

A Wellsian Tale

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Rated: PG

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Summary: At a time of loss and grief, Lois and Clark are presented with a stark choice. But will they take it?

Mild Wham warning. This story has subject matter that some might find unpleasant, but my intent was to explore a certain 'what if' situation which necessitated the unpleasant 'set up'.

Lois stared at the plain, ivory-colored ceiling, trying to regain control of her grief. The firm, warm grip of her husband's hand as he slept in the chair next to her bed was reassuring but could do little to alleviate her pain. Pain that was both physical and psychological.

Why were hospital beds so uncomfortable?

Yes, Lois, was in a hospital again, but not because she'd dangled herself above the jaws of death in the pursuit of some page one story. No, this time it had all been quite ... normal ... at least at the start.

Lois had been pregnant. She still marveled at that fact. Bernie Klein had been convinced that she and Clark could never have children, but even though Clark was Kryptonian and she was a mere human, somehow she'd become pregnant.

It had been a fairly normal-seeming pregnancy. She'd had mild bouts of morning sickness, and had gained more weight than she would have liked, but nothing had been out of the ordinary until she had reached her ninth month.

Apparently, Dr. Klein had been right after all. Kryptonians and humans were never meant to procreate. Lois had developed problems with the pregnancy. Problems that had manifested in ways that threatened the lives of both the mother and the unborn child. It had been touch and go for quite a while. Lois, though near death several times, had finally pulled through.

The child had not been so lucky. Their little girl hadn't survived the delivery.

Both Lois and Clark had been devastated by the loss of Lara Ellen Kent. She knew how excited Clark had been over the prospect of becoming a parent, and she also knew that he would have been a wonderful father. Even though she'd never been too sure about her own ability to be a good mother to a child, as time went on Clark's eagerness rubbed off on her and she'd been looking forward to the new addition to their family nearly as much as he had been.

But that dream was ended now. Dr. Klein had worked like a man possessed and it was only by his incredible skill and determination that Lois survived at all, and it was Bernie's opinion that Lois would not be able to survive another pregnancy.

She wanted to cry again, but not for herself. She wanted to cry for Clark. Knowing how terrible she felt over the loss, she knew that he had to be feeling ten times worse. He was so stoked about the idea of a family and being a dad, and now that had been taken away from him. If only there were some way that things could've been different.

Lois heard a quiet movement coming from the door. It was the middle of the night. Who would be bothering them now? She glanced over and saw the outline of a short man coming toward her. She was so fuzzy from her medications that she didn't register any fear even though she could tell it wasn't a nurse, or an orderly.

Once the figure reached her bedside she was able to make out his features in the dim light afforded by the nightlight and the bleed from the hallway lights coming under the door. She recognized her visitor.

"Mr. Wells ... Herb?"

The dapper Englishman gave her a sad smile. "Miss Lane, how are you doing?"

She didn't smile back. "I've been better. Should I wake Clark?"

The time-traveling author shook his head. "No, not yet anyway; I really need to talk to you."

Lois stared hard at the look of concern on Herb's face. He had that look of nervous worry that always spelled disaster for her and Clark. Something had happened that would affect the future Utopia that Well's had made himself the caretaker of, and whatever it was needed their help to put back right. Lois couldn't help but think that Herb's timing wasn't coincidental.

She closed her eyes briefly, then focused back on the mist-veiled eyes of her visitor. "Are you here because of the baby?"

He nodded quickly, and then reached out and took her other hand. "I don't know how best to explain this to you, Lois, but your child wasn't supposed to die."

Lois sucked in a breath. "What are you saying? Did Tempus escape again? And how could he have had anything to do with the loss of my baby?"

He patted her hand. "No, Tempus had nothing to do with this." The Victorian-era Englishman shrugged his shoulders. "It seems that this has just been some sort of Karmic mix-up."

Lois shook her head. "I don't understand."

"History has chronicled this incident quite extensively. The students of the future have all read about the critical events that took place here. How the pregnancy had developed problems at the end of the term and how Dr. Bernard Klein battled valiantly to save the two lives under his care. And how ultimately he was only able to save one life."

Lois felt a chill slither down her spine. "What are you saying, Herb?"

A tear rolled from the corner of H.G. Wells' eye. "History informs us that the child survived the ordeal, but the mother didn't. Lois, the records in the future tell us that you are the one who died during the childbirth, not your daughter."

