

When You Can't Tell Night From Day

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Rated G

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Summary: Clark and Lois deal with the consequences of rejecting each other.

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Superman, is there any hope for us? You and me? I'm so completely in love with you that I can't do anything else without knowing.

Lois, I do care for you. But... there are things about me you don't know, that you may never know.

*It doesn't matter. I know you. And I don't mean you the celebrity or you the 'superhero.' If you had **no** powers, if you were just an ordinary man leading an ordinary life, I'd love you just the same. Can't you believe that?*

I wish I could, Lois. But, under the circumstances, I don't see how I can.

I watched the tear fall down her cheek and longed to brush it away. But I couldn't. It wouldn't be right to encourage her feelings for me when I couldn't, wouldn't...

I needed to go. With a last look at her, I flew out the window.

"Clark, open up!" she demanded, for at least the fourth time.

How could she think it was okay? Still okay, I mean? To just show up at one in the morning on my doorstep? After she rejected me and then threw herself at Superman? How could she?

I felt angrier at Lois than I ever had before as I stormed to my door, intent on letting her know how unfair this was. How cruel. How could she just act like nothing happened when she had broken my heart earlier today?

"You're here," she said surprised, her arm still raised, when I opened the door.

"Yes," I said, the bitterness not even slightly hidden in my voice.

"Clark," she said, her voice suddenly soft. It was a statement and a question in one, and in the face of that one word, softly spoken and nearly aching with the desire for things to go back to normal, my anger faded away. I never could stay angry with her.

"Yes," I replied, my voice resigned. Lois' lips perked up just a little.

"Can I come in?" she asked, but I could tell that she knew she could, and so I moved out of her way without a word.

"I need your help with something," Lois said, pure confidence now. Now that she knew I had forgiven her she showed no sign at all of the question that she'd uttered in my doorway. It was two months ago again. We were best friends and Lois felt comfortable coming to my apartment at any time of the night.

Only it wasn't really. However she wanted to play it, things were different now. We didn't work together anymore — heck, I didn't even have a job. I had told her I loved her six hours ago. She had told me

she loved me four hours later. And then an hour after that... she'd accepted another man's proposal of marriage.

Things weren't the same, and they were never going to be that way again. She was getting married in just a few weeks time. No way would Lex Luthor be okay with his wife at my apartment in the wee hours of the morning. Even if we had still worked together. And since I'd go off and live in a cave in the Arctic before I ever took a paycheck from Lex Luthor, that wasn't happening anytime soon.

Lois looked up at me with surprise. I wasn't even sure what she saw there. My anger at her for making this so weird? My anger at me for making this so weird? My anger at Luthor for what was to come? Or my hurt over all of it?

Her eyes closed in pain and again, I felt my anger crumble.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "I know I hurt you today, and I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

I nodded my head, not able to tell her it was okay, but wanting to erase the look of pain from her face.

Taking a deep breath, I asked, "What do you need help with?"

Lois started pacing, rather than talking, and that made me nervous. "Don't hate me for this, okay?"

"What?" I asked her cautiously. If she expected easy forgiveness for breaking my heart, what could she possibly be about to do now that she would be worried about?

"I talked to Superman earlier tonight," she told me, although it was almost hard to hear her voice over the sound of her heartbeat, which was going a mile a minute.

I nodded. Since she'd asked me to tell him she wanted to see him, this was something I was supposed to know. As opposed to what she'd said — about loving him even if he was an ordinary man. Unless of course, the ordinary man was me...

I sighed, bringing myself back to the present.

"He said something..." Lois paused, and looked around nervously. "It got me thinking."

"About what?" I asked, my voice sharper than intended.

"He said there were..." she paused for a moment. "He said there were things I didn't know about him."

I didn't know what to say to that. Was she upset to learn that Superman kept secrets from her? Was she planning to find out what those were?

Strangely, that didn't leave me feeling the fear it once would have. Instead it made me feel... vindicated. I couldn't help it. The idea of Lois discovering that Superman was just me, and it turned out she wouldn't love him if he was just an ordinary man, made me feel strangely happy. Like I had won something. What, I had no idea. The right to point out to her that she had been wrong? Would that make either of us feel better?

It didn't matter. She wouldn't figure it out. She didn't want to know. That was the only explanation for the fact that she didn't know now. Not when she knew both Clark Kent and Superman better than anyone and had never even guessed.

