

# Soldier On

by Eternal Optimist

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Rating: T

I do not own Superman... it belongs to Siegel and Shuster and DC Comics. (Although I wish I owned Dean Cain, Brandon Routh and Michael Keaton. Yummy!)

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This is my first Superman story... it was originally posted on fanfiction.net. I have edited it some so this version is slightly different than the original. Hope you enjoy it!

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A hazy darkness filled the entire room. The curtains were drawn closed tightly; the slight glow emanating from them gave evidence of the daylight outside leaving the room in a constant state of twilight. The room was occupied by a sole individual shrouded in the half-light and felt devoid of any life or feeling. Not that Clark really cared or anything because the darkness suited his mindset. The curtains shifted slightly, a single tiny ray of the offensive light briefly illuminating his features showing the mask of anguish and tears pouring down his cheeks. He sat perched precariously on the edge of the bed, hunched over, his broad shoulders shaking silently. His appearance was haggard, like a man who had gone through hell and back many times over and finally had succumbed to the pressure. Dark, coarse stubble graced his normally smooth skin. He clearly hadn't shaved in a few days and if the bags under his eyes weren't evidence enough, there was always the haunted look filling his eyes as if he'd witnessed a great tragedy that had struck him to the core. Clark drew in a large, ragged breath and dragged his hand across his weary face. If anyone could guess here was a man who'd reached his breaking point. Clark's thoughts were as dark as the room he was in. As Superman he was used to being everyone's hero. The one who swooped in to save the day when hope was minimal and all seemed lost. Even under the grimmest circumstances he would grin and bear it, coming to the rescue but even the Man of Steel can only handle his fair share of horror and tragedy. But where was Superman's hero? Who saved him when all hope seemed lost in his eyes?

One might ask as Clark definitely does, "Why him, why does it have to be him?"

The only answer anyone including Clark himself can expect is, because he can. He has the power to make a difference.

Three days before, this man had reached his limit. Clark sank deep into the dark recesses of his mind and into the memories that haunted him. "**Bang!**" A shot echoed like a ghost through his tormented psyche. Clark desperately closed his eyes tight and dug his palms into the sides of his head as if trying to squeeze the painful memories out.

**"Bang! Bang! Bang!"**

His face screwed up in pain, the tears squeezing out the corners of his closed eyes. He dug his palms harder into his head. And then it happened, the images he had tried so hard to block out flooded through his mind.

The choking scent of gunpowder filled the air as five figures in dark clothing and masks ran through the hallway, like monsters from nightmares. Each brandished a sawed-off shot gun, shooting bullets into the crowds of kids who tried desperately to escape. Children ran into

classrooms screaming in despair as they tried to get away from the hail of bullets ripping through the hall. Clark flew onto the scene with all the speed he could muster, throwing himself between the armed men and the fleeing children. The bullets impacted his chest and ricochet off. He grabbed the nearest two men and knocked them into each other with force enough to break bones. Two others stopped terrified at Superman's sudden appearance while the final man ran towards another classroom on a final suicide mission. He burst through the weak barricade and into the full room popping off a few more shots before finally turning the gun on himself. Superman arrived just in time grabbing the speeding bullet in his outstretched hand, and knocked the final shooter unconscious. Having apprehended all the shooters Clark turned hesitantly to survey the damage only to be horrified.

Blood was everywhere like a botched splatter paint job. Children were screaming and crying out in pain, a sound he would always be haunted by for the remainder of his life. He took off flying through the roof, gathering up the waiting medical crew to save as many lives as they could.

Clark jerked suddenly away from his memories to find himself still in the dark room once again. How long had it been... two days? Clark shook his head and tried to drive away the sound of shots and screams that still echoed through his mind. He gazed across the room to see a dimly lit reflection in the mirror. He looked terrible. His thoughts once again turned dark. What was humanity coming to, why were humans such a deeply flawed species. So much so that a group of men could run through a school killing innocent kids. Why hadn't Clark been faster, stronger... maybe if he was then ten more kids would still have a future. Clark was filled with an immense self-loathing. He had let ten kids die and he remembered every one of their faces and had seen those lives extinguished in an instant like the flame of a candle. How many had Clark saved in his lifetime? He couldn't even remember. Though, how many more had died because he hadn't gotten to them in time? The blackness in his mind and heart was growing with every tragedy he witnessed, every life that was lost. He was so weary of playing the hero to a race that killed their own fellow beings without so much as blinking. He was so tired of being the invulnerable "Man of Steel" that was supposed to be strong, when inside every death was like a kryptonite knife poisoning his heart.

His thoughts turned darker still. It would be so easy to end it all. Never have to feel the pain of the death and destruction of a people that he cared so much about and more importantly he wouldn't have to deal with all his internal pain alone. He had no one to turn to with his thoughts because no one could know the truth and those who did, like his mother, would be too heartbroken if he confided in them. He had to go through life bearing his burden alone because as Clark no one was allowed to know the truth and as Superman he had to be the invulnerable "Man of Steel." The darkness was steadily closing in and gripping his heart in its iron grasp. There was so much kryptonite in the world and it was surprisingly easy to obtain. No one questioned why the hero wanted a piece of material that could cause his demise. Who knew that his worst nightmare could be his greatest salvation? Clark let out a bitter, humorless laugh that turned into more of a choked sob. "A suicidal Superman. Who wouldda thunk it?" Clark's shaky, clammy hands picked up a small metal box sitting on the bed beside him. Even through the lead he could feel the deadly thrum of power that belonged to the neon green rock beneath the lid. His hands started shaking so violently that the box almost slipped from his grasp. He placed his clammy fingers over the lid, his already shaky breath quickening with the finality of what he was about to do.

"Superman! Help me!"

"Superman! I'm not ready to die!"

"Fire! Fire! Somebody get some help!"

Clark's keen senses picked up the distressed pleas for help effortlessly. He sat completely still in the dark solitude for a moment trying to steady his breath and trembling hands. Sighing with exhaustion both mental and physical he let the lead box fall to the floor with a resounding thunk. He sat on the bed, his head hanging, then stood up slowly and ran a hand through his hair. He trudged over to the window and braced himself, then threw open the curtain basking in the glow of the sunlight. He loved the human race like his own because they always had been his own kind since the day the Kents adopted him. He had to fight for them, protect them, even if they were self-destructive.

"I'll live to fight another day," he said softly looking out over the city then removing his outer layer of clothing took off in a blur of color.