

The In-Between Moments: In Other Words

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Summary: An alternate ending of Church of Metropolis, drawing on the last scene. Lois heads home, confident that she hasn't lost Clark, in spite of his ending the night with Mayson. What happens if Clark drops by, instead of Superman?

Story Size: 2,346 words (13 kB as text)

"...in other words, hold my hand... ..in other words, darling kiss me..."

A knock sounded at her door.

Lois paused mid-spin, deciding whether or not she was going to open it.

She'd been floating on a wistful daydream since she'd gotten home from the Charity Ball. Even though Mayson had interrupted her dance with Clark tonight, Lois hadn't missed his hand holding on to her own waist as if he wanted to stay with the partner he had. His hand had molded more tightly around her hip when Mayson had approached them. Even as the blonde had physically pulled him away, his fingers had lingered until the last second, as if he didn't want to give up touching her.

Besides, he'd asked *her* to dance when the music had started.

He hadn't even glanced at Mayson.

She let her eyes close again as the feeling of his warm hand ghosted across her lower back, a sensual extension of his usual polite touch there. She gave up on whomever was at the door in favor of the daydream.

The knock came again.

"Lois?" a familiar voice drifted in from the hall.

She blinked.

Was that really Clark's voice? Or had her mind just substituted his in place of whomever was really out there because that was what she wanted to hear?

Only one way to find out.

She grinned and stepped forward, reaching for the knob.

A second later, her grin widened.

The man could wear a tuxedo, she thought, not for the first time that night.

"I just dropped in because you forgot your wrap."

He stepped across the threshold of her door and held it out to her.

"Oh!" she said, fantasy fleeing for the mundanity of retrieving a lost item. "Thank you! Here," she said, taking the shawl from his outstretched hand, "come on in."

She closed the door behind him and crossed the room to drop her shawl on the back of the couch. When she turned back, she realized that Clark had followed her all the way in. Her sudden stop and quick turn had brought them into close proximity again.

The lights in her apartment were soft and amber. This close, she could see that the lights really brought out the depth of his eyes.

"I love this song," he said.

"Do you?" she asked. The song suited him. It shouldn't surprise her. Clark Kent was a romantic at heart, she knew. Plus, it made a lot of sense that they would share a similar taste in music. "It's... one of my favorites," she said, feeling like he already knew. Feeling her cheeks heat, she heard herself giggle and wondered when Clark Kent had reduced her to this bundle of blushes.

"Mine, too," he said with a grin that she couldn't quite decipher.

The enigma threw her off a little. Feeling the need to steady herself, she rifled through her mental file on their last story for common ground. "Thank you for testifying for my uncle."

"It was the right thing to do. I was happy to help."

He'd taken a step closer.

"I'll always be there for you, Lois." Her eyes widened a little at his intensity and she watched him check himself. "You or your Uncle Mike," he amended.

Funny, she thought, a little hazily. She suddenly preferred that her Uncle Mike stay out of it.

But Clark was looking down with an abashed expression.

“Anyway, I should go.”

She moved automatically toward the door, even though her mind was protesting that this wasn't how the night was supposed to end.

He followed, still close to her side, and they stopped together at her door again. She turned back to look at him.

Her partner could *really* wear a tux.

His hand had landed lightly on her lower back again as they'd crossed her apartment together, and her skin was warm where they met. It brought her back to the moment repeating in her daydream from earlier in the night.

“Would you, uh, like to dance?”

The words were out before she'd registered saying them.

But it must have been the right thing to say because she was suddenly enveloped by the light of Clark's patented million watt smile.

“I've been waiting all night to finish that dance,” he said, moving closer still.

Their eyes locked then, and he held out his hand.

Something flickered across his gaze and she tilted her head, trying to capture it. But whatever it was, he'd stowed it away again.

She slid her palm across his, stilling as he clasped her to him.

They paused, the air growing more tangible between them, before stepping into the warbling rhythm of Dinah Washington.

She tried to quell the butterflies that had swarmed through her when he'd started to sway them.

“I always forget that you're such a good dancer,” she said to fill the almost-tense, almost-comfortable silence.

Another one of those indecipherable looks crossed his features, but it fled almost as soon as it materialized. What had he been about to say? They were off their usual script, and she was filled with a curiosity of where it might go—or was that anticipation?

“It's easier when you have the right partner,” he said.

They were in sync again, moving and thinking in tandem for the first time in nearly a week. She was even letting him lead for once.

“Everything is easier with the right partner,” she offered.

His eyes softened.

This is it, she thought. This was what she'd been missing all week as Mayson had made her ploy to dig her claws

into him. This... attention? True, it was an all-consuming attention, but it was something else, too.

Adoration, her mind whispered.

That was closer. She latched onto that.

Adoration.

She indulged in it for a moment, stepping subtly closer to him. She felt his arm tighten around her waist in response.

Was that what he'd been harboring behind the veil of frustration all day?

Was that what had flitted through his eyes just a moment ago?

She'd given him an opening tonight, asking him to dance and tacitly granting him the permission to get close to her in a way that she rarely allowed, especially at the Planet—unless of course they seemed to be mere moments from death. It wasn't exactly the physical closeness that felt so intimate, though she was reveling in that. It was the sort of amber intimacy that came with knowing someone well, knowing they knew you just as well, and choosing to indulge in the connection.

Now, she felt that connection spark between them, like a live wire that was nearly overwhelming her, holding her in place in his arms.

Between the soft, entrancing music, the soft light reflecting the adoration in his eyes, and the deep clutch of night surrounding them, she was being swept away in his arms, she realized.

Her guard was down, and he'd gently stepped beyond her wall that kept everyone out, drawing them instead into a world that only held the two of them.

