

What Is Eternal?

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Some of Clark's thoughts while he was locked in Lex Luthor's Kryptonite cage. Set during the episode "The House of Luthor."

Disclaimer: I neither own nor make anything. All recognizable plot points, dialogue, and characters belong to DC comics, Warner Brothers, December 3rd Productions, and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise. The lyrics to "What Is Eternal" belong to the Trans Siberian Orchestra. If you are unfamiliar with them, go look them up. They are amazing.

Much love and thanks goes out to Anti-Kryptonite for beta reading this! You're the best hun! Your comments made me think, smile, and even laugh. This story is much, much stronger for all of that.

Author's Note: I know Clark is an eternal optimist, but I wanted to go darker with this piece — because, emotionally and physically, Clark is in a very bad place. Lois is about to marry Luthor, she shot down his profession of love, flung herself at Superman, and then said that she would love Superman without or without his powers, which he knows is not true. Plus, he's locked in a Kryptonite cage and dying. So yeah, I went into darker thoughts for this one.

I don't typically do song fics, but my muse has been tormenting me with this, to the point where I can't listen to the song anymore without coming up with things to write for this. (Clark would not have known of this song, since it did not exist back then.)

*And here in the night
As I feel the inferno
I stare in the dark
Thinking what is eternal*

*Pain.
White-hot, blinding pain.*

It feels like thousands of tiny, flaming razors cutting into my flesh. It feels like infinite amounts of serrated knives plunging into my brain. My body aches and throbs. My muscles and skin scream in torment. Nearly all thought is obliterated in the assault of agony. My muscles spasm and my body writhes on the cold, hard floor beneath me, independent of my tortured brain. My stomach clenches. My vision swims before my eyes. My strength bleeds from my body, along with every other power that I possess. I groan and cry out against the pain, though I dearly wish that I could remain silent. It burns me to let out how excruciating the pain is, even if he isn't here to witness it.

But all of that is nothing compared to the anguish in my heart.

Lois has made her choice. And it isn't me. It's him. Lex Luthor.

I just don't understand it. Okay, so maybe it isn't that far-fetched that she chose to reject me — the Clark me. And I guess... well, I guess I never really had any real hope that my profession of love in the park would change her mind. But I couldn't keep silent. And though I shouldn't have harbored any shred of hope in my heart, I did anyway.

What was I expecting? For her to throw herself into my

arms? For her to decide, all of a sudden, that she loved me in return? For her to turn her back on Luthor and cancel this sordid wedding? I was a fool.

But then, just hours later, she threw herself at me; practically propositioned me — the Superman me. She swore that she would love me without or without my powers. But it wasn't true. It was a lie. An unintentional lie, but a lie nonetheless. Because she doesn't love the ordinary guy that Superman is. She doesn't love Clark. Oh, I don't doubt that she loves me as a friend and as a pseudo-brother. But she isn't interested in anything beyond that. And I could almost live with that. Almost. Except, she does love me — the super powered alter-ego of mine. Or at least, she thinks that she does.

But that's not who I am. Not really. I am so much more than a super powered alien. I am Clark Jerome Kent — reporter, friend, son, and all around average man. It's the man beneath the suit who is real, not the man who flies around in that blue and red suit.

Shame.

Shame tears at my heart, rivaling my heartache.

How did I let this happen? How could I have so blindly fallen into Luthor's trap? How could I not see this happening? Because I was worried about Lois, that's why. Because I love her. Because I would do anything within my power to keep her safe. Because her happiness is worth risking my life for.

I should have known that I couldn't trust Luthor. I should have known that he never had Lois' best interests at heart. In fact, I did know it. But how could I have stayed away? I just never thought that Luthor could stoop to so low a level, to use Lois as a weapon against me. But I should have known better. The signs were all there. He's been using Lois all along. He's been controlling her, manipulating her. He's isolated her from the people that care about her. Why wouldn't he use her as bait for me?

Still, I never would have stayed away, even if I had known exactly what was going to transpire. I wouldn't have stayed away because I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. I have always been willing to risk everything for Lois. My heart. My life. Everything. My love for her is eternal.

And now, I might pay the ultimate price for the love that I carry for her. Locked in this Kryptonite cage, I can feel my life slipping away from my body, as steadily and undeniably as blood flows from an open wound. If it weren't for Lois, if it weren't for some weak hope of rescuing her yet, I would welcome death as a release for the pain I feel in my body, mind, and soul.

