

# You Can't Take It With You

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Summary: Lex Luthor—billionaire, philanthropist, Superman's greatest nemesis—dies of natural causes. Introspective.

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Across my lifetime, I've compared myself to many magnificent figures.

Like the mighty Alexander the Great, my hero, my namesake, I am a conqueror. I am ruthless where needed, gracious where asked. Humanity reveres me, hails me a hero. The smart fear me, get out of my way. The innocent hope to catch a glimpse, to touch the hem of my garments. The rest get trampled underfoot, and still I'm respected for it, applauded.

Like Napoleon Bonaparte, at the cusp of world domination, leading the charge on horseback, sword drawn one moment and blood drawn the next. I cut my teeth on underhanded business deals and hostile takeovers. The people need someone else to take charge, to make sure their lives run smoothly. They don't much care how high a price that toll is. Those that do are only standing in my way, and like Napoleon, nothing stands in my way.

Like Attila the Hun, I stride across borders, taking and claiming everything that's before me. I am strong, I am fierce, and I am undefeated and unparalleled in my victory. My rampage against all who dare defy me is swift and harsh, brutal and unforgiving. You don't cross me twice and live to tell about it.

Like Julius Caesar, I am a dictator. I govern with an iron fist, surround myself with people who flatter and serve me. I even have my own Brutus, but unlike Caesar, I am cunning enough to know how to keep him in his place. Nigel is always waiting in the wings, I am painfully aware, but he'll never act outside the bounds of his own imagination so long as things are running smoothly, and I never anticipate that changing.

But perhaps I'm more like Marcus Antonius. Misspent youth leading to fighting my way up through the ranks of officers and world leaders until I am the apex. Loyal, to those who've earned it. Taking what's mine, earning my spot at the top... and I'll be the first to admit, I do have a soft spot for the members of the fairer sex. And yet, all these women are nothing, compared to my Cleopatra. Just slightly out of reach, keeping me interested, keeping me hunting and hungry. I'll earn her, just like I earned my place in society, and then I'll possess her, body and soul. I shudder in delight at the prospect. I'm so close.

Truthfully, though, I'm none of these in comparison to how much I am Hades. God of the underworld, I govern the seedy underbelly of this city. And while I won't say it's without its little enjoyments, the burden is also immense. To guard the souls of those deadened, vile criminals, to keep them all tight within my grasp... there's days where I wonder if my efforts are wasted. If things wouldn't have been nicer if I'd remained at the top, the pinnacle, the Mount Olympus of society. But I know, surely as the sky is blue, that my own soul was restless there. That I belong down here, amidst the wretched and lowly, even if no one else believes that. Irredeemable, but for one saving grace: my love, my heart, my Persephone.

Lois. My beautiful, ravishing, Lois. She truly is a rarity, a precious gem. But she's more than that, even, not simply a thing to be possessed—although possession will be entirely too sweet. Like Persephone, she's a sort of fair-weather friend, not always

there for me, not quite interested at all times. I dream of the time when her winter arrives, and she'll be damned with me for a piece of eternity. She doesn't know that's what she's marching towards. Rather, like Cleopatra, she presents a challenge, leaves me wanting more. She is easily capable of commanding me to do her bidding, and at times, I've even fallen for her charms and done something radical, something that causes me to work against my own interests. Menkin, for one, comes to mind. But I'd do it again for her to look up at me like I'm the hero she's been looking for all along, not that godless freak in a cape.

Superman.

The name is bitter, vile tasting in my mouth.

I am no Superman.

That's the crux of it, right there.

I have an ungodly amount of money. I have name recognition worldwide. I have fame. I have power. I can manipulate and influence people into doing my bidding. I have the reputation of a saint, and simultaneously, the street credit of Al Capone. I have cunning, intelligence, I have an acumen for business like none other. I have the imagination to come up with any plot I like and the means to pull it off.

But I'm not Superman.

What did he do to deserve such glory? How could he possibly have earned such a moniker? He's an oaf. An ingrate. All these powers, and he only serves others. What a waste. And then he has to go and be so smug about it too. Just because he can literally fly above us doesn't mean he has to look down his nose at the rest of humanity.

I won't give him the satisfaction of calling for help. Not that I think he would, or even that he'd hear me right now.

But for all my musings, for every historical, mythological, and modern-day figure I've compared myself to, I didn't once consider this.

Never, not once, did I ever compare myself to a regular, mortal man.

My body is cold, my fingers numb and immobile. I can't catch my breath, and I'm lying here in what are surely my last moments wondering if anything was worth it. What wouldn't I give, now, as my blood stills in my veins and my breath stills in my chest, for one more day? Wouldn't I cast every dollar I've made, every last worthless penny, at the foot of any saint standing in a fountain that might save my life? Wouldn't I give it all away, fill my half-empty buildings with the homeless, feed the hungry, help the poor, if one last act of kindness could appease God and spare me this fate? Wouldn't I lay down my arms, dissolve the network of crime I've created for myself, destroy every last dissenter and criminal in an effort to postpone the inevitable? Would I be as ready to don the cape and the boots, even if I had been granted the powers of Superman, just to say my soul was decent?

A shudder runs through my body, as clarity finds me once more.

No.

The word is freeing, and if I could smile still, I would. Because it's the truth. I had everything within my grasp, and I didn't do a damn thing with it.

A bad heart.

The doctors had no idea how true those words were.

I'm in my office, on the ground, in my tuxedo, dying. Lois is awaiting my arrival, I'm sure. I asked to be left alone before the wedding, so it's my own doing that no one is searching for me now, when I need it most. That a long dormant heart condition could be the end for me, like fifty percent of the average men in this country. No death at the hands of a lover after a torrid affair. No betrayal by a close friend, someone who I thought cared but was really just looking for a piece of me. No glorious battle to the death with an unnamed foe, or a heroic, sacrificial death in the name of love or victory or country or money.

How pedantic.

There is always a silver lining, though. As I lay dying at the foot of my desk, my enemy, my rival, my very antithesis, is lying fifty floors beneath me, in my wine cellar, just as helpless as I am to his fate. There's a wonderful sort of symmetry in our deaths. I may die like a simple middle-class man, but history will remember me. I'll go down in history as the man who killed a god, and was killed by God for his crimes.

I suppose that's still fairly romantic.

I make my peace with the fact that this is how it's going to end. Alexander Luthor is no more. For all my money, my fame, my contacts and my expertise, I'm dying.

You can't take any of it with you, but I'll die atop my pile of money, at the top of my tower, at the height of my fame and popularity, and still be laughing all the way to the grave.

Top of the world.

THE END