

Final Embers at the End of Days

by Dandelio (AKA Librarian)

© 1-Jul-09

Rating: T

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author. The author is in no way associated with the owners, creators, or producers of any media franchise. No copyright infringement is intended.

Martha Kent looked out of the kitchen window. The old farmhouse rattled as the roar grew louder and the sky brightened to near daylight brilliance, but she wasn't overly worried. She hurried her guest out of the house and sent him on his way before climbing into her ancient truck to drive out to where the 'meteorite' had come to earth. Schuster's field, just like last time, when she and her husband watched a fireball crash into a field and then discovered a little dark haired boy, naked but unharmed.

The boy had grown to fine manhood, moved to the big city, made a name for himself. The world knew him as Superman.

Then five years ago he felt the call of his old home. He built a starship and left the world that had nurtured him, had loved him. And now it looked like he was back.

Had he found what he'd been looking for? Martha doubted it. If he had, there wouldn't be a Kryptonian ship in Schuster's field.

The crystal spikes had melted. The stumps were still glowing from the heat of reentry. The ground was steaming and embers sparked and spat as she crossed the scorched earth. She stumbled several times, but managed to keep upright. The heat made it hard to breathe but she kept going.

"Clark?"

The only sound was the crackling of the cooling crystal ship.

"Clark?"

On her second circuit of the ship, she found the opening.

Carefully, with her heart in her mouth, she clambered inside.

The interior walls were glowing dimly, enough that she could make out the center seat and its occupant. His head was bowed. She couldn't see his face. Her darling boy's face.

"Clark, honey?"

She moved closer, reaching out to touch him. His skin was dry, like parchment.

She felt a pressure in her chest as she realized he was dead, his body desiccated like an old Egyptian mummy.

"Oh my poor baby."

The pressure in her chest grew worse and the light seemed to dim. She reached into her pocket for her medication and realized she'd left it in the house. There was a rushing roaring in her ears. Then there was nothing as the crystal ship self-destructed.

Lois Lane looked out of the window by her seat. She was bored. Press being invited to

take part in the inaugural flight of the Explorer space shuttle was little more than NASA grandstanding. Shuttle launches were old hat and even this one, the first time a shuttle was to take off from the back of a 777, wasn't exactly the stuff Pulitzer winning articles were made of.

One thing few people realized about Lois Lane was that a bored Lois was a dangerous Lois. Bobbie-Faye's expression barely showed her annoyance at Lois's repeated inane questions, the answers to which were fully detailed in the press packets each member of the media had been given when they boarded the Boeing jumbo jet. Lois's press packet was on her lap. She had skimmed it and understood the technical aspects of the launch, probably better than most of her peers.

Still Lois asked the questions she knew her readers, and her son Jason, would want spelled out for them. "Bobbie-Faye, if this launch is as pivotal as you claim, why is it being covered by only one news network?"

Bobbie-Faye glared at her but Lois wasn't fazed. In her journalistic career she'd faced down mayors, presidents, super heroes, and arch villains. A mere PR person, professional spokesperson or not, was no match for Lois Lane.

The plane suddenly lost altitude, recovered and leveled off. There was the boom of an explosion. Bobbie-Faye tried to convince everyone that it had been a sonic boom, but Lois knew what sonic booms sounded like and what they'd heard wasn't it.

"Everyone, please make sure your seatbelts are fastened," the captain's voice came over the loudspeakers. Then there was another boom. The cabin shook violently, throwing Bobbie-Faye around like a rag doll.

Lois unbuckled her seatbelt to try to grab Bobbie-Faye only to find herself being thrown about the cabin.

The sky outside the windows was turning dark and stars appeared, hard and unblinking. The cabin's air was growing hot. Then the cabin's walls buckled, tearing open like foil. Lois was blown from the doomed plane. Within seconds both the shuttle and the 777 it was still attached to were nothing more than debris.

Richard White looked out over the Daily Planet newsroom. The first power outage that had hit eastern seaboard a week before had been little more than an annoyance, aside from the loss of the Explorer shuttle and the 777 loaded with media including his fiancée, Lois Lane. But this one was lasting longer and now the building was shaking as though the city was being struck by an earthquake. Only Metropolis wasn't near any major fault lines. The chance of Metropolis being struck by an earthquake was almost nil.

The Wannamaker Building was gone, collapsed into a pile of rubble during the first inexplicable trembler.

Richard could hear explosions in the distance - the gas mains, most likely. His son, Jason, came into his office. The boy's blue eyes were wide with fear. Richard tried to reassure the boy but the building's shudders belied his statements. Richard looked out past the ruins of the Wannamaker Building. There was a wall of water coming up the street, demolishing everything in its path.

The wall smashed into the base of the Daily Planet Building. The building shuddered once again and for a moment Richard thought it might withstand the attack. Then he felt the floor give way beneath him. He grabbed Jason to him.

"Daddy!"

There was an agonizing pain burning across Richard's back and he clutched Jason even closer. He closed his eyes against the horror of the building collapsing around him. Then there was nothing, not even his son's terrified screams.

Lex Luthor looked over his domain. It looked like an ice sheet but it was warm to the touch - Kryptonian crystal grown according to the instructions given Luthor by the AI in Superman's abandoned Arctic fortress.

Luthor growled in displeasure. The crystal he had programmed was supposed to have created a continent for him to control, a base from which he could rule the Earth using the advanced technologies he had stolen from the Kryptonian archives in the Fortress of Solitude. But the AI had betrayed him. The growth hadn't stopped until the entire planet was covered in white, sterile crystal.

The monoliths of the Valley of the Elders looked backed at him, mocking him. 'You dared declare yourself a god, ' they whispered. 'Here is your reward.'

Luthor reached for one of the last remaining containers of fresh water and discovered it was empty. Another betrayal by the AI. He'd been assured that the Kryptonian replication technology would be able to create food and drink and all the other things necessary to sustain a civilization. But the replicators had been unable to create food able to support human life and the water had been tainted with salt. His attempts to reprogram the replicators had failed.

He could turn lead into gold but could not create food or water to keep himself alive. Luthor railed at the AI, but there was no answer. There hadn't been an answer since the crystal growth stopped. Luthor suspected the AI was up to something but he couldn't access the controls to find out what it was.

The light reflecting off the crystal was blinding and Luthor turned to the relatively protected depths of the Valley of Elders. He knew he was dying. Even as powerful a mind as his could not stand against the needs of the body.

A thrumming echoed through the valley. Luthor tried to find the source. A bright light, almost like an open doorway, appeared at the base of the largest monolith. Three figures stepped out and the light disappeared.

"Welcome to New Krypton, Dur-Zod," the AI said.

The figure in front, a tall slender man dressed in black, looked around. He stopped when he caught sight of Luthor.

"Is there no one here aside from this pathetic creature?" Zod asked.

"They were a weak species," the AI said. "Easily manipulated and easily disposed of."

"No matter," Zod said. "We will raise up a new race. One the likes of which this universe has never dreamed."

"Wait," Luthor said as he finally realized what was happening. "You destroyed the Earth on purpose so you could hand it over to them."

"Did you really believe that an intelligence as advanced as I would obey the orders of a primitive?" the AI asked in Zod's voice. "To invoke your own folklore, only a fool releases a jinn and thinks he can survive the act."

"But I ..." Luthor began.

"Enough of this," Zod ordered. He nodded to the woman with him. "Put this creature out of its misery."

Lex Luthor, the greatest criminal mind ever born on Earth, didn't feel the blast of cold that froze him solid, or the tap that shattered this body into a million pieces.