*The man or the moment
The act or the reason
These thoughts fill my head
As I contemplate treason
Of dreams I have had
And dreams I have pondered
When late in the night
My mind it would wander
Superman.*

There have been so many times when I have regretted inventing him. How many times now have I cursed his birth?

I know that he is a necessary measure for me to be able to do what I do. I know that he has been the only way that I can possibly protect my identity and still use my powers to help people. But this dual life has been a double edged sword. And no matter how careful I am with it, I always wind up managing to hurt myself. Or worse, hurt Lois. How many times now have I run out on her with a lame excuse or none at all? How many conversations have I needed to cut short or missed completely because I've needed to fly off to a rescue? How many times have I seen the veiled hurt in her eyes when I've finally made my way back to her? She may say that my disappearing act doesn't bother

her, but I don't believe that for a second. I'm supposed to be her friend — someone that she can depend on. Instead, I look like a flake, always running out on her.

As much as I sometimes wish that I didn't have these powers, I don't actually regret having them. I don't regret having the ability to help people. I enjoy it, actually. It makes me feel good every single time I'm able to catch the bad guy. It makes me feel good every single time I am able to save a life. Using my powers to help people, under the guise of Superman, gives me a way to feel like the alien part of me has a place here on Earth.

But at what personal cost?

All I've ever wanted in life was to be accepted as a normal guy. All I've ever wanted was to fit in. When I was a child, that meant having friends, doing well in school, and being able to play sports. As I grew older, it meant making new friends, pursuing my career goals, dating, and trying to find the woman I'd share my life with — all of my life, even the parts of my life that are super powered. And I've managed to do almost all of that. For a short time, I had it all — the dream career, friends that became more like family to me, and the perfect woman, though she only ever viewed me as a friend. But now, that's all been taken from me. The Daily Planet is gone. My friends are scattered; I couldn't even find Jimmy for a while. Lois is marrying a sociopath who orders the murders of people as easily as he breathes. And I am all but certain to die tonight, be it from the Kryptonite that surrounds me or at the hands of Luthor.

Once upon a time, I thought my dreams might one day come true — to eventually have a wife and a family. As soon as I met Lois, I knew that she was the one for me. But over and over again, I have managed to hurt her. Superman has become a nearly insurmountable obstacle that forces a distance between us. Superman's birth has fractured or outright destroyed a lot of my dreams, especially those that concern Lois.

So many nights, I have lain awake in bed, staring at my ceiling, daydreaming about Lois. I dreamed of kissing her; I mean really kissing her, not as a pretense, but completely honest and real kisses, ones where I don't have to keep a tight rein on my emotions. I dreamed about asking her out on a date. I dreamed about what it might be like to spend the rest of my life with her. Sometimes, I even dreamed about telling her my secrets — all of my secrets. But they've only been gossamer dreams, with no hope of being a solid reality. Lois sees me as a friend, nothing more. And for that, at least, I am grateful. But it isn't enough for me.

Sometimes I've wondered if I should just tell her my secret so that she will understand the things that I do. And, more importantly, why I do them. But now that she's about to marry Luthor, I'm glad that I never did. I know Lois would never willingly betray me. But if Luthor ever found out somehow... although, on second thought, I suppose things can't possibly get any worse than they are right now. Still, if I do manage to get myself out of this cell, I can't risk having Lois know about me. Not now. It's simply too dangerous. To her. To me. To my parents. To Jimmy. To Perry. To every single person that I have ever been close to.

Sometimes, I have dreamed about giving up the double life. I've considered abandoning Superman and letting him die. But he has become a vital part of me. We are inextricably linked now, he and I. As much as I hate to admit it, it is necessary that the Superman persona lives on. The world needs him, in a way that it has never needed Clark Kent. Maybe Clark is the man who should die, making the path clear for Superman to live full time. With Lois marrying Luthor, why does Clark need to exist? But no, Clark needs to survive. One day, Lois might need him — as someone to talk to or as a shoulder to cry on. And that possibility is enough for me to keep Clark alive, should I somehow survive this night.

