

I'll Keep Your Secrets

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Lois has discovered that Clark is, in fact, Superman. Clark tries to make amends. Set during and after "We Have a Lot To Talk About."

Disclaimer: I own nothing, I make nothing. All characters, plot points, line of dialogue, etc belong to DC Comics, Warner Brothers, December 3rd Productions, and anyone else who owns Superman. I just like playing with characters. Inspired by listening to "I'll Keep Your Secrets" by The Trans-Siberian Orchestra, especially the refrain. I don't own them either. If you don't know who they are, check them out.

*Lost in your dark
I see you there
What do you see beyond your stare
And you believe that no one else can know*

*What is this thing you keep inside
Out of the light and wrapped in pride
Always afraid that one day it will show*

*I'll keep your secrets
I'll hold your ground
And when the darkness starts to fall
I'll be around there waiting
When dreams are fading
And friends are distant and few*

*Know at that moment I'll be there with you
What are these voices that you hear
Are they too far or far too near
What are these things that echo from the past*

*Who are these ghosts you see at night
There in the shadows of your life
They only live by the light you cast*

*I'll keep your secrets
I'll hold your ground
And when the darkness starts to fall
I'll be around there waiting
When dreams are fading
And friends are distant and few*

Know at that moment I'll be there with you

*I'll be around
When there's no reason left to carry on
And every dream you've ever had is gone
And the dark is deep and black without a sound
And every star has been dragged to the ground
Know at that moment I will be around
Know at that moment I will be around*

"Will you marry me?"

The words still rung in Lois' head. How could he? For more than two years he'd been lying to her. Keeping secrets from her. And those lies and secrets had been huge. Clark Kent was

Superman. She'd figured it out only the day before. Clark and Superman had both touched her in the same way. She'd made the connection seconds before Superman had frozen her to create the illusion that she was dead, so that some maniac wouldn't kill Clark's parents.

She replayed the night over in her head. Clark had saved his parents and had brought her back from her frozen state. She had caught a little cold, but was otherwise unharmed. Clark had asked her to take a walk with him in the nearby park. He'd seemed nervous. Lois was sure that he was about to reveal his alter ego to her. Why else would he be choosing his words so carefully? She'd been blindsided when he'd gone down on one knee, pulling the ring box from his breast pocket, and asked her to marry him.

She'd blinked a few times, stunned. Then, choosing her own words carefully, she'd let him know that she was onto him.

"Who's asking? Clark ... or Superman?" She'd reached out and pulled the glasses from his face as she'd talked.

Clark's face had gone ashen as he realized that the game was up. That nervous laugh of his had appeared as it always did when he was uncomfortable. Not answering her, perhaps thinking of how to respond, he'd guided her out of the rain and dried her clothes for her with his heat vision.

"I guess the first question is ... how long have you known?" he had asked her.

Lois had smirked a little. He wasn't going to deny it. Wasn't going to give her some flimsy line. Not this time.

"Really? I thought the first question would be ... how'd you figure it out?"

A guarded look had crossed his face. "That's kind of neck and neck with ... how mad are you?"

Pain and fear had danced in his eyes in a way that she had never seen before. For a brief moment, Lois had felt truly rotten. But the moment had passed quickly as she remembered the years of deception. He was supposed to be her best friend! She had said that she wasn't mad, but hurt. It had been a half truth. She was hurt ... but she was also close to furious with him.

They hadn't parted on the best of terms that night. As always, Clark had to dash off. The only difference was, now she knew where he was going, and it wasn't to return a book to the library. Someone needed Superman.

She slumped onto her couch, hot tears of anger running down her cheeks. She decided that she actually had crossed over in the realm of furious. Had Clark ever intended on telling her? Or was that some kind of lie of his, too? How could she trust him again? Had he enjoyed watching her squirm the past two years? Had some sick part of him enjoyed knowing that he was pulling a fast one on Lois Lane, the best damned investigative reporter in Metropolis, if not the country? God, she could almost hate him for this. Almost.

