

Justified Delusion

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Rated: G

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Summary: In this episode extension of “All Shook Up,” Clark remembers just why it is he loves Lois so much.

Disclaimer: This story takes place directly after “All Shook Up,” written by Jackson Gillis and Bryce Zabel. No copyright infringement is intended.

I mean, I love you. Like a...brother.

The words ricochet through my mind, bouncing off image after image only to pick up speed and momentum and ring louder before finding a softer recollection to temporarily dull their clattering passage. In a way, the moving, morphing words are helping me find the memories that were so briefly lost to me. In a way, they're a blessing. At least, that's what I try to tell myself. Unfortunately, I don't seem to be as skilled at convincing myself of things I don't really believe as I am at blasting space rocks apart with my bare hands.

I mean, I love you. Like a...brother.

In a way, I try to tell myself, those words are a sign that I'm getting closer to my heartfelt goal. Reawakening memories inform me that the first time Lois Lane saw me, she didn't even pay attention to me. The second time, she treated me like an indentured lackey. The third time, she threatened me with a fate worse than death should I betray her confidences. And the times after that didn't get better for quite a while. Not until a trip to Smallville, a premature goodbye, an encounter with some weird love potion, and an undercover stay in the honeymoon suite. Really, with memories such as these, it's no wonder I was talked into standing on the ledge of a balcony in front of people who believed I could fly and were perfectly willing to push me over the edge to prove it. Obviously, my entire life is weird.

I mean, I love you. Like a...brother.

Obviously, if the utterance of those words and the feel of Lois's hands on my shoulders are my single most precious memory, I'm rather pathetic. What kind of person is *happy* when the woman they love thinks of them as a brother? Amnesia or no amnesia, I'm pretty sure the answer is an obsessed, delusional kind of person. A person who can't seem to get it through his head that the woman he loves is clearly not in love with him and not in any danger of falling in love with him. Ever.

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Still, whispers the delusional part of my mind, there was quite a long pause between the first sentence and the second. And she clearly had to think a moment to realize she needed to add that second, bucket-of-cold-water sentence. But then, the saner part of me snaps back, she hadn't realized her words could be construed as anything other than platonic

affection until she saw my lovesick expression. It wasn't, I dimly had to admit, as if I had been aware enough to hide how much I wanted her to love me over the last couple days.

“Clark? Are you all right?”

It takes me a minute to realize that though they are spoken in the same honey-smooth voice, these are different words.

“Huh?” I look up from my musing to find Lois leaning over my desk and waving her hand in front of me.

“You're okay, aren't you?” she asks a bit uncertainly. “Do you still remember me?”

That, I realize, has got to be the dumbest question Lois has ever asked, and I definitely remember a ridiculous question concerning Superman's Suit, so that distinction is not made without some competition.

“Yes,” I say simply instead of exclaiming that of course I remember her, I even remembered everything I felt for her when I didn't remember anything else, including the bits about invulnerability, the power of flight, and a certain asteroid that I had to get rid of before the world was destroyed! All in all, I think I showed admirable restraint in my reply, so I reward myself with a long look into Lois's dark eyes.

“Are you sure?” She stares back at me, though her scrutiny is more about checking my mental health than indulging in a perusal of beauty. “You're not sulking because I said that about you not measuring up to Superman, are you?”

Well, no, I hadn't been, but there's nothing like rubbing it in to make sure I do.

Fortunately, I keep those words bottled up inside me. I'm beginning to recall that there's quite a bit I keep bottled up inside, most notably being the awful, crushing love that seems to have taken up permanent residence in my heart whether I want it or not. Odd. You would have thought my most pressing secret would be the one involving my other day job, but that one, at least, I'm fairly certain I'll tell her about someday. The other one doesn't have as certain a future.

“I was just remembering everything,” I tell her truthfully. That's something I remember quite clearly — trying to tell the truth as much as Supermanly possible.

“Oh, well...” Lois pauses. “Do you remember that occasionally you walk me home?”

A crazy surge of hope causes my breathing to quicken. Actually, what I recall seems to indicate that I would occasionally, to the cadence of Lois's assurances that she was perfectly fine and didn't need a babysitter, accompany her to her apartment. But all I say is, “I should probably check to see that I remember the way.”

Her bright smile is more than enough to silence that sane voice in my head and pull me to my feet. Who needs sane, anyway? I fly; compared to that, there's nothing wrong with loving a woman who thinks of me as a brother.

I feel her eyes on me as I gather up my coat and say good night to the people I know — and now remember I know. It's more attention than she usually shows me, but I'm sure it must be her way of making sure that I really am well enough to walk her home.

“Leaving?” Perry asks gruffly when he catches sight of Lois leading me up the ramp toward the elevator.

“Yeah, Chief, we’ll see you tomorrow,” Lois tosses over her shoulder, and I find myself once more caught by the sureness imbuing every facet of her being.

“Be careful.” Perry looks at me a bit more intently than usual, as if wanting me to realize he’s trusting me with Lois’s safety. “There’re an awful lot of reckless people out there celebrating our salvation.”

“We’ll be fine,” I promise him, ignoring Lois’s growl of frustration and subsequent muttering under her breath, though I can hear every word of her speech about men’s arrogance in trying to protect women. There’s a tinge of fondness in her voice, one of the reasons I don’t let her diatribe bother me.

“See ya, CK!” Jimmy calls out after me. “Bye, Lois!”