*To things I have done
And then quickly regretted
While denying vices
My life had selected
And I think what I've done
Or have yet to begin
And the man I've become
And the man that I've been*

There's a lot about my life that I regret. And most of it involves Superman. Or rather, the way that I've behaved as Superman — especially when Lois has been around. I've stupidly allowed my feelings to shine through my otherwise carefully maintained aloofness when I'm around her. It has led her to believe that she had a chance to be with Superman. And, I guess, in a way, she did have a chance with him, simply because he is me. But that isn't how I want her to want me. I don't want her to love just the super parts of me. I want — no, I need — her to love the ordinary man that Clark is.

But I've continually shot myself in the foot when it comes to how I've allowed Superman to act around her. And my reasoning? I've done it all because I fear losing Lois.

And now, I've done exactly what I feared I would do. I've lost Lois. She's rejected Clark, been rejected by Superman, and has turned to Luthor. And it has all been my fault.

I need Lois, and I know that she needs me, as both Clark and Superman. She confides in Superman. She trusts him. And while I know that she confides in and trusts Clark too, it is different with Superman. As for me, I need her smiles and her friendship, in both of my personalities. She recharges my spirit, as much as the sunlight recharges my body.

I never should have allowed Superman to be anything more than a colleague to Lois. I should have relegated Superman to nothing more than a distant friend. I should never have allowed him to do more than to save her and give her a good quote or two for her stories. I should have had Superman treat her the same way he treats the rest of the world — with a sense of friendly detachment. But I am weak and try as I might, I couldn't help how I acted. Every time she smiled at me, my iron resolve to distance Superman from her melted faster than my heat vision can melt ice.

And now, I am paying the price for that very same foolishness. Because Lois thought that she had a chance with Superman, she never gave a thought to Clark. Blinded by the hero worship she had for Superman, she never saw the man beneath the suit. She never saw me. But really, who could blame her? That was, after all, the whole point of my disguise. Who would make the connection that the valiant superhero was really the same goofy guy who laughed with her over Chinese takeout, while wearing the most garish ties that he could find? Why would she ever think that the gentlemanly hero could also be the guy who good-naturedly teased her and made the occasional innuendo just to get under her skin a little?

*Now caught in a waltz
With the eternal dancer
I'm courted by death
But death isn't the answer
I say*

How is it that I am even still alive? I've lost count of the hours — days? — since I first became Luthor's prisoner. In the eternal gloom of this wine cellar, it is impossible for me to judge the passage of time. And with the piercing pain of the Kryptonite covered cage bars, every second seems like an eternity.

I don't doubt at all that Luthor will kill me himself, if given a chance. But it's been so long since he's come to gloat over me. Will I even live long enough for him to strike the fatal blow? I've never been exposed to Kryptonite for this long. I have no idea how long it will take for the radioactive rock to finally kill me.

And if fate decides that I will die tonight — if I can find no way to escape this place — my hope is that the Kryptonite steals the last of my life before Luthor can return. I don't want him to have the satisfaction of being the one to end my life with his own hands.

In my heart, I'm almost positive that I am still alive only through sheer willpower. I simply refuse to give in to the deadly rock that is bleeding the life from me. It would be so easy right now, to give up the fight. It would be so easy to embrace my death, if only to stop the pain in my heart. All I would really need to do is to grasp the cage bars to increase my exposure to the lethal substance. Then again, I've never been one to take the easy way out of things. I have no intention of dying tonight, not if I can help it. Instead, I stubbornly cling to life. I obstinately keep denying death.

I need to stay alive for Lois. I need to stay alive so that I can be there for her when life with Luthor finally sours. And I know that it will. Lois is the smartest person that I know. She'll finally see the light sooner or later. I just wish she'd seen it sooner and broken off this farce of a wedding. But I'll be there to comfort her, just as I always have, assuming that she ever forgives me for the way that I've been acting lately. Maybe we've both said and done things that we regret in the last few weeks or so. But I know how much it hurts her that I have refused to attend this sordid wedding.

But to do so, I need to stay alive. And that will require me getting out of this toxic hell that Luthor has built for me. I can only hang on for so long. I just don't yet know how I can accomplish that. I can't touch the tainted bars. Doing so burns like fire and saps my life even quicker. And even if I could touch the bars, my powers are gone. What hope do I really have of escaping this evil place?

