

Better to Hope

by repmetsyrrah

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Rating: K+

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A/N: Written for Rizny. **Request:** Reeveverse please - I would love an AU oneshot where Zod wins, maybe, and there is angst, or something else where the story goes AU, whatever catches your imagination.

In all things it is better to hope than to despair.

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Lois was cold- but that was nothing new. She didn't quite remember a time when she hadn't been able to see her breath or hear her teeth clatter together as her body desperately tried to warm itself. She tried to pull her thin clothes tighter around her body to keep in the heat.

At least it was summer up here. The weak northern sun shone all day, making the Fortress at least survivable for humans. It wasn't pleasant but then again her captors didn't really care about whether she was happy or not. She was alive and that was enough for them.

When Kal-El had bought her up here the first time he had warmed it up for her. She remembered how he'd blushed when he'd asked if she was comfortable, telling her shyly that he didn't feel the cold and wanted to be sure the temperature was right.

Of course the current occupants couldn't have cared less how Lois felt. They'd seen the heating of the Fortress as unnecessary and turned it off. After all the only people in there would be Kryptonians and Lois. And no one really cared about how Lois felt anymore.

It had only taken a moment for it to happen, during the fight Kal-El had turned suddenly towards her, though she hadn't made a sound, and his eyes had widened as he looked at her in shock as if he had seen her there for the first time.

Non had stepped forward then, faster than she could comprehend and struck him while he'd been distracted. Kal-El had crumpled, oblivious to Lois' scream and Lex's shout of triumph.

Zod hadn't been done though. He'd sworn to Jor-El that his son would kneel before him and he was determined to uphold his vow. Only half conscious and clearly slipping away, Kal-El had been dragged before him, barely managing to stand.

"Now, Kal-El, son of Jor-El," Zod had commanded, "Kneel before Zod."

He could have forced him to his knees, he could have nodded to Non who would have been only too pleased to kick Kal-El's feet from under him.

But the victory was not in the mere act of kneeling but the submission of his opponent. Zod wanted Kal-El to kneel of his own will, knowing that he was beaten and that Earth would soon fall after him.

Kal-El bent one leg and almost collapsed as he lowered himself before the dishonoured general.

"No," Lois whispered, willing him to get up again, to jump up unharmed and reveal it had all been some elaborate trick to lure the three other Kryptonians into a false sense of security.

But Kal-El was in no state to rise. Non's blow had clearly undone him. A small, clinical part of Lois' mind told her he was probably losing blood, bleeding internally and would most likely not be getting up again.

"Please." The word came so quietly Lois thought she had imagined it until it came again. "Please, let her live."

"Look, he's *begging*." Ursa's voice held no sympathy, only a cruel glee in the face of her enemy's humiliation. "He's begging you to spare the life of his pathetic alien woman."

Zod looked from Kal-El, crumpled on the ground before him and then to Lois, who was frozen in shock, her mind unwilling to accept the events unfolding before her.

"I see no reason why she can't live," he replied casually, as if Lois was of no more consequence to him than an insect on the ground, "Humans are easily controlled and the satisfaction I draw from your pathetic pleading is enough."

Kal-El's body finally gave way then and he crumpled forward, Zod stepping neatly away and moving menacingly towards Luthor who was babbling again about deals and partnerships.

Lois never did find out what they did to him. Maybe he was busy ruling Australia and Cuba like they had agreed. Or maybe they had simply tossed him out into the frozen tundra and left him to die.

At that moment her whole mind had been focused on one man. She forced her body to obey her, flinging her down the stairs and to his side. She half expected to be stopped, to be pulled back by arms as strong as steel and dragged away from him.

But they were either busy with something else or just didn't care. She knelt down by his side and was relieved to see his chest still rising and falling. "Kal-El," she called desperately, taking his hand in hers and stroking his face. "Clark," she whispered quietly and his eyes fluttered open.

Despite everything, at the sight of her face his mouth curved into a smile and he whispered, "Lois."

"I'm here," she sobbed, wishing she had the kindness to lie to him and tell him it was all okay.

"Lois," his voice changed, he sounded urgent now, "Lois," he repeated, his eyes unfocusing for a moment and Lois choked back another sob as she realized he was really leaving her.

