

# Breathe

by Brin Londo 5

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Rating: K+

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He sat Jimmy down, then dove upwards, twisting gravity at the Planck level of space-time around him to fall upwards into the atmosphere, screams echoing from across the entire state, in his ears and in the part of his brain that allowed him to hear things from distances before the soundwaves had reached his physical position, as his fall accelerated to terminal velocity before leveling out to fall forwards and tapping into the zero-point force and speeding up his horizontal "fall".

His "heat-vision" lanced out along the rocky walls of Harper Valley, scoring the stone at already weakened stress points, causing normally stable slabs of sedimentary and metamorphic rock to flex and expand to the breaking point. A landing of meteor-impact level and a loosened boulder on either side of the valley walls was all it took to start an avalanche, and selected blasts welded enough of the wall together to act as a makeshift dam.

He's just allowed himself to relax, seeing that the Harper Valley housing development complex was safe for the time being, when something bothered him, something niggling at the back of his brain. It wasn't the screams, they were still there, although fewer as emergency crews and concerned citizens stepped forward to help their fellow man...

...something was missing. Something he'd taken for granted, recently. He strained his senses to the limit: the muted sounds of debris of the Route 93 bridge settling under the slowing current of the Black Canyon area of the Colorado River, families crying as they realized that despite his aid they would still have to evacuate their homes until the Hoover Dam was repaired, Jimmy panting as he jogged beside the highway, his heartbeat accelerated by the recent shock and stress...

...heartbeat...

LOIS!

The air thunderclapped behind him as he hurled himself over the intervening distance somewhere between the speed of sound and the speed of light, and the desert hills blurred below him, until he saw it.

The bumper of a red Cadillac, the same type Perry had rented for Lois at the airport, almost rendered a pink or beige tone by the dust and powdered rock that pinned it and its driver into the crevasse it had fallen into..

(...nononono...)

Gingerly, tenderly he lifted the smashed automobile out of the earthen crack, and set it back down, then, seeing the crumpled, dirt-smearred form buried behind the wheel, he ripped the driver's side door from lock and hinge.

Kneeling, he touched her cheek, his alien vision seeing the thermal glow of her skin cells winking out one by one, like stars vanishing in the night when one got too close to the lights of a city, refusing to understand what he was seeing. Choking back the sob in his throat, he lifted her still form from the gravel and soil in the car's interior.

(...breathe, breathe, Lois, oh god, Rao, Jesus, anyone, please breathe...)

One step back, then two, four, then seven, eight backwards steps before legs that could kick through foot-thick titanium alloy nuclear bunker doors suddenly tried to give out from beneath him. Tenderly, he knelt, his hands trembling in shock as he gently brushed the dust from her pale features, lowering his head down and softly kissing her lips, hoping, praying that the fairy-tales Ma told him as a child sometimes came true...

A whimper reached his ears, but the voice was his own, alone as he had never before been on this world he was not born to.

Time seemed to freeze, but he could hear the wind softly echoing along the walls of the ridge, the same walls that had unknowingly taken this one precious thing from him.

This could not be, this was wrong, wrong, wrong, so very, very wrong that he had no words for it in English, Kryptonian, or any of the thirty-seven languages (Terrestrial or alien) he'd picked up in the last twelve years. The scream that ripped from his throat echoed across-

"JESUS, SMALLVILLE!" Lois yelled, her coffee splashing onto the dashboard as Clark bolted upwards in the car, the sound echoing over the jazz station she'd had it turned to. "The frikkin HELL is wrong with you? First you fall asleep during a stake-out, then you wake up like that crazy Silver Banshee psycho that Superman took down last month!"

Clark looked around the car's dark interior, then at Lois, then seemed to almost relax back into his seat. "Sorry, Lois, I was just, just-"

"Yeah?"

"-Just reliving the very worst day of my life."

The look on Lois' face softened at that, as she guessed that this close to the anniversary of the date of Jonathan Kent's death he might have been reliving either the funeral, or worse, the day he died in Clark's arms. "Sorry, Clark. You caught me by surprise, that's all. Hey, when we nail this guy, I'll spring for sending your mom a copy of the headline, okay?"

Clark scratched his head in confusion, then realized what Lois had assumed. "Um, okay..."

Lois took another sip of the remainder of her coffee, not willing to admit to Clark that she, too, had been dozing off.

She shuddered as she remembered the dream, replaying the events of a year and a half ago, the brine of the sea air, the strain in her shoulders as she tried to keep Kal-El's head above the waves, trying to backstroke her way back to Richards sea-plane with the one man she loved more than him in her arms.

(Breathe, come on, damnit, Kal-El, BREATHE...)