But when Lois stopped her pacing and looked at me again, it was not the look of Lois — Star Reporter in Pursuit of a Story I saw. It was the Lois who had been left by her father, used by some stupid French guy, who trusted no one — that was the Lois who looked at me. But she *had* trusted someone. She'd trusted Superman to be... perfect, I guessed. Someone she *could* trust, even if she couldn't trust anyone else.

"Lois," I said, softly, not having any idea what I was going to say, just knowing that I had to wipe that look of hurt off her face. I could barely remember what I had been so upset about; I couldn't focus on my own feelings, my own hurt, when she looked like that.

She shook her head, tears glistening on her cheeks. "I know. I was foolish to think I was something special to him. But I did, Clark. I did."

She sank into my couch then, giving in to the tears, and at a loss for what to say, I sat beside her, took her into my arms, and held her quietly while she cried.

"You were," I whispered, when I couldn't bear the sound of her tears anymore. "You are special to him."

Lois gave me a wan smile. "Maybe, but still... I guess even if I am special to him, it isn't the way I want to be. He still kept a part of himself from me. Whatever the secret is, he feels there is something he can't share with me.

"Not like you," she said quietly, wondering. "Why couldn't he be more like you?"

I felt awful. Right down to my toes awful. How to tell her that I wasn't any better than Superman? Just that I'd apparently been better at my Clark costume? I shut my eyes, not feeling worthy of looking at her face when I had deceived her so badly.

"I love you, Clark," Lois said softly. "I know it's not in the way you want, but I do love you. So much."

I nodded my head, not able to speak. The pain, from when she'd told me she'd loved me as a friend earlier, was gone. Now I just felt awful. It didn't matter how she loved me — I didn't deserve her love of any kind. Not when it had been months since Lois was anything but herself with me, and yet I continued to be duplicitous with her.

"Can I stay here tonight?" she asked. "Please."

She must have known I wouldn't say no to her, couldn't say no when she pleaded with me like that. Still feeling unable to speak, I nodded my head. Taking a deep breath, I added, "You can have the bed," in a quiet voice.

She leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. "Thank you, Clark," she whispered before getting up and making her way to my room.

Two weeks passed. Two Lois-less weeks. I had spent every moment I wasn't needed as Superman investigating Luthor. Mainly as I felt certain that if I could get enough evidence together, I could stop the wedding. But partly as whenever I stopped, even for a moment, I was overcome with guilt for the secret I was keeping from Lois.

Who cared if she was marrying another man in a matter of days when she had shared so much of herself with me? What had I done in return to earn her love? Lie to her at every turn, tease her with promises from Superman and then rebuff her for preferring the superhero to the ordinary man? I didn't deserve her, and her marrying the man I hated more than anyone I'd ever met was no more than I deserved.

The only problem with this was that it wasn't what Lois deserved. She deserved better than Luthor. Better than me. I wasn't sure who; I just knew that if I didn't stop this wedding from happening, I would regret it for the rest of my life.

The knock at my door startled me. I was only supposed to be home briefly to change into a new suit — the old one had gotten charred at a fire I helped at earlier. Jimmy and Jack were spending the night at Perry's, and everyone had halted the investigation of Lex Luthor for the night. Well, ostensibly. I had been planning to go back out, but since Clark Kent needed more sleep than Superman did, I had said I was finished for the night as well.

I glanced through the door using my x-ray vision as I moved over to get some Clark-appropriate attire. I stopped in my tracks in shock, though, at what I saw. Lois was on my doorstep. Lois - whom I hadn't seen since the night she spent here. I had fallen into a fitful sleep just hours before dawn, and had awakened to an empty apartment. There was a note from Lois thanking me for letting her spend the night, and apologizing again for not loving me the way I wanted.

We hadn't seen each other since. Lois, presumably, was busy with starting her new job and wedding planning. I had been busy with... well, snooping into her fiance's true business dealings.

Giving myself a shake, I spun into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt and moved to the door. I wanted to stay inside, not face the guilt I felt at seeing her. At another time I may have done that, but not tonight. Not when she was standing on my doorstep, once again in the middle of the night, with tears falling down her cheeks.

"Hi," I said quietly when I opened the door.

"Can I come in?" she asked softly.

I nodded, but with her head bowed she couldn't see, and so I placed a hand gently under her elbow to guide her forward.

She moved over to my couch, taking a seat, while I closed the door and wondered what to do. My casual comfort with her was gone now, as was hers with me clearly — Lois had never before asked permission to come in. Not real permission anyway. I wasn't sure what to do with all this unease between us.