Lois sighed. Everything seemed so confused to her. She thought back over the past couple of years with Clark. He'd always seemed genuine to her. Strange, but genuine. So many fond memories with him. Giggling over Chinese food. His protective arm around her when things got a little too dangerous. Sitting in his apartment watching a Lethal Weapon movie marathon, each of them quoting the parts that they knew by heart, each of them making comments on the more ridiculous parts. How safe she had felt that night, even knowing that some lunatic was trying to kill her. His utter fear when he'd approached her and asked her out on their first date. She sighed again. So many lies, too. His constant disappearances that had left her feeling like she was somehow undesirable. His brush with death when he had, as Superman, ingested Kryptonite thanks to Diana Stride. His actual ... no ... faked, she now knew, death at the hands of the resurrected Clyde Barrows. She had gone through an emotional hell with that last one. She was mad enough to punch him when she saw him next, or would if she thought it would do any good,

other than cause her to break her hand.

For that last one, she was going to, at the very least, give him a harsh tongue-lashing when she saw him next. A grim smile passed over her lips for barely a second. She could make him squirm, at least a little.

But was it really fair to make him squirm? That was the sixty-four thousand dollar question. He'd hurt Lois so many times, not just in keeping his alter ego a secret, but in all of the tiny lies that he'd constructed to help maintain the facade. But could it be that he'd been hurting, too? Lois growled her frustration like a caged animal. Now she was mad at Clark for planting that seed of guilt in her mind.

She chewed her lower lip in thought, then went to the freezer. Opening the door, she peered inside. No ice cream. Damn. She'd finished the last of it the night before she had been frozen for Clark and had forgotten to restock.

Strike thirty-five tonight, Kent, she thought.

She meandered to her bedroom. The image of the engagement ring that Clark had presented her with came unbidden to her mind. She looked at her empty bed, wondering for a brief moment what it might be like to see Clark there, waiting for her to join him. She'd thought about it before. The mental image flickered between a bare-chested Clark and Superman in all of his red and blue suited glory.

"Ugh," she said, trying to banish her thoughts. "Not in the foreseeable future."

She dreamed that night, a recurring nightmare that plagued her until she rose for work in the morning. She was at The Daily Planet and everyone around her was laughing, staring and pointing at her. Clark was leading them all, taunting her, his shirt open to reveal the S beneath his suit.

"I'm Clark ... I'm Superman ... I'm Clark ... I'm Superman," he said, pulling his glasses on and off to match his words.

A couple of days later, Bill Church and his son were safely tucked away in Metropolis' maximum security prison. Clark had dropped her off at her apartment, after taking her high above the earth, above the clouds. She'd promised him that she would be there for him but had told him that she couldn't give him a yes or a no on his proposal. He'd said that he understood and that he would wait for her until she was ready.

Lois wasn't sure what to do now. It was Saturday, her day off, and while in the past she'd often wound up chasing stories on her weekends, today she was all about taking time to recover. The only problem was, she couldn't stop thinking. About Clark, about Superman, about the ring. Watching TV didn't help — it was, apparently, celebrity wedding weekend on most of the stations that she watched. And the news stations were all abuzz at how Superman had stopped a volcano from erupting in Hawaii by punching a hole in the side and allowing the lava to spill harmlessly into the ocean.

Yeah, really easy being mad at a hero, she thought cynically.

She turned off the TV as a knock came from her door.

"Who is it?" she called, standing up from the couch.

"It's me," Clark's voice said, sounding somehow humble.

She crossed the room and opened the door.

"What?" she asked, a hint of anger in her voice.

"Still mad, I take it," Clark said as he pushed past her, his arms filled with bulging grocery bags. "Can I interest you in dinner?"

Lois hesitated a second. "Depends on what it is."

"Teriyaki chicken, white or fried rice — your choice, steamed vegetables, sushi — if you want it, and wine." He had a hopeful smile on his face.

"A place you know in Japan?"

"No. Well, actually some of the ingredients I did fly to Japan for. But tonight, I am going to cook for you. Just to prove that

I'm not lying about where the food is coming from." His remark had its intended effect, he could see by the way her cheeks colored. "And I'm offering one more thing."

"What's that?" Lois almost smiled. Clark looked so hopeful, so pleased with his plan to woo her with a home-cooked meal. And Japanese food sounded very good to her. Her stomach grumbled its agreement.

"After we eat, I am going to give you the interview every reporter in the world would give their press badge for. I am going to answer any, and all, questions you have. About Clark, about Superman. No topic is off limits."

She gave him a hard look. "Every reporter?" She gave him a smug, but amused, smile.

Clark smiled as Lois' mood lifted. "Ok, almost every reporter."

"Geez Clark, trying to rack up the brownie points?"