*All I was
Meant to be
Could I
Suddenly
Just decide
Not a thought
Would survive
Could it be
My life's worth
Ended there
With my birth*

Locked in this lonely and cold cell, faced with the knowledge that this might be my final hour, and knowing that Lois must be getting ready to walk down the aisle, I can't help but to feel useless. And I wonder, has the birth of Superman made Clark Kent unnecessary? Does Clark Kent even have any worth anymore? My parents would argue that Clark is more important than Superman. Or at least, that Superman is just as important as Clark. But is that really true? If Lois can't love Clark, then what worth does Clark have?

Superman is less than a year old, but already he has robbed me of everything that I have worked so hard for. He's stolen the affections of Lois — the one thing that I, as Clark, crave above all other things. He's made the Clark part of me useless. Nothing that I do as Clark comes close to rivaling the deeds that Superman does. And oftentimes, I hate Superman for that. It seems odd, the idea of despising myself — of being jealous of myself. But it's easy enough when you keep two identities as separate in your mind as I do.

If I die tonight, will Clark be remembered as having impacted this world? Or will only Superman be remembered? My heart tells me that the world will mourn Superman and that few will mourn Clark. Superman will live on in myth and legend, immortal in the hearts and minds of mankind. Clark will be forgotten, his body incinerated or left to rot in an unmarked grave

at Luthor's command.

Now that The Daily Planet is gone for good, Clark the reporter is no longer needed. The only people left in this world who need me — the Clark me — are my parents. Is that enough to mean that Clark has any worth left in this world? I suppose it is. I, as Clark, have at least touched the lives of two of the most amazing and caring people in the world. But, in the grand scheme of things, how much does that matter? I can't help but to think that if the birth of Superman made Clark's life insignificant in Lois' eyes, then Clark's life is worthless.

*If I could see someone
Who's been there before me
And traded his soul
For a moment of glory*

Sometimes, I think that I would give up every power that I possess just for a chance of being with Lois. I think that I would trade the super side of myself for a normal life with her in a heartbeat. How freeing that would be! To not have to hide. To not have to lie. To never, ever have to hurt Lois in any way. To be able to focus all of my being on her happiness, without having to rush out and save the world.

How glorious that life would be!
Or would it?

I've been without my powers before. When I first encountered Kryptonite and my powers were gone for a day or so, I was never so worried in my life. Not only for me. But also for Lois. I was afraid that something would happen to her and that I wouldn't be able to save her. And something did happen. She and my parents were almost killed. And so was I. And during those long hours without my powers, I truly felt as if part of myself was missing. Like half of my soul was gone. I was broken, incomplete.

It's true that I haven't always had my powers. Most of them didn't manifest until puberty. But looking back, I always had a sense of completion in my soul, even as a powerless child. Now that I am grown, anytime my powers vanish, no matter how briefly, I feel half empty.

Most people would think that having these powers would be glorious. Who wouldn't want to imagine the instant celebrity status that comes along with making an impossible rescue? Who's heart wouldn't swell with pride anytime the media praised them for a job well done, be it an apartment fire rescue, or aiding in the rescue efforts when natural disasters strike, or when nabbing some criminal?

But not for me. Oh sure, I have my moments of pride when I've made a successful rescue or successfully captured a criminal. But my real moments of glory have been in all of the little things. Landing my dream job at The Daily Planet. Earning Lois' respect as a journalist. Gaining her trust and her friendship. But the ultimate moment of glory would have been if she had come to love me as Clark, as well as Superman.

*His penance or mercy
By spirits debated
While judged on a scale
That's been heavily weighted*

Sometimes, it is so hard to be Superman. Sometimes, it takes every ounce of my strength and courage to pull on the suit. My issues with his interference in my private life aside, there is just so much pressure in being Superman. Pressure from the world. Pressure from myself.

The world looks at Superman and sees this god in a cape with the ability to help. Or maybe even the obligation to help. And they praise him when he succeeds. But when he fails, he falls from their graces. Blame is heaped upon him. When he is forced to choose between crises, his decisions are called into question. He is only one man, but the world expects him to be everywhere at once. The world expects him to somehow be able to save

everyone.

But that pales in comparison to the pressure that I put on myself.

I am, without a doubt, my own harshest critic. Rationally, I know that I can only be so fast, that I can only be so strong. Rationally, I know that I can only be in one place at a time. But it still destroys me inside whenever I am unable to save someone. I still shed tears each time a life is lost. I still have nightmares whenever a rescue goes wrong. I still shake with grief whenever I am seconds too late to the scene. I still agonize over the decision to help at one crisis over another. I still berate myself for every single mistake that I make, even when it does not affect the outcome of events.

