

That's Who He Is

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Description: Lois's thoughts on Clark in every facet of his life and her conclusion.

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Clark in the newsroom.

Every time I enter, he's smiling at me. Every time I glance over at him, he looks up and smiles at me. Every time I mutter about our assignments or about Ralph or about anything in general that's upsetting me, he smiles and nods and teases me into smiling or laughing. It's a new thing -- this smiling when I'm teased -- it never used to happen. People didn't tease me, or if they did, it wasn't in fun and they rarely survived it or came through unscathed. In fact, before Clark walked into the Daily Planet and my life, I would have sworn that I would hate it if anyone thought they could poke fun at me and smile at my "quirks" and laugh when I go a *little* overboard.

But then, that's Clark for you. Somehow, he seems to make the impossible become possible. And it's not like he even tries. He just smiles at you in that easygoing, compassionate, empathetic way of his. He just looks at you -- *really* looks -- and listens -- *really* listens -- to what you have to say, no matter how weird or off-the-wall or even derogatory it is. He just reaches out with an insanely gentle hand and touches your shoulder or your back or your arm ... or your cheek. And before you know it, things are different, and the world is upside down, and you're floating.

Not literally floating, of course, because Clark in the newsroom is utterly ordinary. Some might call him boring, others staid; most might even label him as the boy-next-door type. Always dependable, always there, always ready to open that door for you no matter that it's the twentieth century and you really shouldn't feel all warm and cherished and safe because of the small, caring action.

Clark is ... Clark.

I told him that once, when we were walking through the "famed" Smallville Corn Festival. I marveled at how down to earth he was, how normal he was, how friendly he was toward me even though I was nothing like anyone else I met in that town. He just laughed and said that's who he was -- Clark.

Funny how those words now come back to me.

That's who I am -- Clark.

He said it so cheerfully, so uninhibitedly, so openly. And even then, even so normal and *ordinary*, he smiled at me. And when we got back to the bullpen and he claimed the rights to name the alleged green rock, he still smiled -- well, grinned was more like it -- and said he felt super.

But then, Clark is super.

Clark at home.

I've never felt like I couldn't walk over to Clark's place, knock on the door or pick the lock, and walk right in. I've never felt like I wouldn't be welcome. Even when I was engaged to Lex and we were hardly speaking, I knew that if I walked up to Clark's door and knocked, he would open the door and invite me in and make me a cup of coffee. Because that's who Clark is. You can hurt him, you can tear him to pieces, you can dismiss him without a second thought, and he'll still go out and buy you a unique Christmas present and cancel the holiday celebration with his parents to spend it with you.

Sometimes, on one of those numerous nights when I stayed late at his place because we were watching some Mel Gibson movie or looking through reams and reams of paper trails, I would look over at Clark and wonder what it would be like to be as good a person as Clark is. I wondered how much work it would take to always -- every single time -- think automatically about the other person. To always -- without fail -- put someone else's needs above my own. To always -- no matter what the cost -- come through for him. To always -- even if it hurt -- do what he asked me to do.

How do you do it, Clark? How do you wake up every morning, get ready for work, and stride out into the world without ever once consciously putting what would make you happy first? How do you let someone walk all over you and demean you and ignore you, yet still offer to protect that person from harm even if it means an impromptu sleepover or a night out on a cold bench? How do you let someone lie to you and hide from you and steal from you, yet still apologize for breaking their trust when one of your few evasions is uncovered? How do you let someone dismiss you and make unreasonable demands concerning a wedding invitation and a job offer, yet still stand outside the chapel and hold out your arms with assurance and forgiveness?

I would look at Clark while he watched the movie or reached for another slice of pizza or made us more coffee, and I would wonder if I could ever care for just one person enough to do for him what Clark does for me.