"Speaking of brownies, I brought some for dessert. I made them at home."

Lois actually laughed as he produced a Tupperware tray filled with brownies. She noted that no two were cut the same size — definitely proof that they were home-made.

"Ok, you're on."

"Clark, that was amazing," Lois said as she licked the last morsel of food from her fingers. "Where'd you learn to cook like that?"

"Well, my mom and dad taught me some of it, some I picked up in my travels. You know, cooking is an excellent trait to have in a partner." He tried to make it into a joke, and Lois humored him with an uncomfortable laugh. "Uh, anyway, like I said, I am an open book. Ask me anything. And, Lois, I just want you to know, I am always going to be an open book with you. Hook me up to a lie-detector machine if you want."

Another smile touched Lois' lips. "I'll believe what you tell me. But where to start? I mean, who are you really? Obviously you weren't born at the Smallville General Hospital as Clark whatever-your-middle-name-is Kent."

"Jerome."

"What?"

"My middle name. It's Jerome. At least, as my parents ... my earth parents ... named me."

"Oh."

Clark sat forward on the couch, resting his elbows on his knees. "Please, understand that I don't know too much about why and how I am here. But I was born as Kal-El, the son of Jor-El and Lara. I was only days old when I was sent to Earth. Jor-El left me messages on that globe ... the one Jack stole from my apartment, but he didn't leave me too many details. All I know is that Krypton was on the verge of destruction. How or why, he never said. To save me, he and Lara put me in a ship and sent me to Earth, because I would at least look like the people here. I don't think they ever thought that I would ... be the way I am here ... have these powers. I think they suspected that Earth's yellow sun would have some effect on me, but I don't think they ever imagined that I'd have all of these powers. Anyway, as soon as I'd cleared the atmosphere of the planet, it exploded."

"That's really sad," Lois murmured.

"It's not something I think a lot about," Clark assured her. "Once in a while it'll cross my mind. More so because there are more questions than I have answers for. I honestly don't regret being here on this planet. I'm grateful for the sacrifice that my biological parents made to ensure that I lived. I just sometimes wish ... well, that I wasn't the last Kryptonian left alive."

"Whatever happened to that globe anyway?"

"It's in my Fortress of Solitude." He said it so casually that Lois blinked in response.

"Your what now?"

Clark smiled. "My old tree house in my parents' yard."

"Depressing name for a tree house."

"Yeah, well, I spent a lot of time there when I was a kid. I did a lot of thinking there before I discovered my ability to fly."

"Tell me about your childhood?" It was a definite question.

For all of Clark's assurances that all topics were fair game, she wondered if she was picking at old wounds of his.

"Well, for the most part, it was great. I didn't wallow in some sort of depression or anything. But growing up is hard, no matter what or who you are. Discovering all of my powers just made it more ... complicated. I mean, when I was in the fourth grade, I gained the ability to speed read and write. In the first three weeks of school, I'd finished every book on the curriculum for the entire year and their accompanying book reports. The following year, I could easily outrun the local trains with no heavy breathing, no breaking of a sweat."

"What else?" she prompted him, knowing that she'd let down her guard. Her fascination with his stories was clear as day on her face. She didn't bother to try and correct it.

He ran a hand through his hair, thinking back. "By junior high, I was lifting furniture and by high school, I was bench-pressing farm equipment to blow off steam. I once stared at my calculus homework so hard that I set it on fire. That's how I discovered my heat vision. My discovery of X-ray vision came from staring at the blackboard in history class. Suddenly I could see the home economics class next door. After that, I started wearing glasses as a kind of way to ... remind myself of what I could do. It helped me to not accidentally use my powers. But that wasn't the end of my emerging powers. I blew my 16th birthday cake off the plate and into the wall when I went to blow out the candles. By the time I was 18, most of my friends were worrying about zits popping up before dates and I was waking up every night floating five feet above my bed."

"Must have been rough on you," she said sympathetically.

"Each new discovery scared me," he admitted. "Each power needed to be controlled so I didn't hurt anyone. But there was no one there to teach me. My parents tried to help, but they were scared, too. They always feared that if word got out about what I could do, that the government would find me and lock me up in a lab to dissect me like a frog."

Lois stood from the armchair and sat down on the couch next to Clark. She slung one arm around his back.