Lois stared at the small man that she thought was a friend. "You knew about this. You always knew about this." Wells stared at his feet, but nodded. "How could you not tell me?"

His head snapped up and his eyes met hers. "Miss Lane ... Lois, you know I couldn't tell you about your future. I couldn't take the chance that your knowledge would somehow alter things and change the future that was meant to be." Wells began to pace in a tight circle. He was quite agitated, but he held his voice in check. "You don't know what a burden to carry this has been for me. I've grown very fond of you during our adventures and the knowledge of your impending death pained me greatly."

Lois still allowed her anger to hold back the awful words that Wells had told her. She was supposed to die. "I suppose everything you told me about the future is a lie also. You told me that I was revered nearly as much as Superman. That there were books about me, museums; Tempus even told me I had a breakfast cereal named after me." She had to fight back tears that threatened to fall. "History doesn't write tributes to mothers who die young."

Herb shook his head sadly. "No, but daughters who miss the mother they never knew do." He took Lois' hand again. "I've told you that your descendants founded Utopia. That the ideals handed down to them from you and Clark formed the building blocks of the society that allows Utopia to exist.

"Lara Ellen Kent was the key to everything. She grew up idolizing the woman who sacrificed everything to give her life.

She was a bright, inquisitive child, not unlike her mother, who was raised by a doting father who never tired of telling her stories of wonder about her mother. She read everything that Lois Lane ever wrote. She talked to all the family and friends who knew you. She wanted to know all there was to know about who her mother was. And what she found out impressed her.”

Lois frowned. “You make me sound like some sort of saint.”

Herb smiled ... almost. “In her eyes you were.” He patted her hand and continued. “As she grew into an adult she wanted her life to stand for something. She wanted your sacrifice to have meaning; so she dedicated her life to the principles of truth and justice, just as her parents had.

“She not only took the Superman Foundation to heights that it previously hadn’t reached, but she also founded a second foundation in your name to be a place of learning. A place where people could be taught lofty ideals and how they could apply them to their everyday lives.” This time his smile was real. “She won three Nobel Peace Prizes during her long life, and when she finally passed, she was a mother of four with twelve grandchildren. Whereas you and Clark represented the ideals and values that Utopia grew out of, Lara Kent was the driving force behind their implementation.”

“But Lara didn’t survive.” Lois’ voice was barely a whisper.

Wells sighed. “No, she didn’t. At least not this time.”

“What are you asking me, Herb?”

Tears flowed freely down his face. “I think you know.”

Lois had trouble catching her breath. A part of her was appalled by what Wells’ was intimating, yet another part of her was not at all surprised. In their past encounters Herb had shown that he was, if nothing else, very protective of the so-called Utopian future that he’d chosen to call his second home.

“You’re asking me to go back in time and do the pregnancy all over again, only this time you hope that the outcome will be more to your liking.”

“Not to my liking, Lois, but one that is necessary to the formation of a near perfect future.”

Lois had tried to remain calm and rational while talking to Herb, but she was quickly losing it. Tears began to run freely from her eyes. “I suppose if I don’t die then, you’ll just take me back and we’ll do it all again, and again, and again, until Lara survives and I die.”

It was obvious to Lois that Wells was distraught, that this scenario was one he had hoped to just let happen and never be actively involved in. But she could also see his reluctant determination to right what he saw was a threat to his perfect future.

“Lois, I know this is a terrible thing I’m asking, and believe me when I tell you that if there were any other way I wouldn’t be here. But for the sake of the future, for the sake of Utopia, you have a decision to make.”

“The answer is no.”

Both Wells and Lois turned in surprise at the sound of a new voice. “Clark?” He was standing next to her bed; his hand reached out and took hers in a firm grip. “How much did you hear?”

“Enough.”

Wells, to his credit, didn’t wilt under Clark’s harsh gaze.

“Well then, Mr. Kent, you understand the dilemma we are in.”

“No, I don’t.”

Wells looked startled. “Beg pardon?”

“You come barging in here like some thief in the night, during a time when Lois and I are both grieving the loss of a child, spouting some nonsense about how the child should have lived but Lois should have died.”

Wells nodded his head, slowly. “Yes, that is true, but as cruel as it may seem to you, it is hardly nonsense.” Herb shook his head sadly. “Future history has chronicled this time and that is

what was supposed to happen.”

“Apparently, you’re wrong.”

