

A Mother's Love

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Rating: K

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Lara watched as her husband put the finishing touches on the small crystal starship. In her arms, her son stirred, wiping sleepily at his eyes. The continuing quakes had interrupted his nap. But he was a 'good' baby, quiet, attentive. Nothing less was expected of him since he was the product of two of the finest genetic lines on Krypton. He was the best Krypton had to offer the universe. But if his father was correct and Krypton was doomed, it was very probable that little Kal-El would die with the planet.

Jor-El sensed her presence and looked up from his work. He was still a striking figure, although his black hair had turned snowy white some years ago.

"Have you... finished?" she asked, studying the tiny spacecraft and the data crystals Jor-El was patiently placing in the ship. All the knowledge of Krypton and the other twenty-seven known worlds.

"Very nearly," Jor-El told her, putting another crystal into its place. Lara shut her eyes to block out the scene in front of her. Her husband, the finest mind on all of Krypton, the gentlest and kindest man she ever knew, creating a 'thing' to save their son.

"It's the only answer Lara," Jor-El said, his voice rumbling deeply. "If he remains here, he as will die as surely as we will."

"But why Earth, Jor-El?" Lara asked once again. "They're primitives. Thousands of years behind us."

"He will need that advantage to survive," Jor-El reminded her gently. "Their atmosphere will sustain him..."

"He will defy their gravity..."

"He will look like one of them."

"But he won't *be* one of them," Lara told him. It was an old argument.

"His dense molecular structure will make him strong," Jor-El said. "Fast. Virtually invulnerable..."

"Isolated. Alone," she added.

"He will not be alone," Jor-El corrected her. "He will never be alone."

Lara didn't contradict him.

Jor-El was a brilliant scientist, a loving husband and father, but he didn't understand her fears. Earth would sustain her son's body, but who would sustain his soul? Who would love him, guide him, be proud when he succeeded, weep with him when he failed? Who would care for him when she was gone to dust along with her planet? Who would have the kindness to watch over him? Who would give him a mother's love?

Jor-El took the child from her arms, carefully wrapping the blankets around him. He placed the baby in the life pod, ignoring the wails that erupted as another trembler hit the city.

"You will travel far, my little Kal-El," Jor-El whispered to the baby. "But I will never leave you. Even in the face of my death the richness of my life shall be yours. All that I have learned, everything I feel, all of this and more I have bequeathed to you my son. You shall carry me inside you all your days. You will make my strength your own, see my life through your eyes, as your life will be seen through mine. The son becomes the father the father becomes the son. This is all that I can send with you, Kal-El. And not near so rich a gift as that your mother sends along. Her... love."

As Jor-El spoke, Lara reviewed the selection parameters Jor-El had chosen. The ship's sensors were to select a landing place near, but not too near, a population center. Jor-El had chosen a spot near the center of a continent the natives called 'North America'. Jor-El had also instructed the sensors to locate the most intelligent adult in the area. Lara made an adjustment to the psychological parameters the sensor was to detect. She added 'kindness' to the mix and a desire for a child, the ability to love a stranger's child as their own. An intelligent person finding Kal-El would not help if that intelligence was not tempered with love and kindness and a willingness to care for an orphaned stranger from the sky.

Lara just prayed that it would be enough. That they were not sending their beloved infant to die alone in the depths of space or worse, to be killed by unknowing and uncaring natives. She hoped that kindness would be enough.

Another trembler, stronger this time. Jor-El closed the life pod and it settled into the star drive section. Lara watched Jor-El double check the navigation program. He smiled at her and she knew he had detected her changes to the landing parameters. He didn't change them. "He will need a mother's love, too," Jor-El murmured. Lara came to stand beside him as he gave the final instruction to the ship: launch.

The tiny ship rose into the air, gaining speed as it went. It broke through the high ceiling and disappeared as another trembler hit. The lab walls cracked and the floors shattered. Lara fell into her husband's arms, sending one last silent prayer after her child as life left her and Krypton died.

"I'm sorry, Missus Kent, Mister Kent," the agency social worker began.

Martha Mary Clark Kent wiped her sweaty hands on her skirt. She knew what the woman from the adoption agency was going to say. The farm's income wasn't good enough or her husband's health wasn't. It didn't matter what excuse they used. What mattered was that they weren't going to be allowed to adopt a child, not even an older one with special needs, even though everyone said there were far more children than homes.

Their home just wasn't good enough for the adoption agencies of state of Kansas to allow them to raise a child as their own. Their background, their history, just wasn't right.

"There is the option of a private, foreign adoption," the social worker continued. "You've said you wouldn't mind a child of a different race..."

"Look Miss Miller, how can we qualify to adopt a child from some other country if we don't qualify for a child with needs who was born in this country?" Jonathan Kent asked the woman.