He went on with his story, pausing only to give her a thankful smile. "Every power that surfaced put me at an even greater distance from my peers. I knew that I'd never be normal. So, when I was thirteen, I decided that I would hide those aspects of my life. No one would ever know what a freak I was. And it worked. I had friends, I dated, I had girlfriends. But I could never allow myself to truly connect with them, especially any women. There was always this third person there, preventing me from really letting anyone in. It's not to say that I don't have close friends. There are some people that I am at complete ease with ... well, as completely at ease as I can be without giving myself away. I've learned over time how to overcome the issue of who and what I really am. But I have never told anyone my secret. I thought about telling you very soon after we met. I may, in the future, decide to let Jimmy and Perry in on things."

"Why? Why did you think of telling me so early? Why didn't you?"

Clark hesitated a moment, searching for the right words.

"Well, because. I knew as soon as I met you that I was in love with you. Maybe we didn't have the best of beginnings as partners but I felt an instant connection with you. An instant friendship. The same goes for Jimmy and Perry. Lois, over the years I've become a pretty good judge of character. I've had to. But I still haven't learned to let go of my fears. My fears of being so intimate with someone that I have absolutely no secrets. My

fears of rejection. Of being labeled as a freak. My fears of the wrong people finding out about me."

"Did you not trust me?"

Clark shook his head. "At first, I had to be sure, to make sure that my instincts about you were correct. I had to make certain that my secret would be safe with you. And once I knew that you wouldn't run straight to the editing room with *The Real Story Of Superman* to publish ... well, by then we'd gotten to be the best of friends. And I was afraid that my secret would drive you away from me before I'd gotten the chance to get close to you, as more than a friend. Lois, it took me nearly two years to summon up the courage to ask you out on a date and the thought of doing even that ... well, it first occurred to me when you walked in on my interview with Perry."

"And you were going to let me in on the secret when exactly?"

"I tried to tell you a few times," he said, his gaze steady, looking her in the eyes. "But things got in the way, like my parents getting kidnapped. I chickened out. I think I gave you a lame excuse about my barber."

"So that's what you were trying to tell me."

Clark nodded.

"I guess I'm mad at myself as much as I was with you. Mad that a pair of glasses prevented me from seeing through your charade. I'm supposed to be this great investigative reporter and everything." Lois' tone was soft, reflective.

Clark chuckled. "It's not only the glasses. I don't exactly have the same personality in either of my identities. Mild-mannered reporter. Commanding super hero."

"I guess," Lois said with a half-smile. "So. Um, is it hard? To, uh, keep the two separate?"

"It used to be. At first, when I was younger, it was so hard to keep my powers under control. Now, it's as natural as breathing ... most of the time. I still occasionally break things that I don't mean to. Or find myself floating above the bed ... if I'm unusually stressed or worried. And sometimes, it's hard for me to keep up the aloof Superman persona ... especially when you are in danger. But in my mind, I've ... separated myself. Superman did this. Clark said that. It helps me to keep the two identities straight so that I don't slip up and say something that I shouldn't and give myself away."

Lois thought for a second. "And how does it feel now? Knowing that I know?"

Clark's face brightened "Incredible. I feel relieved. Liberated. Joyful. Scared. Hopeful. Vulnerable. Confident. Like the weight of the world has been lifted from my shoulders. And like an idiot for not telling you sooner."

"So ... why create Superman in the first place? If you wanted to have a normal life?"

"Well, I've always looked at my powers as a gift. As something I need to use to help people. My parents raised me to be the type of guy who is compassionate to others, to help people in need. I can't hear a cry for help and not do anything. Until two years ago, I tried to do it ... covertly. But that always got me into trouble. For a few years after college, I traveled all over the world. I could never stay in one place for long because I'd help someone and then nearly get caught. So I fled from country to country. And then, I arrived in Metropolis. And you created Superman for me."

"I did? What are you talking about?"

Clark smiled at her. "You gave me the idea. I saved the workers in the sewer and got dirty. Do you remember? You said I should bring a change of clothes with me to work. So I thought about it and realized that you were right. I flew to Smallville as soon as I could and had my mom make me a disguise. Suddenly, I could help people without fear of being seen. And I worked very, very hard at ensuring that Superman did not resemble Clark at all

— slicked back hair, no glasses, a completely different attitude.”

She noted Clark’s gaze suddenly shift as though his mind was a hundred miles away. “Someone want you?” He gave a nervous laugh. “Go.”

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” he promised her.