“What?”

“Listen, Herb, I don’t care about what your history books say. I don’t care if you think this is a dire threat to some imagined future fantasy you’ve embraced. All I know is what actually happened.” Clark moved around the bed and interposed himself between Lois and Wells. “There has been no insidious plot perpetrated here. There has been no evil plan that needs to be foiled. There has only been a tragic incident; one that was fated to be because that’s the way it happened.”

“But what about Utopia?”

“I don’t care about Utopia. I don’t care that you feel that you have to protect some perfect future that, for all I know, only exists in your mind. Lois and I live our lives in the here and now. We face challenges and trials everyday and we do the best we can. Sometimes we win and sometimes we lose, and when we lose we do what we can to deal with the consequences and move on with our lives ... together.”

Lois watched as Wells appeared to gather himself. His manner had turned from sympathetic to defensive.

“I must say, Mr. Kent, that your attitude, even though somewhat understandable, is quite selfish.”

“Is it?”

“Yes, it is. I understand your desire not to lose your wife. It is only logical that you love her dearly and will miss her terribly. But for the sake of Utopia you must make that sacrifice, just as Lois has to make the choice to trade her life for that of her child.” Wells pulled the bowler hat from his head and fiddled with its brim. “You, Mr. Kent, at least have the comfort of a loving relationship with your child to make things easier to bear.” Wells turned toward Lois. “I think you have a choice to make, Miss Lane.

Lois slowly shook her head. “No, I don’t.”

Wells looked dumbstruck. “I don’t understand.”

Lois sighed. “Believe me, if confronted with a situation where I had to jump in front of a speeding car to shove my child out of the way, or even take a bullet to save my daughter there would be no hesitation. The choice I’d make would be obvious. Either Clark or I would, without a second thought, give our life to save our child. But your logic is flawed in this case, Herb.”

“How so?”

“Because there was never a choice here. I’ve never been a spiritual person. I don’t hold with any formal religious teachings. I can’t even say whether or not I truly believe in a God. But Clark was right. If Lara had been meant to live and I to die, that is what would have happened. But it didn’t. I feel the pain, believe me I do, but I lived, and the child didn’t. It doesn’t even matter if I wish it would have been the other way around. What happened is what happened and that is what Clark and I have to accept ... and live with.”

Clark moved over and placed his hand on Wells’ shoulder. “Herb, you’ve been a friend, and have helped us through some uniquely difficult situations in the past, but I’d appreciate it if you left us now. Lois and I have more grieving to do before we can begin the healing process, and that you can’t help us with.”

Wells looked like he was going to say something else, but thought better of it. He just turned and left the way he came. Once he was out in the hallway Lois saw a brief flash of light and she knew he’d left. She silently hoped that the future he went back to was the same as the one he left.

Clark sat on the edge of her bed and pulled her into his embrace. She cried on his chest.

H.G. Wells stormed into his modest apartment, and slammed the door behind him. He tossed his bowler toward a nearby hat rack, not caring that he missed it completely.

“How’d it go, Herb?”

Wells glared at the man sitting in the large, overstuffed chair in front of a super-large holovision set. The mindless pabulum that passed for entertainment in the future played endlessly in bright, vibrant colors.

“How do you think it went?” Wells growled back.

Tempus laughed at his angry friend. “Kent quashed your plan, didn’t he?”

Wells frowned. “Yeah, I bet I could have convinced Lane if I’d been able to isolate her from him.”

Tempus laughed harder. “Like that would be possible given the circumstances.” He got up from the chair, walked over to his disappointed friend. “Hey, buddy, it was a good effort, but it was doomed from the start. We both know that Kent would never give up Lane for anything.”

“I guess ... but I thought for sure I could trade on their altruistic personalities to make it finally happen. We could finally be free of this soulless, boring excuse for a society.”

Tempus clapped his hand on Wells’ back. “Face it, Herb, it works better when you have the clever, ironic, villain driving the plot and the bumbling protector coming to the rescue.”

Wells shook his head. “Yeah, that’s worked real well so far hasn’t it?”

Tempus laughed again. “I guess we’ve been underestimating Kent and Lane’s ability to foil our evil plots.” He clapped Herb on the back again. “We’ll get ‘em next time.”

Wells walked over and flopped down in another large, overstuffed chair. He stared at the colorful antics on the holovision. “God, I hope so.”

Fin.

THE END