Because he's not very good at hiding it. I had known him for less than a day when I saw him looking at me with such unguarded admiration that I couldn't help but know. I think Perry knew almost the instant Clark did, which was about two seconds after I interrupted their interview. Jimmy and the rest of the newsroom knew about a week after we'd been partnered together. I don't know when Lex figured it out, but he knew -- he wouldn't have worked so hard to keep us separate if he hadn't. Even after Clark gave me that ridiculous lie outside the burned and hollow shell of the Daily Planet, I knew. In fact, the entire city of Metropolis knew, as evidenced by Bobby Bigmouth's encouragement of our first date -- nobody knows the mood of the city better than Bobby.

But at the newsroom, Clark disguises it better with friendly partnership and professional rapport. He skims over it with excuses of camaraderie and justifications of a smooth working relationship. He pretends it's just friendship and Midwestern politeness and his own unique brand of ... charm.

At his place, though, when it's just him and me, he can't hide it so well. It's there in the way he can't stop glancing over to look at me sitting there with him. It's there in the way he checks with me before he rearranges the contents of his kitchen cabinets. It's there in the way he's always so insanely careful not to crowd me. It's there in the way he can never let me walk out the door on my own but always has to walk me to my car or my apartment. It's there in the way he says my name, as if it's a prayer or a plea. Or a dream.

But then, Clark always dreams big.

Clark in the air.

Men don't fly. That's just a simple fact of life. You don't step outside your apartment building or your house and look up to the sky to count how many people decided to fly to work today. You don't carry an umbrella just to keep from getting hit by loose change falling from pockets. That's just not the way the world works. Men don't fly; the world's not flat; Bobby Bigmouth is eating -- facts of life.

Until he flew inside a space-shuttle and ate a bomb. Until he looked at me and smiled. Until he flew out the door and lifted tons and tons of metal and plastic and people straight up into the air. Until his cape fluttering through the air became the symbol that impossible dreams come true and truth and justice can prevail.

He called himself a friend and promised he'd be around. Other people -- me, namely -- gave him a different name, a name he never would have chosen for himself. Who knows what that symbol splattered across the front of his chest really means, but now it's synonymous with the name I gave him -- Superman.

He flies in, exhibits extraordinary powers and abilities, saves the day, and disappears again until the next cry for help.

He's unbelievable, really. Nothing on Earth can hurt him -- and I mean nothing, not bullets, not missiles, not nuclear bombs, nada -- but that doesn't mean that what he does every day doesn't take courage. It does, believe me. I've seen him when he's afraid. I've seen him when he arrives at the scene of a large fire and goes in only to come out carrying limp forms that are soon covered with sheets. I've seen him lying on the floor, trying not to show how much the bullet wound in his shoulder hurts, encouraging me to cut open his invulnerable flesh and remove the poison. I've seen him blind and helpless and struggling to retain his inner courage even when the future ahead looks, literally, dark. I've seen him break through a wall and instantly look for me with terror in his eyes because the air was running out impossibly fast.

Doing what he does one day, that doesn't take courage. Getting up and doing it the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that -- that takes unbelievable courage. Voluntarily taking the weight of the world on his shoulders and making himself responsible for every death and crime and natural disaster and criminal plot in the world -- that takes superhuman courage. Willingly turning himself into my bodyguard and protector -- there's not even a word for that kind of courage.

He's more than just strength and courage, though; he's also integrity. When he says something, he means it. When he promises something, it's a done deal. When he nods solemnly, you don't have to worry anymore. He's a super-powerful, self-proclaimed alien from another world -- do you have any idea how many horror movies there are concerning aliens? Yet the world trusts him. The world knows he won't lie to them. The world knows he's there to help and protect. *He* did that. *He* achieved that. With anyone else, people would run screaming the moment they caught a glimpse of his trademark colors. Anyone else, and they'd probably need to.

But then, Clark never lets you down.

Clark with me.

I don't think I ever really knew who Clark was. And it wasn't his fault. I'd like to blame him. I'd like to yell and scream and throw things at him and rant and rave and cast blame ... but I can't.