The elevator closes before I can do more than wave my response. Not that the closing of the doors allows silence to fill the elevator. Sometimes I think Lois has this deathly fear of silence, as if someone once convinced her that if there was silence for longer than thirty seconds, the world would explode. Or, more likely seeing as it’s Lois, that she would never get to hear another secret.

I don’t really listen to Lois’s flow of words; I just let it wash over me. In fact, if I could, I would dive in and let those words totally surround me. Because, you see, there’s no one else in the elevator, so I know she’s talking to *me*. Pathetic, isn’t it? At the same time that I remember I’m a beloved superhero, I also remember that my single greatest goal in life is to get one woman to look at me with something more than a colleague’s politeness or a sisterly concern.

Still, following Lois out of the elevator, across the lobby, and out into the January night, I realize that I don’t really mind. Lois is a force unto herself, and if I recognized that before a lot of other men, then that just means I’m the lucky one. Anyone who can get Lois to look at them with eyes melting with softness and bold timidity and hear her say their name in a tone that makes you think instantly of waking up every morning to that same sound...well, that person would be the luckiest man in the world. I know, you see, because I’ve seen her look at me like that and heard her speak my name like that — just not when I was Clark.

Lois doesn’t seem to be in any hurry to get to her place. Her steps are almost leisurely, though her hands are crammed into her pockets and her breath mists in front of her. I can’t help but smile when the wind coaxes the mist to wreath her for a single instant — too quick for a human eye to catch — giving her an ethereal crown.

“So, Clark,” she says abruptly, looking over at me with a neutral expression. “How did you feel about facing the end of the world?”

Ah, this is something else I love. Not that I don’t love working with her, and bouncing ideas off her and having her do the same to me (sometimes it’s good I have bullet-proof skin), and watching her light up when she has some stroke of genius that nobody else can follow yet ends in a Kerth-worthy article and another inmate in the Metropolis Prison. I love all of that, too, but I also love these moments, when it’s

just her and me. When she looks at me because she wants to, talks to me because she wants to, listens to me because she wants to — not because she’s paid to. When she slips her mask down just the slightest bit and lets me catch another glimpse of the woman she wants to be but doesn’t think she can be.

While savoring the thrill of seeing a bit more of her inner beauty, I think about my answer. When we’re together like this, I try my utmost to always be as honest as possible. Because, in that delusional part of my mind, I pretend that she’s looking for glimpses of the non-work me, just like I do with her.

“I didn’t really feel like it was the end of the world,” I reply slowly. “I was concerned more with finding my memories and reestablishing who I was. So, I guess it didn’t feel like the end because I was trying to find the beginning.”

The smile she flashes at me lights up the night sky and dispels the chill — not that I feel the cold, but you get the idea. She steps closer to me and tucks her hand through my arm with a small laugh that makes me wish I knew what I had said to make her so happy. I wish I could make her this happy all the time.

“That’s so like you, Clark,” she observes pleasantly, seemingly forgiving me for my exchange with Perry. “When everyone else sees the worst, you just see the best. I’m glad you didn’t lose that.”

My heart stops — figuratively, you understand — and I can’t help but stare down at the woman so trustingly tucked up against me. She likes something about me? Of course she does, the rational part of my mind snaps wryly. Some people actually do like their siblings, you know.

“What about you?” I ask. I’m so used to the inner arguments inside my head that they don’t faze me anymore. Even when I couldn’t remember my own name or the importance of always wearing glasses, I endured the internal dialogue concerning what I thought I felt for the woman who claimed only to be my work partner.

“Me?” Her brow furrows as she thinks, and my stomach tightens in reply. What is it about Lois that the slightest thing she does or thinks or says or is has such an effect on me? “It was...interesting.”

“That’s so like you, Lois,” I mimic her. It’s become almost second-nature to tease her in an effort to keep her from seeing just how much I hang on her every word. “Even at the end of the world, you’re thinking about a story.”

“No, that’s not what I meant.” Her voice is soft, and she avoids my eyes, though her hand tightens on my arm. “It was interesting what I learned about myself. The Daily Planet was emptied, Perry was afraid, Lex wanted...well, never mind that,” she hastily adds, perhaps feeling my muscles tense as tight as...well, steel...under her hand. “Superman had disappeared, and you...” Her voice grows very soft. “You didn’t remember me. I...I didn’t like that.”

I am certain that if Lois had said these words to me while I was still suffering from amnesia, my parents wouldn’t have had to work near as hard to convince me I can fly. If not for a stern mental command to myself, I would be floating a thousand feet in the air. Feeling unaccountably bold, I tentatively slip my arm around her

shoulders. “I did remember you, Lois. Maybe not how we met, or what stories we worked on, but I remembered that I knew you and that I l — “ I pretend to cough, as if the cold air had affected me. “ — that I like you.”

Her eyes are almost mischievous as she looks up at me. “You said Superman was the first thing you remembered.”

“He was,” I reply carefully. “I remembered just how wonderful he is compared to ordinary men.” Compared to me, I almost add, and I would have if I hadn’t now remembered how habitual it has become for me to hide so much away.

“Well,” Lois studiously looks away from me, though her hand reaches up to hold on to mine, wrapped around her shoulder, “you’re not so bad yourself, Kent.”

Sane? I mentally shrug off the concern as I match my steps to Lois’s. Sanity is overrated.

THE END