

# I Sense That I Love You 3: Hearing Three Unspoken Words

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Rated G

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Summary: Lois's thoughts concerning the things she did and didn't hear Clark say.

Disclaimer: Some dialogue is taken from several different episodes, but altered slightly to make sense without a lot of background context. No copyright infringement is intended.

A/N: I've always been especially entranced by the chemistry between Dean Cain and Teri Hatcher; it fascinates me anew every time I watch the show. So, in a way, these five Sense stories are something of a tribute to them, as well as the writers of this excellent show! Also, I've been remiss in my last few stories by not properly thanking my General Editor, Deja Vu, for her great help, work, and encouragement, not to mention a lot of guidance as I stumbled my way around. Thanks a lot!

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Clark is a man of few words — and when I say few, I mean *few*. But, really, he doesn't have to say much. He can stop you in your tracks with a smile, make you think twice about some reckless stunt you just proposed with a raise of his brows, or let you know that he thinks you're the best thing in the world with a single glance.

At first, I thought it was just because of his Midwestern upbringing, part of that gentlemanly charm he carries around with him wherever he goes. Past that assumption, I didn't think much of it; after all, I had told him from the beginning that I was the one who'd ask the questions while he remained quietly in the background. He didn't need to say much — in fact, to be my partner, it was preferred.

And yet, in the beginning, it was always him who asked the important questions. Questions like what I liked in my coffee. Or what my favorite holiday was. Or why I had chosen to become an investigative journalist. Or what I wanted for my birthday. Or who my friends were. Or what I thought about something as simple as the new decoration on a storefront we passed every morning or as complicated as the new law being passed through Congress.

Questions I never thought to ask him were part of his everyday vocabulary, including the simplest one that often blew me away in those first days: "How are you?"

No one ever asked me that. No one ever thought about asking it. And certainly no one cared as much about the answer as Clark did.

Even before Perry partnered us together permanently, Clark would ask me every morning how I was doing, and then he'd wait and watch me patiently and listen to whatever I said, whether it was a rant on early morning traffic or a brusque "Fine, let's get to work."

I was — still am, actually — the quintessential opposite. While Clark is content to sit and listen to others — in fact, even *delighted* to hear all about your troubles and woes — I don't like to listen to what other people have to say. I've learned to listen, of course — you kind of have to when you interview people for a living. And maybe that's part of the reason it took me so long to really understand Clark. I got so focused on the big issues, the deciding question that makes or breaks the entire deal, that it took me a long time to listen to all the small things he was saying.

Things like "Stay here tonight?"

Or "That's what partners are for."

Or "I won't leave you. I'm right here."

Or "I would not let anything happen to you."

Or "Partner."

That last was the hardest to hear, yet the one he spoke the most often, a codeword for "friend." And maybe more ... if I ever wanted it.

Words spill out of me. I don't know where they all come from or why I'm sometimes compelled to send forth a mountain of words to bury people in. Maybe it's a coping mechanism; maybe it's a defense mechanism; maybe it's a sign of nervousness or stress. Maybe, as Clark would say, it's just the way I am. Whatever the reason, sometimes it backfires on me and buries me instead of the other person.

And with Clark, I was busy or scared or blind, and I ended up being buried by my own words, inadvertently sheltered from the realization of everything Clark was — with so few words, in such coded terms — telling me.

Ironically, I didn't start hearing Clark's message until he was no longer there to pass it on. Until angry accusations ... and painful remarks stemming from hurt and betrayal ... and terrible, awful, dreadful silence had taken the place of what he had been trying to tell me. Walking down the aisle toward a man who said a thousand words that came cheaply and had little value ... all I could hear was everything Clark had ever said to me.

The teasing banter that had conveyed just how much he admired and respected and liked me. The tiny comments that, upon later reflection, imparted a wealth of friendship and affection. His declaration of love that had come so disjointedly and awkwardly — nothing at all like the smooth way Luthor had proclaimed his own feelings — and yet so obviously sincere it had physically hurt.

Even then, the semblance of a lie, the words expressing his desire for only friendship between us, the catch to his voice that had given away just how little he meant this newer declaration ... well, it was enough to make me shrug off the truth that his statements, comments, and jokes — taken altogether — spelled out.

And then, later, long after I should have let him in on the fact that I had broken his code, there came an even worse silence. One that no apology or halted wedding or fervent embrace could break.

The silence of the grave.

For a little less than twenty-four hours — for an eternity — there was not one single word from Clark. His voice had been irrevocably muted, all of his words drowned out by the sound of three gunshots, the truth he had been waiting for me to hear since shortly after I had met him suddenly consigned to the past alone.

And ironically, all I could hear — at my apartment, at the Daily Planet, in the streets, facing death at the hands of an outdated mobster — all I could hear were all the things he had been telling me and all the times I had purposely refused to listen.