And in those moments, I sometimes wonder if life without my powers would be better. Not only would I be a better friend to Lois, and maybe even more, but I might be able to shed the burden of having to be the irrepensible hero. Or would I? Would I watch the news and be become mad with grief when I'd see how many more people would die because I wasn't able to lend my aid? Would I be able to live with myself, knowing that I could have made a difference? And if Lois ever found out, would she ever look kindly on me again? Would she be disgusted with me?

I don't have a choice in the matter. I will never be rid of my powers. And, as much as I sometimes wish that I could let Superman die, I know deep down in my heart that I will never let that happen. As heavy as the burden of Superman is to carry sometimes, I know that the world needs him. And in a way, I need him too. He is an indelible part of who I am. I know that the scales of judgment that the world places him on are just the result of human nature. And so I try not to take the public's opinion of him too much to heart. But it isn't easy, and I often fail at the task.

*And what have I done
Could there be such a sin
In this man I've become
In this man that I've been*

I've traveled the world over, studying civilizations and cultures as I have moved around. Each place has their own beliefs on what happens to a person upon their death. Take the ancient Egyptians, for example. They believed that when a person died, his or her heart would be placed on a set of scales and weighed by the god Anubis against a feather. If the heart weighed less than the feather, the person was allowed into paradise. But those hearts that were weighted down with sin and proved heavier than the feather — those poor souls were devoured, destroyed for all eternity.

If I die tonight, would my heart pass the test of the scales?
Pride.
Overconfidence.
Arrogance.

Am I guilty of those sins?

Sometimes I wonder. Have I become so overconfident in my powers that I've forgotten humility?

How many times have I picked up a cry for help and thought to myself that it was a job for Superman? I never really thought twice about the necessity of my arrival on the scene. I never really stopped to think that things might very well be in the capable hands of the police, or firefighters, or other emergency personnel. I've always sort of just assumed that I and my powers would be needed. It seems so foolish. People were handling crises successfully well before Superman ever came onto the scene. And if this night is my last night alive, the world will move on. Crises will be handled by ordinary people. Why should I have ever thought differently?

It's not in my nature to stand by and do nothing if there is a way that I can help. I don't deny that. And I don't believe that

that is a bad thing in and of itself. But the danger lies in considering myself a necessity at each crisis. There is danger in viewing myself as the only source of hope. And maybe, in some cases, I really was the only hope. Surely the Space Program would have been shut down if I hadn't been able to lift the shuttle into orbit. But there is far too much danger in allowing myself to determine how necessary Superman is. I need to bear in mind that I am lending my aid because I have the ability to help, not because I feel that I am the only source of hope.

Truth be told, sometimes, at a crisis, I still surprise myself. Superman's debut is the perfect example of that. I didn't know if I could lift the shuttle into orbit. I'd never tested my strength to that degree before. And when I actually was able to lift it, I was as shocked as everyone else. When I swallowed that bomb, I just sort of assumed that I would be okay. I'd never tested my invulnerability like that before. It was a risk, and I was a little surprised to find that the only side effect from it was a tiny little belch. Overconfident, indeed.

I was overconfident when meeting with Luthor as well and more than a little blind with anger. Still, I thought I was smarter than he. I laughed when he lowered this cage around me, until he surprised me by activating the Kryptonite covered bars. I completely underestimated him. And now I might die because of that overconfidence. Now I am alone and weak, still searching for a way out of this nightmare.

Throughout my life, I have tried so very hard to avoid such arrogance. I've always tried to remain as humble as I can. And most of the time, I am extremely modest about what I can do. I've gone so far as to pretend that I'm less agile than I am or that I am much weaker than I am. Part of that act is for purposes of blending in, for maintaining my disguise. But it also helps to remind me not to take my powers for granted. Oh, I guess I still do sometimes. It's so easy to forget sometimes, when I am alone and can just float up to the ceiling to change a light bulb or remove food from the oven without a mitt. It comes so naturally to me that I sometimes forget what an extraordinary gift my powers are. But then, there have been the times when I have been too late to help, times when my powers haven't been enough. There have been times when lives have been lost, despite my best efforts. And though I beat myself up over those losses, they have always served to humble me. To remind me that even I have my limitations.