The stressors of the world fell away here. Away from Mayson, away from the endless string of corrupt wrongdoers they chased down, away from the gender politics of the office, and away from the hundred other things that separated them throughout the day at the Planet, she wondered... was this what they would be like together?

She had given him an opening, and he'd chosen to adore her.

On the first day they'd met, he'd assured her that he was unlike any other man she knew.

Standing now in the embrace of his arms, she couldn't believe that he'd been right.

It turned out there were two unique men in the world, then.

Superman, the last Kryptonian.

And Clark, the pure of heart.

Lost in her thoughts and the light scent of his cologne, it was a surprise when he dipped her low.

“Clark!” she laughed out loud.

She clung to him, but felt more secure now, held close to him, than she had on her own two feet.

“Perry’s not the only one who dips suddenly.”

His voice had a wicked, teasing lilt to it.

She laughed again and caught his eyes.

He was going to kiss her.

Her breath caught.

She was suddenly aware of how close they really were, as he held her aloft against gravity, his face dipped toward hers, his arms warm around her.

She felt a wave of lightheadedness and wondered if it was the dip or just Clark’s nearness.

His eyes flicked down to her lips.

Her eyes began to flutter shut.

And then he righted them, setting her on her feet and swaying again to the rhythm they’d first established.

...*what the hell?*

Knowing that her cheeks were flushed, she buried her face against his shoulder as she purged the lovelorn look from her face. She intently marshaled her breath and heart rate back to normal.

They’d been so in sync, she’d thought, and then...

He pulled away, taking her hands in his.

Her body was assaulted by the cool night air coming in from her open window as he broke away from her.

“Thank you for the dance,” he said, looking like his attention was suddenly split.

“You’re leaving?”

The song hadn’t even ended.

“I have to go,” he said, already moving toward the door. “I really just stopped by to drop off your wrap.” He opened the door and looked back at her.

She knew she was doing a poor job of keeping the crushed look from her eyes.

His eyes caught hers and he hesitated. For one second, the wave of her misery from his abrupt abandonment seemed to crest over him, too. But then his fingers gripped her door, and she watched the decision settle over him.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said. He sounded so earnest that she almost allowed herself to believe it was a promise.

She shook the thought off. That way led to an ache in her chest that she didn’t want to examine.

He was probably headed off to meet Mayson. She’d only been an errand after the ball. He’d returned her wrap and now Mayson was getting the glass slipper.

Pure of heart, sure, but the attention span of a mongoose, she thought with rising irritation.

“Goodnight, Lois,” he said in a low voice.

She didn’t wish him the same.

The door snicked into place behind him.

She let herself linger despairingly in place.

What had gone wrong?

She toed off her heels, bending down to pick them up as she mentally recounted the night.

He’d returned her shawl. Polite conversation, laced with flirtation from them both. She’d suggested the dance, but he’d been the one to offer his hand. They’d been dancing. Close. He’d pulled her closer. She’d accepted his bid about the right partner and affirmed it. He’d dipped her. She’d laughed. He’d leaned in to kiss her—she was *sure* of it—and then he’d run.

Again.

A surge of resentment lanced her chest and she threw one heel across the room.

It made a cracking noise against the exposed brick of her wall.

It was satisfying.

She threw the other shoe, too.

The crack was nearly as loud and it was followed by a thumping clatter as the heel landed near its mate.

She exhaled sharply through her nose. What was his problem?! She’d given him every opportunity!

And he hadn’t taken it, she realized, deflating completely at the fresh, breathless stab of pain.

She’d offered, and he hadn’t accepted.

She felt a frown etch itself onto her face.

She hadn’t had Clark rejecting her on her bingo card for 1994.

There had been the attention. The in sync feeling. The unmistakable adoration.

Her mind conjured the look in his eyes that she’d indulged in, and she swayed in place as it threatened to overwhelm her.

Had he been serious back in May when he'd told her that he only wanted to be friends and partners?

Forever?

Had he really meant forever?

That conversation had given her nearly the same kind of suffocating whiplash she'd felt again tonight. One minute she could have sworn that he was telling her she was one of the few precious things in the world to him, and the next minute he'd sworn that it wasn't true.

He'd promised her he'd wanted the same thing that she wanted.

If he only knew.

"...in other words, I love you..."

Forever.

The strains of music softened and glided to a stop as the CD ended.

The room felt empty in the ensuing, engulfing silence.

Deciding she'd had enough of this day, she chose the classic Lois Lane panacea of forward movement to cure the stillness that was allowing her to feel the ache in her chest. She threw the locks on her front door. Leaving her heels where they'd landed, she stomped over to her window and pulled it shut with a sharp thud, locking it, too, for good measure.

Two unique men, she huffed in a pique, chastising herself for allowing the drift into vulnerability with someone else, even in her own mind.

She retreated to her bedroom.

It was a shame that particular song always got stuck in her head once she heard it. The music that had lifted her to cloud nine earlier was still circling her mind as she changed into her pajamas.

But it mocked her now.

Now that they'd danced to it together, she wondered if she'd ever really enjoy hearing the song again. Or would it mock her forever? That she'd been robbed of the comfort of another favorite stand-by left her with a sour feeling. This was what she got for letting her guard down. She should have learned this lesson by this point in her life—especially with the multitude of disappointing examples she'd been given. But Clark always seemed to slip under her defenses.

Today is over, she thought, in both regret and consolation.

She'd start over again tomorrow, armor intact.

She twisted the lamp switch just before pulling the blanket over her head, and the lights winked out in her apartment.

Closing her eyes against the night, she never noticed the melancholy swath of red fabric that halted at her locked window just as her lights went out.

THE END