

# Because I Secretly Looked for Your Order

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Rated: PG

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Story Summary: Lois holds grudges and Clark makes excuses, two indisputable facts. But when the two collide, will they find their way through to the other side? A story spawned from QueenoftheCapes' title generator.

Story Size: 4,036 words (21Kb as text)

**Author's Note:** I was looking for a small distraction from my other WIPs, so I hit up QueenoftheCapes' title generator (<https://tinyurl.com/3fshnzju>) and was struck by this title. I have to thank lovetvfan and AnnaBtG for their BRing, cheerleading, and support! I have to especially thank Anna for her expert eye with the present tense... a form I am, as an editor and English major, embarrassingly unfamiliar with, and I'd never really planned on writing in, but apparently the muse is in charge, not me. And while I pouted mightily (okay, not that badly) at a challenge about a certain characterization point, I admit the story is 100% better for her having questioned it. And thank you to KathyB, who is my official (she doesn't know it's official) summary writer!

Thanks to my GE, GooBoo, for a quick once over for the archive!

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Maybe you think I don't notice, that I don't catalog these excuses of yours. Okay, so I don't catalog them or even write them down. I do remember them, though. For days at a stretch, especially the really bad ones, so that I can be mad at you and glare at the back of your head in hopes that you'll feel my eyes boring through your thick skull.

I hold grudges, Clark. You should know this already. Do you take that into account when you're planning your escape from me and spinning up your next lie? Do you realize the wrath you're risking?

Do you realize that it's impossible to hold a grudge against you?

I'm really good at keeping grudges. Like, really good. But against you? For some infuriating reason, I can't. No matter how many times you've lied to me. I hate liars. And it just doesn't make sense to me. You don't make sense to me.

Actually, that's not true. Every part of you makes sense to me... except for the part where you run away from me when I'm trying to let you in.

Can you tell me why? *Will* you tell me why?

It hurts, Clark. It hurts. It makes me feel like you don't trust me. But I do trust you. Of course I trust you. And I respect you more than anyone I've ever met. I've never opened up to anyone so much in my whole life, and it hurts

when I feel like that trust isn't returned.

And it hurts even more because...

I think I'm in love with you.

I'm not sure where it came from or when it snuck up on me, because it definitely snuck up on me.

I definitely wasn't in love with you when we went to Smallville and your parents both teased and fawned over me even after I insulted them. And when you almost died at the hands of that delusional man, Jason Trask.

I definitely hadn't become attached to you or addicted to your presence when you threatened to leave Metropolis along with Superman during the heatwave.

I definitely wasn't attracted to you when we were sprayed with that pheromone perfume. Not remotely attracted. Only... infinitesimally. And definitely not, because you didn't seem to be attracted in return.

I definitely wasn't aroused and confused after that kiss in the honeymoon suite. That was just for cover. Nothing significant about that.

When the world was ending... I definitely didn't regret hiding my too big and too scary feelings from you. Because, in the end, the world didn't end.

And when... my world was ending, it definitely didn't hurt me that you didn't show up to the wedding I didn't want to have. I definitely didn't think about you before the ceremony or say your name with mine like they belonged together.

And I definitely didn't think of you and only you as I was walking down the aisle toward another man. An apparently obviously evil man, obvious to everyone in my social circle but me.

I could go on. And on. Because we've known each other for a year and a half now. If I'd loved you at all in that time, I would have known.

And it wouldn't have devastated, crushed, and damn near killed me when you died last week.

Nope. Because being in love with you definitely snuck up on me.

In fact, it hit me like... the full force of the bullets that hit your chest. Remember? That night you died?

I'll never forget.

But I hope to God the memory fades. There's no future for us if it doesn't.

That excuse was the worst one.

Because it was so... necessary. And I hate that I caused you to do it. And I hate you had to die in front of me.

And I hate that you didn't trust me enough to come to me afterwards.

It hurts, Clark. It hurts.

Maybe you couldn't figure it out (you clearly needed my help). Maybe you didn't trust me enough (you clearly didn't). Or maybe...

You just wanted me to pretend it didn't happen. I mean, that's almost what it seems like when you can't come to me and tell me what really happened. When you fall asleep when I'm trying to tell you I love you. When you get out of my car and walk away like I didn't just get you back.

All that, and I still can't hold a grudge. I can be mad, though. Hurt, too. And I'm both of those. Very, very hurt.

And it hurts even more because...

I know I'm in love with you.

Last week you died.

I watched you get shot. I watched them carry your lifeless body away.

I didn't know. I didn't know then that it wasn't real, that you were still alive. I still see it when I close my eyes — I see you, getting shot and dying before my eyes. I try to erase it just like you did, but I can't. Even when I know the truth.

So, I was hurt, you see. Because last week you died. And this week you're alive.

And I was trying to be grateful. Trying to rewind and erase the horrific images from my mind. Trying to be grateful that — despite watching you die all over again every time I closed my eyes — I got to see you alive and well every time I opened them again.

But last week you died. And this week you're alive.

You're alive and you're still lying to me.

Both of you.

The last honest man and the man who stands for truth. What a lie.

Maybe I should have known you were one and the same. I should have figured it out sooner.

It hurts, Clark. It hurts.

Because you're lying to me again. Still. But this week, it feels like more than simple excuses. Earlier this week, you had to return a video and water your neighbor's plants. Do you do those things too? While you're out? Does that make it less of a lie to you?