"I made a mistake," Lois said as I came over to the couch, looking at me with tear-filled eyes. "I chose wrong, and now I'm afraid... I was stupid, and I don't know if there's a good way out."

I felt my heart speed up at her words. I had no idea what she meant, but something about her tone made me afraid for her.

"What do you mean?" I asked her.

"I chose wrong," she repeated.

"For what?" I asked. She must have made a thousand choices in the past two weeks — wedding dress, cake, who to invite and who not to. None of which were monumental enough to cause crying, but then again, women got emotional about weddings, didn't they?

"Lex," she said simply. "You were right. I don't love him."

I took a deep breath. I hadn't expected that. I knew she had chosen wrongly, of course, but I hadn't expected Lois to see it. How had she... had he threatened her?

"Lois, what happened?" I asked her anxiously, suddenly worried that he had hurt her somehow.

Lois shook her head. "Nothing. It's not Lex. It's me. I've been stupid." A new onslaught of tears caused her to wipe at her cheeks hastily.

I moved to give her a hug, but she pushed me away. "No, you shouldn't... I don't deserve... Oh, Clark, how could I have made such a mess of things?"

I pulled her toward me despite her protests, running a hand soothingly through her hair. "You haven't. I'm sure we'll find a way out of this."

Lois took a deep breath, pushed herself away from me and said, "I need to call off my engagement to Lex. I should never have accepted his proposal. But while I'm still not sure I believe the things you do about him... well, I don't imagine Lex is used to being told no."

"I'll go with you," I told her, wanting — no - needing to be there. If he were to try to hurt her... I needed to be there.

"You can't," she said quietly. "He's going to ask why, and Clark... you just can't."

"I don't understand," I said, while wondering if I should offer for Superman to go with her. I wasn't sure she'd say yes, though, given how she must now feel towards him.

Lois stood up and began to pace. "Things haven't felt right for awhile," she said as she paced. "Ever since, well, since Superman told me that he had secrets from me. I don't know what made me accept Lex's proposal..."

"That's not true. Just say it, Lois," she coached herself, giving me a guilty grin at talking to herself. "I've been doing a lot of thinking and I realized that I don't love Lex. And I didn't love Superman. I mean... I was... fond of him? Maybe that's not the right word. It was a crush, I guess. A big crush, but still just a crush."

"Lois, what does Superman have to do with..."

"I think I threw myself at Superman as I thought he was safe, Clark. And Lex for the same reason."

"You thought Lex Luthor was safe?" I asked her, stunned. I knew she didn't believe my accusations and yet, to think that she thought he was "safe" - it was unfathomable.

Lois gave a nervous giggle. "Not in the way you mean. I didn't really think beyond the way I mean. I mean, he couldn't hurt me."

I raised my eyebrows, imagining the many ways he could hurt her, but Lois shook her head.

"Not really, Clark. He could probably do innumerable things to threaten me, but I mean... if he didn't love me back, it wouldn't have hurt. It wouldn't have bothered me much at all since I didn't love him."

I nodded, to show I understood. And I did, sort of, although I was still imagining the many very real ways Luthor could have hurt her.

“And Superman was the same thing, really,” she added, bringing my focus back to Lois. “It did hurt when he said no to me, but not really. It was more like my pride was hurt,” she said.

“I don’t think I’m fully understanding, Lois,” I told her softly, trying to understand, and sort of getting it, and yet, not really.

Lois took a deep breath. “I was hurt when Superman said no to me, but mainly that I was stupid enough to throw myself at him like that. I was hurt that he hadn’t shared every part of himself with me because I wanted to think he had. But I hadn’t really done that for him, and I didn’t feel anything like... well, like the pain I saw in your eyes when I told you I loved you as a friend.

“I don’t love Superman the way you love me,” she finished softly.

My mind was reeling, though - stuck on something she had said earlier. “What do you mean you hadn’t done that for him?” I asked her. “Were you hiding something from Superman?” I couldn’t believe it. There wasn’t anything she hadn’t told Superman that I knew. Was Lois really a better liar than I had given her credit for? Than I was, clearly?

Lois flushed, looking down. “Sort of. Not on purpose. I mean, I didn’t realize it myself, really, but...” She took a deep breath before sitting back down on the couch. “I guess, there have been safe guys around before, Clark, but I haven’t felt the need to throw myself at them.”

“They weren’t Superman,” I pointed out. “And you didn’t have the third richest man in the world offering you his hand in marriage to push things along.”

Lois gave a small smile. “That’s not why, though. It wasn’t really Lex’s proposal that made me feel the need to do something.”