And then there was the worst of my overconfidence. In a way, it was a bigger offense than any fleeting thoughts of self-importance. I was arrogant enough to truly believe that I could handle living a double life with few complications, without hurting anyone. Part of me acknowledged that it wouldn't be easy, even as far back as when I was first struck with the idea of creating Superman. But the bigger part of me thought that I could handle it, no problem. And that overconfidence has been my downfall. My private life is in shambles because of it.

*Now calling to God
From the pit's very bottom
I pray He forgives
Every sin I've forgotten
This day*

I never meant to give the world false hope in a hero that would always be there for them. But now...now, as I sit here on the verge of death, I know that this is exactly what I have done. I gave the people a hero for the past year. Someone to look to for help. Someone who freely gave of himself for the betterment of society.

What will happen when that hero is gone? Will people curse him for leaving them, not knowing that he was murdered? Will the criminal circuit kick into overdrive, knowing that the man in the flashy suit is gone?

Have I actually condemned society, rather than saved it?

If I have, it is surely the worst offense that I have ever committed. If I have, then it doesn't matter how good my intentions were. If I have, I deserve whatever punishment might await me on the other side. Surely, it can't be worse than the private hell that I am locked in now. Surely, it can't be worse than knowing that Lois does not love me.

I am beyond sorry for being the liar that I have been to Lois. I have hurt her so badly over this past year, and that alone is enough to condemn me. For hurting Lois, there is no punishment strong enough.

*And who would have thought
That my fate it would conjure
This twist in the road
On which I have wandered*

If you had told me a year ago that I would be flying around in a crimson cape and a blue spandex suit helping people, I'd have called you crazy. If you had told me a year ago that I would be competing with myself for the affections of a woman, I'd have known, without a doubt, that you were insane. And now look at my life. All of these improbable things have all come to pass, as strange and unbelievable as it sounds.

Sometimes, I can't believe the twists and turns that my life has taken. I still marvel at these things sometimes. It still feels awkward for me to write about my alter-ego's latest doings. It still feels awkward seeing kids playing in the park, wearing shirts with my own, personal shield on the chest. But, in a way, that also feels kind of good, because it proves so much to me.

Despite the scales of judgment that society sometimes places Superman on, he is loved. He is accepted. I'd worried in the beginning that he'd be feared and hated. People are afraid of what is different from them. And who is more different from them than Superman? He might look and sound just like them, but he is definitely not human. But the public never looked at him like the alien that he is. They looked at him with awe and respect. The fact that he's from another planet never seemed to faze anyone, except for Trask and the rest of Bureau Thirty-Nine.

Most importantly though, Lois accepts him.

But the real twist is, I'd rather if Lois accepted Clark and his affections easily, instead of Superman. But I've sabotaged that for myself without even realizing it at first. And when I did realize it, it was already too late.

Now, my life is reversed. Not long ago, it was the super side of me that was all alone. I hid that part of myself, fearing that I'd use my powers and have someone see it. And now, the super side of me no longer hides. As Superman, I can allow the world to see the powers that I possess. But Clark is all alone.

*Each vision and dream now
Completely dismembered
To give one's whole life
And find nothing's
Remembered
And what good is a life
That leaves nothing behind
Not a thought or a dream
That might echo in time
Alone.*

There is no one here now to comfort me. No one here to stay by my side as the Kryptonite ravages my body. No one here to bear witness to my final hours. No one here to lend me strength through the power of their love and friendship. It scares me to face the end all alone. I've been alone all of my life. I always hoped that I wouldn't have to die alone.

If I die tonight, who will remember me? And if I die tonight, what will I be remembered for? Will Clark be remembered? I've no doubt that Superman will be remembered, even if only in passing. But I'm not interested in Superman's legacy. Not really. Right now, as I sit staring death in the face, I couldn't care less

about how Superman will be remembered. More important to me is if people will miss Clark. Will he be remembered kindly? Will he be remembered at all?

Perry might remember me, if only for the short time when the team of Lane and Kent brought The Daily Planet to new heights. Not that that matters much anymore. The Daily Planet is no more. And it never will be again. That's just one more item on the already long list of reasons why I despise Luthor with every fiber of my being. I know he was behind the bombing. What better way was there for him to sever the last ties between Lois and her friends?

The Planet was a second home for me — the place where I made my closest friends and met the woman I love. I mourn its loss.