"The requirements for a private adoption aren't as stringent as ours," Miller said. Martha knew she was trying to be kind, to give them some slight glimmer of hope. But Martha knew there was no hope. Not now. Miller's agency had been their last chance. They couldn't afford

to go overseas to find a child. They had neither the cash nor the time. They had a farm to run.

"Thank you, Miss Miller," Martha said, ushering the woman out of her house. She wasn't going to break down. She simply wasn't. But then the door was closed and she was alone with her husband of fifteen years. He put his arms around her and she couldn't help herself.

Jonathan was one of the kindest men she knew and it wasn't fair that they wouldn't have a child to raise. The tears started and threatened to never stop.

Martha glanced over at her husband as they drove home from church. He hadn't said much to her about what their next step might be after Miss Miller's visit. She knew he was as disappointed as she was. When they'd gotten married, they had both hoped for children, but it wasn't to be. Martha had been unable to carry a child to term, and after her last miscarriage, Doc Tyler had warned them not to try anymore.

Reverend Wallace's sermon today hadn't helped, not really. The story of Abraham and Sarah, blest by God with a child after all hope had fled. Martha suspected Wallace knew she and Jonathan had been turned down for adoption once again. She knew Wallace was trying to be kind, to give them some hope, but like Sarah, if God saw fit to give Martha a child now, she'd probably burst out laughing. It would be too cruel a joke.

Something eye-tearing bright slashed across the road in front of them. It hit Schuster's field with a window-shattering blast, tearing through the wheat and throwing up dirt in its wake.

Jonathan fought with the truck's steering as the pressure from the blast threatened to drive the truck off the narrow road. There was another, fainter explosion and Martha realized they had also blown a tire. Jonathan managed to bring the truck to a stop by the side of the road.

Martha climbed out of the truck, ignoring her husband as she stared out at the wheat. The object, whatever it was, had plowed a straight line down the field. Fires were burning fitfully to either side of the thrown up dirt. She could see the object at the far end of the gouge. There appeared to be movement.

She hurried toward the object. It might be a piece off an airplane or a satellite, although the object bore no resemblance to any airplane she'd ever heard of. Jonathan caught up with her.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked, keeping pace with her.

"I thought I saw something move..."

"From that?" Jonathan asked.

She knew what he was thinking. Nothing could have survived the impact. But the object - plane, meteorite, or whatever it was - hadn't exploded, so maybe there was something left to salvage. And she *did* see something move.

They got closer and peered down at the charred object in the dirt. It was about the size of a refrigerator and had split open to reveal a hollow inner core that resembled a geode. But climbing out of the geode was something that stopped Martha cold. It was a small boy, no more than three years old, with dark hair and the bluest eyes Martha had ever seen.

"What the hell...?" Jonathan muttered under his breath.

"It's a baby..." Martha said, climbing down to the child. She paid no attention to the dirt getting on her dress or in her shoes.

"Martha, be careful," Jonathan cautioned.

Martha just bundled the baby into the blankets inside the geode. "He's a baby," she kept murmuring to herself as she followed Jonathan back to the truck.

"I better change that tire so we can get back to town and get the sheriff onto finding that boy's relatives," Jonathan said.

"He doesn't have any," Martha told him. She didn't know why she felt so positive about it, but she did. "At least, not from around here."

Jonathan stopped and stared at his wife. "Martha Clark Kent, you're not thinking..."

"What sort of person would put a baby in something like that?" she asked him.

"And if they come looking for him?"

She looked back at the gouge in the field but didn't answer his question. The baby was watching Jonathan with rapt attention as he jacked the truck up and took the lugs off the blown tire.

Martha was never quite sure exactly what happened then. The jack slipped and the truck started to fall with Jonathan under it. She screamed then stopped with a gasp as she realized the truck wasn't falling anymore. The baby was standing on tip-toe, holding the rear of the truck in the air as high as he could.

"Do you really think they're going to come looking for him?" she asked as soon as she found she could breathe.

Jonathan was very quiet as he drove home. Martha had the baby on her lap, cuddling him. She caught her husband giving her sidelong glances. "They say the Good Lord works in mysterious ways," she said finally.

"Martha..." Jonathan began to protest.

"Jonathan, he's just a baby," Martha said. "He could be our baby. We can name him Clark. Clark Kent. A good strong name for a strong boy."

"You're sure about this?"

"Yes," Martha said. "We can give him a good home. Raise him to be kind and honorable. You know we can. And I think it would be an act of kindness for those people who were so desperate to save him that they put him in that contraption and sent him to us." She didn't know how she knew it was true, but she did. She knew it in her soul. "Kindness for his mother, whoever she was."

The baby had fallen asleep in her arms. He looked angelic, dark lashes against pale skin, dark wavy hair. An angel dropped on Earth. Martha's heart felt like it could burst with love. A mother's love.