, though she never spoke of them either.

Those moments of ordinariness only served to make him *more* extraordinary in my eyes.

And I wish, oh I wish, the people gathered for his funeral could have known those moments. Maybe then, they would have understood that Superman was more than a hero. Maybe they would have understood how powerful a thing it was that he was a human man. That he was a husband and father. That he was a humble reporter who spent his days fighting for those who couldn't.

As it stood, they could only see what was left of the hero. Just the shell of a man, aged but still noble even with his spirit gone. They saw only the symbol they'd long since taken for granted. They saw Superman's lofty goals for the world, his eagerness to help, his undimmed passion for justice. They saw the hope that Superman always embodied as less bright, now that he was dead. They saw a body to bury, the same as any war hero — a stiff, unmoving form lying in repose in a casket, which would soon be draped with the American flag. They saw his death in terms of the world — how good people in every corner of this planet were watching Superman's funeral, dabbing at their eyes with sodden tissues, shuddering cries wracking their chests. They saw political opportunities — how would each of them use the death of Superman to further their own agendas? Could they fill in for the hero? Could they continue his work? Did they even *want* to, despite the fact that Chris and Michael took up the mantle of Superman decades before our father died?

I envied them in their ignorance. I craved their blindness.

They couldn't know the heartbreak, not the way I did. They never saw the heart Superman had. They were oblivious to how human he was. How gentle. How patient. How selfless. They didn't know him as the man who would stay awake all night with his children if they were sick or scared or suffering from

heartbreak. They never cried into his shoulder or fell asleep in his arms. They never saw how only his wife's death, a few short years before his own, was the only thing that ever truly aged him.

They lost a hero that day.

I lost my father.

"Madam President," they called to me, signaling that it was time to begin the sterile government funeral Superman was getting.

But the speech I'd prepared felt devoid of meaning, because even in death, no one could know the truth about Superman. No one could know that Superman never really existed, that he was nothing more than a facade adopted by a humble reporter, the son of farmers. Because that would have destroyed the illusion for them. For the world, Superman needed remain the other-worldly, nearly god-like entity he'd always been. He had to continue to be — even in death — the ultimate symbol of hope, truth, and justice. He had to embody that distant goal of a utopian society, a goal which we'd actually begun to make real strides toward, even if sometimes it didn't appear that way. If people knew that Superman was a human man who had loved and feared and took pleasure in simple things like a summer night spent barbequing in his back yard, I worried that they would lose respect for him. And with the loss of that respect, I was truly afraid that we, as a society, might lose sight of the ideals he'd set down.

So my speech was dull and impersonal, meticulously devoid of personality. Oh, I'd taken pains to include a few innocuous anecdotes, in the hopes that they might bring the world a few tremulous smiles as they remembered the alien hero who dedicated his life to bettering our struggling little planet. After all, it had never been a secret that Superman and the Kent family always shared a special friendship. But even those few stories I told weren't linked to my family, but to some of his more famous rescues.

It was only later, when our family had our own private memorial service, that I was finally able to express all the feelings I'd bottled up inside. But, at that moment, as I stood there ready to address my country and the world, those aching tears had to stay locked away behind an unwavering, steely gaze. Sorrow leaked into my words, but only because it was expected of me. I was the leader of this country. To not mourn the world's greatest benefactor would have been unseemly and highly suspicious. So I willingly walked that fine line, of grieving the hero and forcing away the grief for the man.

And every moment, I wished that could experience the funeral with the eyes of the rest of the world. I wished I could, just for an hour, see just the hero, like everyone else. I wished I could ignore the man beneath the suit. Because it would have made every part of that gut-wrenching day so much easier. It would have made that "goodbye" so much less painful.

But I couldn't, because the man laying before me, dressed in the iconic suit of a hero, wasn't a hero at all. He was my father. And that made all the difference.

THE END