“What was it?” I asked her, my voice nearly a whisper, although I wasn’t sure why.

“Because I am in love with someone. Someone real, who could really break my heart. I think I thought if I could get together with Superman or marry Lex, I could prevent myself from falling any further, from getting my heart broken,” she said softly.

I felt myself pale slightly. I didn’t know why. I still knew that all things considered I didn’t deserve her — I had hidden too much from her. And yet, still, knowing there was someone else out there who arose in her the feelings she arose in me... Well, it hurt. More than it had ever hurt when she fawned over Superman, so maybe I had known, too, that her feelings for him weren’t as real as she had claimed.

“Who is it?” I asked her, my voice barely audible. I wasn’t even sure I wanted to know, and yet I had to. I had to know what sort of man really had a grip on her heart.

Lois looked at me shyly, biting her lower lip in a way that made me want to grab her back into a fierce hug even as I felt my heart shattering. Without conscious thought, I brought my hand up to stroke her cheek. “Who is it, Lois?” I asked again, the sound of a cry clearly audible in my words.

Lois placed her hand against mine, pulling it away from her cheek and turning it over to inspect my palm. Then placing her palm against mine — almost holding my hand, but not quite — she took a deep breath and whispered, “You.”

There was silence in the room for a second while the Earth tilted on its axis and everything but Lois’ face seemed out of focus.

“I love *you*, Clark,” she continued, her voice slightly stronger now. “I’m sorry I hurt you before. I was just scared. Scared because I love you so much and no one can hurt me like you can.”

“You love me?” I asked in a whisper, barely daring to believe this wasn’t a dream or some sort of big misunderstanding.

She nodded at me, biting her lower lip again, but a shy smile on her face.

I felt my face break into a matching smile, only wider, far wider, and I leaned forward to touch my lips to hers.

Too soon, though, way too soon — before I even had the smallest taste of her lips — I remembered.

I moved my hand out from under hers as I stood up, walked away.

“I’m sorry,” I said softly.

“Is it... am I too late?” Lois asked me, the pain in her voice clear.

“No,” I said. “I do love you, Lois. So much. But you were right. I can hurt you. And I have already.”

“What?” Lois asked. “No, Clark. You haven’t. I understand why you haven’t been around much lately. That was my fault — for choosing Superman, for choosing Lex. But I swear to you, Clark. I know now that I chose wrong. I choose you.”

I closed my eyes, not able to meet hers when they were so clearly full of love for me. Love I didn’t deserve. Not when I was going to hurt her terribly.

“You shouldn’t,” I told her. “I’ve kept something from you. Something big.”

Lois gave a little giggle. “And I kept something from you. My love. We’re even.”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “This isn’t like that. When I tell you... you’ll never trust me again.”

“Not possible,” she said, and I could tell that she didn’t understand. She thought this was me being melodramatic. Of course she did. What could farm boy, Clark Kent, have kept from Lois Lane that she wouldn’t have found out on her own?

Reaching up, I took my glasses off, my hands trembling. “Lois, look at me,” I said, as I moved my hands up to put my hair in more of Superman’s style. But before I could, Lois pulled my hands down.

“You’re trembling,” she said, holding my hands tightly. “Clark, whatever it is, I forgive you.”

I shook my head. “Without knowing...”

She placed her hand on my cheek in a move reminiscent of my hand on hers a few moments ago. “You love me,” she said softly. “I don’t know how I managed to not see it before, but now that I do, it’s all over your face, in your touch, in everything you’ve ever done.

“If you have a secret from me, it can’t be important.”

“It is,” I told her.

She shook her head at me. “Not important enough. Not more important than this,” she leaned up on her tiptoes until her lips touched mine. I moaned, not sure if the feeling was pleasure or pain at the fact that she would never do that again once she knew.

“Lois,” I whispered, pulling away.

“You know,” she said, cutting me off, “you look different than I thought you would without your glasses. Or maybe not as different I should say. You still look familiar, just not quite like Clark.”

I groaned again, the sound clearly anguish this time.

“Actually,” she said, stepping back to look more fully in the face, “did anyone ever tell you...” Her face was scrunched up in concentration and I felt my heart speed up again as I realized that she was realizing it herself. Even without the right hairstyle, or the suit, or doing something silly like flying around the apartment.

“Oh,” she said suddenly, her face smoothing out. “Oh,” she said again in consternation. “Under the circumstances, I don’t see how I can,” she quoted me. “Of course you couldn’t,” she said, mostly to herself.