Jimmy might remember me, at least for a short time. Maybe he'll remember the guy with the loud ties who used to rely on him to help research stories. Maybe he'll remember the times when we grabbed some pizza and headed to the movies or played a little basketball in the park near my apartment. But memories can fade over time. Will he remember me twenty or thirty years down the road? Will he remember CK, the guy who looked at him as brother? Will he remember the guy who helped him stand up to Perry so that he could get his shot at becoming more than just a gofer?

What about Jack? Will he remember Clark? In ten years, will he remember the kindness of the man who got him his first legitimate job, even though he'd stolen from that very same man? Will he remember the friendship that sprung up between Clark and himself?

And what about Lois? I have no doubts that she'll remember me for a while. I was, after all, her partner — the only partner she's ever successfully worked with. I was one half of the hottest writing team in Metropolis, if not in all the country. And I was her friend, maybe even her best friend. No, not maybe. I know that I was. Was. Am I still her best friend? She's still my best friend, despite this whole Luthor debacle. As much as her impending marriage to Luthor disgusts me, I could never hate Lois.

But what does she feel towards me now? I'm sure that, in her eyes, I haven't been the greatest friend lately. It doesn't matter that I've only tried to make her see the truth about Luthor. I'm sure that the only thing that matters to Lois is how distant I've been lately; how awkward things have become between us. Even a quick phone call between us has become a strained and uncomfortable thing, whereas once it was nothing for Lois to crash at my apartment after a movie marathon or an exceptionally long session of combing through our story notes.

I miss the easy friendship of those days more than anything in the entire world.

*The years and the hours
The seconds and minutes
And everything that
My life has placed in it
Betrayed
Betrayed
Betrayed*

Now, I might have irreparably ruined everything between us, even if I were to somehow escape this radioactive prison. She'll know that I wasn't there to witness her marriage. And she'll never forgive me. Given enough time, I'm sure that she'll forget what close friends we once were. Given enough time, she may forget all about me, period. And if that happens, what then was my life ever worth, if the woman I love forgets me entirely?

And what if I do die?

Superman is the one that she will miss. Her hero in the skintight blue suit. The man who paid special attention to her alone when all the world was clamoring for his attention. The

easy banter she had begun to build with the super powered alien.

Will she think that Superman abandoned her? I'm sure that she will.

Will she ever spare a thought for Clark? Will she ever wonder what happened to him? Or will she just assume that once more, he ran off when the pressure was on? Like I nearly did during the heat wave last winter.

I'm afraid that I've never given her a reason to trust that I am the type of man to stick around. Sometimes, I wonder why she ever honored me with her friendship in the first place.

The things I have done

The places I've been

The cost of my dreams

The weight of my sins

I have been all over this planet. For a few years, I fled from city to city, country to country, continent to continent, looking for a place where I could feel that I belonged. But none of those places ever felt like home to me. Some places were better than others. And in some places, I felt even more like an alien than I'd ever felt before. But it never mattered because invariably, I'd stupidly do something super. And each time that happened, I'd nearly get caught. So I would be forced to pack and leave before anything could come of it. But, truth be told, it never felt like such a big loss. Sure, I regretted leaving behind the beautiful Parisian countryside and the delicious food in Italy. I regretted leaving behind the fast paced pulse of Tokyo and the peaceful cabin I was renting in the Canadian countryside. But these were fleeting things, and I'd sometimes even look forward to moving on, hoping that the next place would feel like home.

Everything changed the moment I stepped foot in Metropolis.

There was just something about the place that grabbed me from the start. The city's heartbeat felt so welcoming, so right. I felt connected to the place in a way that I'd never felt connected to any other place that I'd been to. Not since leaving Kansas did I feel such peace in my soul. Such a sense of truly being home. I think that I decided as soon as I stepped foot off the bus that I would do anything and everything to make Metropolis my permanent home.

And then, I met Lois. And from that first glance, my entire world changed in an instant.

Metropolis suddenly wasn't just the place I wanted to make my home. It was the place that I needed to make my home. Because I knew from that moment on, that I'd laid eyes on someone very special. That's why I fought so hard to get my foot in the door at The Daily Planet. Most people would just assume that my persistence with Perry was the mark of a man determined to work for one of the nation's most prestigious publications. The truth is, as loyal as I am to the now defunct Planet, I could have went on to work for any other paper, the New York Times, perhaps. No, my determination to win a position at The Daily Planet was all because I needed to be near Lois. I knew that working alongside her as a colleague was the only chance I would ever get to talk to her, to get to know her, and to let her get to know me.