All that filled my mind was the sound of his voice — smoky, light, infused with veiled strength, touched by gentleness as much a part of him as his brown eyes and coal-black hair. It echoed and rebounded and reverberated until I couldn't sleep at night, couldn't think, couldn't even breathe because all I could hear was

his voice — the tone that touched it when he stretched out my name in that unique, fearless way of his; the timbre it took on when a quiet, suddenly serious moment would unexpectedly enclose us in poignant intensity; the natural, easy chuckle that brought life to the darkest corners of my walled-off heart.

It was a haunted silence that was, incredibly, broken by the sound of his tiny laugh and the warmth of his voice as he murmured my name when I threw myself into his arms.

That miracle of his voice and arms and smile returned to me — it made me realize just how much I had been taking for granted. How much I had been ignoring. And I swore to myself that I would start listening to everything he had to say. Even if he conveyed it inaudibly — even if it were spoken through actions instead of words — I would catch those truths — or rather, the *single* truth — that I had been avoiding so long.

And I heard it. I heard it every time he said my name — and he had so many ways of saying those two syllables — every time he teased me about my competitiveness or my spelling, every time he comforted me during my bad days and hard times. Even though he hadn't said it again since I had rejected him, I heard it clear as day, those three words that he couldn't hide, that he never tried to take back, that he never denied.

"I love you."

It took a while — far longer than it should have — but I was finally able to say it back to him, able to climb past my walls, ignore the compulsion to bury him in my own, useless, cheap words, and speak to him the same way he had been speaking to me — with every breath, every move, every statement.

But he had three more words to say to me, three words I never saw coming, three words that simultaneously turned my world upside down and made everything suddenly make perfect sense. These were three words he had never spoken aloud — to me or, I think, to anyone else — and yet this secret was just as obvious as the other, just as apparent, just as plain.

By the time he was ready to speak these three words aloud, I had already figured them out for myself, already heard them whispering through behind the excuses, the exit lines, the pleas for understanding. And so I said them for him.

"Clark is Superman."

Even more than a spewing fountain of words, anger is my friend, my cloak, my shield, my camouflage. Knowing that I had told him the three scary words before he had revealed this enormous secret ... it made it easy to feel hurt, to get angry, to stop listening altogether.

But in the past two years I had made a habit of listening to him. I had attuned my hearing to the sound of his voice. I couldn't shut him out now — and I wasn't sure I wanted to. He was my partner; he was my friend; he was the man I loved. I knew him, knew him better than even I realized. I understood why he had said so little, why these three words had never passed his lips, why it had taken him so long to form them. I recognized the fact that this secret had swallowed up his entire life, that it sat over every one of his days like a shadow, that it factored into every decision he made, every move he took ... every word he said. That it blanketed the things he wanted to say, muted the secrets he wanted to tell, drowned out the confidences he wanted to share.

And yet ... he had still said my name. He had still called me partner. He had still invited me into his life through the questions he asked, the things he *did* say, and the intent, caring, oh-so-patient way he listened to me.

And in the end, I realized that he had said everything I needed to hear. Because even when he didn't say "I am Superman," he was still saying "I love you."

I write down a thousand or more words a day, sometimes twice as many, sometimes four times as many, but never fewer than that thousand. I shape them into sentences that report the

truth of the day and expose good and bad alike. I fashion them to convey everything the article requires. I rewrite them after Perry edits the piece as a whole. I twist them to my own purposes and get paid for it.

I speak aloud who knows how many words every day, coloring them with a dozen different emotions, shaping them with telling inflections. Sometimes, they fall uncontrollably from my lips; other times, I have to shape them carefully and force them out into the cold, hard world, praying they don't lead to rejection or personal hurt.

For all that, I don't think any word or sentence I have ever crafted — on paper or out loud — have meant nearly as much as the things Clark says. The way he says them, the timbre of his voice, the tiny pauses between some of his words, the sincerity that adds that tiny catch to his tone.

Such simple words. Such simple sentences, each composed of only three words.

"I love you."

"I am Superman."

Each sentence addressed only to me — no other person in the world. No other individual will ever be the recipient of those six special words. No other person will hear the stark emotion that is evident when he speaks to me. No one else will ever be the cause of the blatant emotion exposed in his voice *every time* he speaks to me.

So it was easy, in the end, so easy, to forgive him for keeping three of those words locked behind his shield of silence. Easy ... because there were some words *I* had never spoken either.

Words like "I'm so sorry."

Or "Thank you, Clark."

Or "Don't leave me."

Or "I need you."

Words that had somehow gotten locked inside me, forgotten or ignored in favor of the endless streams of rambling on any and every other subject. Words I had concealed and hidden behind protective lies, hurt deception, or angry silence. Words that couldn't be withheld from him any longer.

But then ... no matter that I didn't always hear what Clark was trying to tell me, he has always, from the moment I met him, heard the things I could never say out loud. He listens with something even better than superhearing — he listens with his heart. He taught me to do the same, and because he did, I heard the three, precious unspoken words.

We both had secrets, but that was then. Now ... now we don't need secrets. Because now, even our silence is filled with a lifetime of words that will never run dry.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

THE END