

Both Alike In Dignity

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© 4-Mar-10

Rating: K+

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AN: Yeah, yeah, I know, in canon Lara is either an astronaut/scientist or a librarian. Given the discrepancy and how few Superman stories even mention her (and how few of those tell us what her profession was), I think I can safely make up what fits my story.

The House of El had been one of the most prominent of all Kryptonian houses since the days of barbarism. There was no other house that can trace its lineage back so far, nor through so many of Krypton's defining moments. For the last few generations, they had focused on science, rising to the top of the field. For Jor-El, that honor was earned by merit as a scientist. (Mostly.)

Neither Jor-El, nor his parents, nor his grandparents had ever been particularly good with money.

This was made clearer to Lara with every document she studied. "I can certainly see why they came to us," she said, not looking up from her reading. "The House of Van may be far less noble than their usual allies, but there is not a house of higher rank who could cover their debts."

"Then is it worth it to us to make the alliance they suggest?" her cousin Valni said. "It is a great honor to be asked, of course, but ... we do not live on honor."

"It's worth it," Lara's uncle Kirel-Van said. "The House of El can open doors. A word from them, and our ships can trade with anyone, on the best of terms. Even at the price they ask, we should make up the difference within three years."

"Who would be your first choice?" Lara asked, glancing around at those gathered: her parents, her aunt and uncle, and all the unmarried women of first rank in the House (all three of them). The heir of the House of El was a heterosexual male.

"I would think Sori, assuming they both agree," her mother said. "They are both scientists; they should get on well."

"I met him, once," Sori said. "It wasn't long enough to form an opinion of him." Lara's sister's tone was brisk and businesslike. All children of first rank were expected to make good marriages to benefit their House; they were usually arranged. The House of El was a rather better alliance than any of them had expected, but their elder brother had already tied another House to theirs through his marriage.

"Is that wise?" Lara asked. "Sori is not particularly good with finances, despite her training as a child of the House of Van; unless you were to send a business manager with her, all of our aid would be squandered as was their former wealth."

"Your point is well taken," Uncle Kirel-Van said, leaning back in his chair. "Do you offer

yourself, then?"

"Yes," Lara said.

"If we're volunteering, I should like to be a candidate myself," Valni said. "As the spouse of an El, my art would be shown in the best galleries."

"Your skills in business are no better than Sori's," Lara said. "We would still need to send a business manager. It would be a delicate thing, to do so without implying insult to their own manager."

"Jor-El will still need to meet with you all," her aunt Tera said. "It is pointless to make plans in too much detail until we know if any of you will suit him-and vice versa. It is a pity his brother is already married, and that the family has no daughters. If Jor-El proves unacceptable, the whole proposal will be moot."

But Lara had her way.

"These will be your rooms," Jor-El said, ushering her in to an impressive suite. The architecture was classical, and the furnishings were all in the stark, pure style favored by the First Families. "This is the personal section of the suite, including your bedroom and sitting room." He gestured to a door to her right. "My quarters are through there. The entrance will be keyed to your voice. The stair opposite goes directly to your offices, which are in the public wing. Is this to your liking?"

"Yes," Lara said. It was far grander than anything in any of the Houses she knew; but for the spouse of the heir to the House of El, it was only to be expected. "Most acceptable. I shall, of course, need to redecorate." Even if she had personally favored the gleaming whiteness (which she did not), she was not leaving the House of Van with this marriage. Given the difference in status between their two Houses, this should be made quite clear. Lara understood the power of symbols. The bright, intricate designs she had grown up with could be used effectively and tastefully in this grand space, to make it feel more intimate and welcoming. Perhaps she should commission a mural from Valni.

"Of course," Jor-El said. "Shall we continue on to your offices?"

"Yes," Lara said, leading the way.

"I understand you will be continuing your work with your House's commercial ventures once we are married?" Jor-El said as they walked down the grand stairs meant for her exclusive use.

"That is correct," Lara said. "Though I expect that, at least initially, my time will be consumed by setting the El finances in order."

"That will probably be a project of some duration," Jor-El said. "I'm sure our business manager will be ... happy to help." His tone was heavily ironic. "He was an old friend of my grandfather's, and has had care of our wealth for many years."

And had contributed greatly to the trends which had, eventually, required their marriage, Lara did *not* say. "Then perhaps he is ready to consider retirement, or a less onerous role within the household." In any case, he would not be a major obstacle. Lara had plans for the House of El's business interests. She had always loved a challenge, and the responsibilities that came with them, and she could rise no higher within the businesses of the House of Van until her mother's retirement.

"Perhaps he might," Jor-El said, and changed the subject. "When do you anticipate having children?" They would have to have at least one, eventually; Jor-El, at least, would require an heir. (Lara, as one of four children, had fewer responsibilities to her family in that

manner.)

"I should like some time to settle in, first, and make a place for myself within the House," Lara said. There was no reason to rush, after all; neither of them had even reached thirty-five, yet.

"I also would prefer to wait," Jor-El said. "My experiments and my work with the Council as my father's deputy leave me little time, at present; also, I believe that the heir to a Great House should have enough time to grow to maturity as Heir, but I have seen how a long wait as an adult to inherit can cause great friction between parent and child."

Lara raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. It was not her place. Yet.

Thirty years later, Lara stood with her son in her arms, and wished she had been a politician instead of a businesswoman. If she had, she might have been able to sway the council, where Jor-El had not. All her work, restoring the fortunes of the House of El, would come crashing down with the rest of Krypton. This house with its purity symbolized in the walls and furnishings and the clothing she had adopted would fall with the rest. She had known this for some time; they had both known Jor-El's last protest would, in the end, be futile. So Lara wrapped her son in the colors of her own House, the House of Van, as Jor-El made the last adjustments to the tiny ship. She had already recorded her personality and memories on one of the crystals included in the set Jor-El had made. It would not be the same as being alive and there for little Kal-El, whatever Jor-El might say.

All the riches of the House of Van, all the scholarship and prestige of the House of El, and all they could give their son for his new life were a handful of crystals and a blanket of bright colors.

It would have to be enough.