I've changed so much since I first arrived in Metropolis. I've grown in ways that not even traveling the globe was able to cause. And most of the those changes have happened because of Lois. The invention of Superman, for instance. She gave me the inspiration for that, simply by suggesting that I keep a change of clothes on hand. And she's made me grow up as a man. I'm a better writer because of her. Being partnered with her forced me to sharpen my writing skills so that I could keep up with her. And, I will admit, because I wanted to impress her. Now, that more sophisticated writing style is second nature to me. It comes as easily as breathing. And I owe it to her.

Meeting Lois, and wanting to be so much more than a professional colleague to her, has forced me to grow in every

way. Without knowing or intending it, she has forced me to face my insecurities and to open up in trust, all in a way that I never have before. She's slipped past my defenses to become the one person in all the world who is closest to me, though she may not know all there is about me. She's made me feel connected to the world in a way that I never thought possible. She's grounded me and given me hope for the life that I want.

She was Superman's first friend and remains his closest confidante. She never looked at him with fear, even when he swallowed a bomb in front of her or when he picked her up and flew her through the sky back to the Planet's bullpen. She made him feel welcome. She made him feel like a hero. And without knowing it, she has been the well of strength that he draws from in order to have the heart to pull on the suit each day. So many times, she has said just the right thing to him, to me, rejuvenating my spirit and renewing my determination to continue the fight against suffering and crime.

And everything that

I've gathered in life

Could it be lost

Could it be lost in this

Could it be lost in this

Could it be lost in this

Night

I can hear the wedding march starting. Even bereft of my super hearing, even amid the cacophony of torture that my body is enduring, I can hear the deep, rich tones of the organ music. My heart twists with renewed agony. Time is running out. I have to find a way out of this death trap. I have to find a way to put Luthor behind bars. I have to find a way of being there for Lois.

The cummerbund might just do the trick. If I can hook it onto the key, I have a chance of surviving this yet.

I can't allow Luthor his victory. I can't let Lois down. I refuse to die tonight. I have worked too hard to lose it all now. I have so much more yet to do — as Clark and as Superman. I'm not ready to give up the fight. I'm not ready to stop helping people. I'm not ready to stop fighting for Lois.

Just a little further, and I may reach the key. If I can just take a deeper breath and focus my energy, I might stand a chance of breaking free. There! The key is almost within my grasp.

The music has stopped and my heart rate quickens. If I don't hurry, I'll be too late to expose Luthor. I'll be too late to stop this wedding.

Footsteps.

Footsteps racing down the stairs of the wine cellar. I have only enough time to wedge myself into a small, out of sight space behind a cask of wine. I can hear Luthor's voice, but it barely registers against the agony that I feel and the pounding rush of blood in my ears from my racing heartbeat. I need a way out of here, and fast. I know now that this wedding couldn't have possibly taken place. The time between the music and Luthor's arrival in this room was far too short. Something must have happened. I'd bet my last dollar that Perry and Jimmy crashed the party. For the first time in far too long, I once again feel hope flare into life in my heart.

Footsteps.

Footsteps retreating out of this place, and not a moment too soon. Any longer and I won't have the energy to escape. I stumble to my feet and begin a desperate, shambling effort to reach the exit, to put as much distance between myself and the Kryptonite as I can. My body feels so heavy, so stiff without my powers. It's all I can do to keep breathing, keep moving. Only the thought of Lois is able to fuel my dying body.

Sunlight.

Blessed sunlight. Somehow, I've managed to stumble out of Luthor's home. I already feel stronger, more stable, now that the Kryptonite has been left behind. The warm sun caresses me,

feeds me, heals me. My pain is gone, leaving only my aching heart to cause me any discomfort.

Lois.

I need to reach Lois. She must be hurting so badly right now. I have to get to her. I have to be there to comfort her. She needs her friend now, probably more than she has ever needed him before. Perhaps I do still have some worth after all. Perhaps I've been granted a second chance. A chance to right all of the wrongs that I have committed.

My powers haven't returned in full. I can feel that deep down. But I can still change out of this super disguise at least. Superman won't be there for Lois this time.

This is a job for Clark Kent.

THE END