“Lois, I’m so sorry,” I said, moving towards her, but afraid to touch her.

She looked at me with tears in her eyes, and at the sight, I felt my eyes fill with tears as well. How could I have made such a mess of things?

“For what?” she asked me through her tears. “For keeping what has to be the world’s most important secret from me? Or for being stupid enough to fall in love with someone as heartless as me?”

“Lois?” I asked her, not understanding.

“I knew,” she said softly, tears falling down her cheeks, “I knew that it was cruel to ask you to send Superman to me that night. I knew it was selfish, but I did it anyway. And now... How can you stand to look at me?” she asked, anguished. “After what I said that night? How could I have said that you? How could you not be furious with me?”

I sat down beside her, not sure how she was the one feeling guilty

right now, when I was the one who had kept this huge secret from her. “Lois, what are you talking about?”

“I’d love you even if you were just an ordinary man,” she paraphrased, her voice mocking herself. “How did you not yell at me, tell me how stupid and cruel I was?”

“No, Lois,” I said moving closer to her, to wipe the tears from her cheeks. But they were coming too fast, I couldn’t wipe them all away, and I felt my heart break anew for all the pain I was causing her. “You didn’t know,” I reminded her. “I hadn’t told you.”

She ripped her face out of my hands as she stood up again. “Of course you didn’t!” she shouted at me. “You can’t go telling people you’re Superman!” She was still shouting and nearly shaking as she looked at me. “Your life as Clark would be over. Your parents would be in danger. Me, Perry, Jimmy... everyone you care about.”

“But I should have told you,” I broke in. “You deserved to know...”

“Why?” she cut me off again. “What did I do to deserve to know? Break your heart? Refuse to see what was right in front of my eyes...” she trailed off for a second, but I didn’t say anything, not sure what was going on.

“Not mud brown like Clark’s,” she whispered.

“Lois?” I asked quietly.

“An example of human evolution,” Lois whispered again. “Clark is the before. Superman is the after. The way, way after.” She finished with a fresh wave of tears. “How could you ever love me?”

I stepped up to her and tried to pull her face up to mine, but she wouldn’t move, so I found myself on my knees before her, looking up at her tear-stained face. “Because you are amazing,” I told her.

“Brilliant and strong and...” I gripped her hands in mine. “And you have the best heart I’ve ever known,” I told her, tears falling down my cheeks, too. “I’ve never known anyone like you, Lois. No one has ever...”

“Been so awful to you?” she cut in.

I smiled at her softly. “Maybe. But no one has ever been so wonderful to me, either. Lois, this isn’t your fault. It’s mine. If I hadn’t kept it a secret... I’m so sorry, Lois.”

“I don’t blame you,” she said softly, pulling her hands out of mine to wipe at the tears on my cheeks, while ignoring those that fell down hers. “You couldn’t tell me. Not when I was being so stupid and throwing myself at the superhero, dating a millionaire, and ignoring the real super man in my life. You didn’t have a choice.”

“I should have told you anyway,” I whispered.

She shook her head. “No,” she said resolutely, kneeling beside me. “You shouldn’t have. It’s a responsibility you can’t take lightly, Clark. No one can know. And maybe it’s okay for me to know now, but before... well, you can’t go telling all your close friends this secret. It has to be more secret than that. I’m glad you didn’t tell me.”

“You are?” I asked, the surprise clear in my voice.

Lois giggled a little as she nodded. “If you had, once I realized how dangerous it would be if it had gotten out, I would have worried about who else you had told. Plus... well, if you’d told me, maybe I never would have realized how special Clark Kent is. How amazing he is aside from any of Superman’s abilities.”

“You shouldn’t forgive me for this so easily,” I told her, my tears drying as I looked at her face, shining with happiness now.

She shook her head at me again. “You don’t get it. There’s nothing to forgive. Except for my actions. My stupid, thoughtless actions.”

“I love you,” I told her before she could get herself worked up again.

“I know,” she smiled at me. “It’s more than I deserve.”

“You have no idea how much you deserve,” I told her, pulling her face to mine for a proper kiss.

A moment later, Lois pulled away to look at me in shock. “Clark?” she whispered.

“Yes,” I whispered back, unable to keep the silly grin off my face as I looked into her eyes.

“We’re floating,” she giggled.

I glanced down, although I wasn’t surprised at all. “Yeah, I sort of have trouble with that when I’m happy.”

Lois giggled again. “Dating you is going to be very interesting, isn’t it?” And then she kissed me again before I had a chance to answer.

THE END