"I'm here," she told him again, wondering why she hadn't been torn from his side yet and thrust into a small cell to presumably live out the remainder of her life in misery while General Zod ruled the world.

"Lois." Kal-El's eyes were filled with fear, but not for himself. He raised his arm and placed it on her stomach in a move with confused her until he whispered, "child," with his last breath.

Zod may have been a cruel and heartless murderer but he had his own morals, no matter how twisted, and he held to them. As he promised Kal-El, Lois was allowed to live.

Of course Kal-El hadn't had much time to negotiate on what 'live' actually meant. Sure, Lois was alive but where she was, tossed in some crystal cell in the back of the Fortress, was hardly living.

Lois never found out how Clark knew she was pregnant. Had he heard the baby's heart beat? At first that seemed impossible, it was far too early. Then Lois had remembered that her child was not entirely human. Who knew how it was developing?

Or maybe he'd heard something different entirely. She remembered their conversation the night he bought her up here, the night of their child's conception, when she'd asked him about his extraordinary powers.

When the conversation turned to his hearing he'd explained that everyone sounded different. Not just the unique rhythm of their heart but a thousand other little things that only he could discern. A slight catch at the end of each breath, the faint click of a not-so-perfect joint every time someone took a step, even the sound someone's hair made as they moved their head could be unique.

"It only comes with practice and if I've been with the person a while," he'd said. "I can't just find just anyone by what they sound like."

"What about me?" Lois had asked him with a smile, knowing his answer even as he blushed again and admitted he'd memorised her unique sound the day they'd meet.

However she didn't dwell on it. She knew herself for certain now as well and if she stayed too long it was only a matter of time before Zod became aware of it too. He may not have known her as Clark had but even he wouldn't ignore her soon expanding stomach and extra heartbeat.

So, Lois had reasoned, she couldn't stay. When they had first put her in the cell she had been cold and requested sheets which Ursa had reluctantly given her on Zod's orders. She likely would have died without them and Zod had said she was allowed to live.

It had only taken her a second to rip her thumbnail to the point when it was sharp enough to cut the thin fabric. She had set to work almost immediately. There would be time enough later to mourn Kal-El's death, now she had to work.

She paused to listen every few seconds. She probably would even have time to hear them if they did decide to investigate but she couldn't take chances. It was painstaking work.

Slice, pause, listen. Slice, pause listen. Slice, pause, listen.

Only when she had three strips did she get a change as she deftly plaited them together into a rope that would be strong enough to support her as she lowered herself down to the ground outside.

Technically, her escape would be ridiculously easy. The prison cells had been constructed from crystals in the Fortress programmed with Kryptonian designs. A room, approximately eight feet by eight feet with a single crystal shelf for a bed, an odd looking bowl in one corner that served as a toilet and, only five feet above the bed, a window to let in air and light.

Lois hadn't understood it when she'd first seen it. It hadn't even had bars and it was certainly big enough to squeeze through. She knew it had to be a trick of some kind and she was right. Whenever she put her hand through it, green lasers criss-crossed the opening.

Kryptonite, she'd realized the first time, as she yanked her hand back only to find it unharmed. Presumably any Kryptonian prisoner would have been badly burned by the light but Lois remained unscathed.

Kryptonians needed sunlight to live she recalled, so a windowless cell probably would have been tantamount to torture. Zod, perhaps giddy with victory or busy running his world hadn't bothered to fill the hole in with anything else that would have put an instant halt to her plan, even simple metal bars would have thwarted her.

She was concerned for the child but between certain death for it here and what harm the

lasers might do there really was no choice.

The most difficult part of her escape was after that, when she had to trek alone and severely under equipped through the Arctic weather. But Clark had done it - when he was, in every way that mattered, as human as she was now. He'd walked from civilisation to the Fortress in the cold and he'd survived. Lois would too.

She had to- within her Lois knew she carried the only hope Earth would ever have of being free and she was determined it would survive.

Jor-El was long gone and Kal-El had followed but Lois swore that his child- *their* child- would not meet the same fate. The last heir to the House of El would live to see Zod defeated, Lois would make sure of it.