From the moment I breezed into Perry's office and cast a cursory glance to the stranger who stood at my entrance, I never once looked at him.

Oh, I had a variety of reasons that all made sense at the time.

I was too focused on my investigation.

I was infuriated that he and Jimmy were all I had to work with.

I was too caught up in my own problems with the past.

I was afraid that he would use what I had confessed to him against me.

I was threatened by being partnered with him.

I was enamored with a certain superhero and blinded by a certain billionaire.

I was swallowed up in self-doubts and recriminations.

I was convinced that I was better off alone, that I didn't need anyone.

The first word in every one of those sentences is probably the key. Clark looked at everything and saw me. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that so did I.

Clark was there when I didn't want him to be, there when I needed him, there when I was ignoring him, there when I looked for him. He was there so often that I took it for granted that he'd always be there. And if he was always there, there was no reason for me to look too closely because there'd always be time later if the inclination arose.

And then a certain blond assistant DA entered the picture, and everything I thought I knew went up in smoke -- green smoke.

For the first time, I realized I could lose Clark.

It doesn't seem like it should have been a monumental realization, but it was. Even when I threw away his declaration of love and propositioned a superhero and accepted the ring of a man he had told me was a criminal, he was there for me. Even when he was shot right in front of me and watched his own coveted life destroyed by three bullets, he came back and was there for me. And then, suddenly, with the presence of a ... moderately ... pretty woman who looked and really *saw* him, I realized that he wasn't always going to be there.

So I started looking, too. I started seeing everything there was about Clark.

I watched him when he was at work.

I watched him when he was at home.

I watched him when he was between home and work.

And gradually, little bit by little bit, I began to really see the man who had made himself my perfect partner and friend for the past two years. I saw enough to say yes to a first date. I saw enough to realize chocolate was oh so much better than rocky road. I saw enough to keep trying and grow up enough to be there for him even when I couldn't understand why he was always running off on me because in that moment I wanted to be as good a friend to him as he was to me. I saw enough so that when he trembled in my arms and leaned his forehead against mine with terror in his eyes, I risked my life to save his parents.

And I saw enough so that now, wracked with chills after my encounter with superbreath, I still get up and cross my apartment and answer the door to Clark's knock.

His silvery-brown eyes are intent on me as soon as the door is open, yet I know that he didn't use x-ray vision to peek. His hands are gentle and tremble slightly when I take them, and I know that he would never tighten his grip to hurt me. His voice when he says my name is hoarse and worried, and I know that I never want him to say anyone else's name the way he says mine.

Do I wish he had told me that he was more than I saw when I looked at him? Yes, I do. Does it hurt that I had to find out myself seconds before I was put into a bizarre form of cryostasis? Yes, it does. But in a way, I'm glad. I know Clark was going to tell me ... because that's the kind of man he is. I know he would be hurt if he had told me and I had lashed out at him with shock and anger and hurt -- as I probably would have done -- because that's the kind of person I am. This way, I still trust him, and he doesn't have to remember any of the horrible things I probably would have shouted at him. This way, I had time to think and process and remember everything that Clark has done for me. This way, I had time to realize that Clark never hid the important things from me.

When I'm there, he smiles at me. The only thing that changes is whether or not there's a pair of glasses covering those soft, tender eyes.

When I'm around, his eyes shine and his being is imbued with hope and incurable optimism and impossible patience. The only thing that changes is whether he's wearing a business suit and colorful tie or red, blue, and yellow spandex with a cape.

When I'm around, he's always ready to stand between me and harm, always ready to throw himself in the path of danger before it can reach me. The only thing that changes is whether he does it through a hug and spoken encouragement or impervious skin and incredible powers.

Clark steps timidly into my apartment, and I step easily into his arms.

I might not have seen the Suit under the clothes, but I saw the man under them both. And no matter that I knew him by two separate names, I know two things that are so much more important.

He loves me.

And I love him.

Because the truth is, Clark was always ... Clark.

THE END