Spinning faster than eyes could follow, he changed into his alter ego. He’d done it before in front of her, but it still took her breath away. He kissed her cheek, then ducked out the window and was gone in a flash.

In the sudden silence, Lois rose and cleaned the dishes, but her mind was whirling. She was used to large and often surprising amounts of information coming at her, but the things Clark had told her easily took the cake. It certainly made for the strangest evening she’d ever had, even compared to the first time she’d met Superman on the space shuttle and he’d swallowed the bomb that had been on board.

She mulled over what he’d told her, methodically shifting through each piece of information. She’d never imagined just how lonely his life must have been. Not being able to share. Fearing to get close to people. She pitied him, in a way. She felt her anger melting away. She felt herself forgiving him.

I really do love him, huh? she thought to herself. Anyone else and I would have skinned them alive.

She found herself thinking more and more about Clark’s childhood. How frightening it must have been, as each new power made itself known. She’d felt enough like an outcast among her peers and she couldn’t fly. For her parents’ messy divorce. For her unhappy home life as they’d fought. For developing early. She shuddered. Boobs Lane, the boys had teased her. She couldn’t quite imagine having smashed a desk just by hitting it with her fist.

She wondered what was going on in Clark’s head at the moment. Clearly, he’d been bursting for the chance to tell her about himself, at least tonight. She still couldn’t quite believe the deluge of information that he’d offered — all without any real prodding on her part. Was he really that glad to finally unburden himself from the secrets he’d carried his whole life? Or was he just trying to make amends? Lois was certain that it was the former. She always felt great when she was able to finally get secrets off of her own chest. They had this way of eating her alive.

Clark’s secrets must have been torture to carry, she thought. Poor guy. Wait a second. Did I just come to terms with this? Huh. I think I might have. I think I’m ok. It’s not like I just found out that he’s some serial killer or something. He’s Superman. I can live with that. I’m still not entirely happy about finding out the way I did, but I can understand why it was so hard for him.

Hours later, she was flipping through a magazine when Clark appeared at her window. He eased himself inside of the apartment. He looked tired.

“Sorry,” he said after spinning back into his Clark clothes. “There was a wildfire in California, a car fire in Chicago, and a bomb scare in New York that turned out to be a duffle bag of gym clothing.”

“Oh, it’s ok,” Lois said. “Come. Sit.” She patted the couch cushion next to her.

Clark eagerly obliged, sighing as he settled down onto the couch next to her. He leaned back, stretching his back and shoulder muscles.

“I did some thinking after you left.”

“And?” He raised his eyebrow worriedly.

“And I think I can deal with this. It’s going to take me some time, but I think I’m happy knowing your secrets. And I wanted to let you know that you don’t have to be afraid. I’ll keep your secrets. I’ll be there for you when you need to talk. I’ll cover for you at work when you need to dash off. Maybe not with excuses

about how you need to return a video, but I’ll do the best I can.” She smiled at him then sobered. “I’m not going to push you away as a friend or as a partner. But I do have to come to terms with this in our relationship as a couple.”

“I understand,” he said, “and I will do my best to be respectful of that and to be patient. I’ve waited my whole life for you. I can wait a little longer. And ... thank you.”

“Can I ask you one more thing?”

“Anything.”

“Just what is it that you want? I mean, what makes you tick?”

He smiled. “What every man wants. A job. A wife. Kids. A house with a lawn and a reasonable mortgage. I want you. I want to share my life with you. You know what image I had in my head the other night when I asked you to marry me?”

“Whatever it was, I’m sure it wasn’t the response I gave you.”

He chuckled. “I had an image in my head of you and me. Sitting in our living room. Our daughter on my knee as I read her a story. Our son out shooting hoops in the driveway. Our two year old sound asleep in her bedroom. You pregnant with our next child. I thought of Sundays spent at the zoo with our family. Going to school plays and graduations. Bedtime stories.” He sighed.

“And maybe those things will happen one day,” she said.

“But I can’t right now. I’m sorry.”

“I know. I don’t blame you. I’ll always be here and I will wait. But maybe some things don’t have to wait.”

Lois arched an eyebrow. “Clark,” she warned him.

“All I meant was, I’d like to take you to the zoo tomorrow.”

“Metropolis?”

“The Bronx Zoo. In New York. It’s lovely there this time of year.”

Lois laughed. “You’re on, farmboy.”

THE END