Today you're being cagey. Both of you. You don't want to reveal how your powers were transferred to a human. You know how it happened. I can see it in your eyes. Both of you. Because of course you'd know.

I pretend I want to print it. Maybe I do. But mostly I want you not to lie to me. Either of you.

The last honest man and the man who stands for truth. What a lie.

I let you make your lame excuse — this one about your Cheese of the Month — and I watched you run off, frustrated that you thought your imaginary cheese was more important than this story.

And then... you appeared behind me in no time flat. Should I have known right then? Should I have guessed?

Maybe I did. I certainly had my suspicions. Even though no one in their right mind could possibly guess that their partner moonlights in tights.

You lied to me again. And then you flew off.

And then you were magically back. Kind of like you magically came back from the dead. You shrugged lamely and lied to me about your cheese, that it wasn't here yet.

Your worst lie yet.

At least... as far as I knew. I didn't know yet that there were far worse lies.

Horrific lies. Devastating lies.

But for now, the cheese is your worst lie. And it sticks in my craw like no other. So that's why I'm here. Because I secretly looked for your order. I was going to catch you in your worst lie yet and make you tell me the truth.

But... there it is. Just sitting there staring at me, staring up at me from your kitchen table with the rest of your mail,

asking me why you abandoned it instead of putting it in the fridge.

How should I know?

You abandon me all the time, and I never know why.

Well, I used to never know why.

Still, I stare at the not-so-imaginary cheese, wondering why I hate it far more than it deserves. Of all the excuses, this one was real?

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I sense she's there even before my boots touch the floor, but I can't stop myself from landing and going inside like I always do. Maybe it's muscle memory or maybe it's some otherworldly force telling me it's time.

It's far past time.

And it might even be too late. I know it's too late.

It's a whole hell of a lot easier to know it now, looking back, that it's too late. That I should have told her. She deserved to know. She still deserves to know. But it's too late.

She's staring at me from my kitchen table, her expression unreadable. But she doesn't look altogether surprised to see me in my apartment wearing a cape.

I need to tread carefully, though. I feel like the next few minutes are going to determine the course of the rest of my life, and I am terrified. The next words, even. The importance and weight of the choice hangs heavy in my chest and my throat as I think of what I can possibly say.

"Hi," I say, hesitatingly, half waving a hand lamely in the air. Why did I wave? Why can't I breathe?

"I opened your cheese," she says quietly, almost apologetically.

"What is it this month?" I can't even... am I being a coward? Or does she want to talk about cheese? I don't want to talk about cheese.

"Manchego. From Spain. La Mancha, same as Don Quixote. Even has his picture on the wrapper. Tilting at a windmill..."

I nod as I take a few steps closer, absolutely unsure of what to say, what to do. Does she know? Is she talking to Superman or Clark?

"Are you hungry?" I move toward the kitchen almost automatically. I don't know what to do, but I can make her food. "I can make you a quesadilla, some queso flamea —"

"No." Her voice is quiet, but the word cuts me and halts my movement. Then her voice softens a little, though her tone is still dulled and almost sad. "I-I'm not hungry. Not right now."

I nod again, afraid to move. Afraid to speak. Should I sit down? I gesture at the chair across the table from her and raise my eyebrows in question.

She nods, so I take a seat, and I notice that her eyes are red and puffy. And it twists my heart painfully that she's been here in my kitchen crying while I wasn't here.

I'm still unsure of everything. Why she's here. What she knows. What I should do. Why she was crying.

She's been doing that a lot this past week, and I hate myself for it. It's my fault, but I would do it a million times over. Always. I will always choose to save her. But I didn't realize... I didn't have time to realize that she would be so upset.

Of course she would be. And I hate myself even more for not realizing that sooner, for being so panicked and consumed about losing my own life that I didn't even consider how she was feeling. I was worried about normalcy and she was grieving, dying inside.

I hold my hands on the top of the table, trying not to fiddle with the mail or trace the wood grain with my fingers. All I want to do is reach out and take her hands. No, what I want to do is hold her in my arms and tell her everything is going to be all right. But I don't even know if that's the truth or if my touch is welcome.

She hasn't seen Superman since...

Fresh tears are rolling down her cheeks now, and it hurts me to see them. It hurts more knowing they're because of me.

"I wondered..." she starts off, her voice still soft but trembling. "I wondered why you weren't there. Was mad at you, even."

"I'm sorry," I say, hanging my head. And it's not enough. It'll never be enough. My heart hangs in my throat still, waiting for her to say it... to confirm that she knows I'm the worst sort of friend imaginable. I can feel my own tears threatening, pricking at the back of my eyes.

"I didn't understand why... why you'd always been there to save me, but you couldn't be there to save..." She trails off, her eyes focusing intently on the box the cheese had come in.

"I'm sorry." It's not enough. And I tell myself I should say all the things... tell her the truth before she has to tell me, but I'm afraid. Terrified. I can't even look her in the eye. I'm a coward.

"But it's because you were there to save me."

"Always," I choke out, unable to keep the anguish from my voice. "I would die if I lost you..." And I wish I could take the words back the second they're out of my mouth.

She chokes on a sob. "So you know, then?" she says, pausing to take a shuddering breath. "You know what you did to me?"

"I..." There are no words. No words to make it right. And I can't even rejoice in the fact that maybe she loves me too like I love her, because if she does... My breath falters again. If she does, then I've hurt her even more than I can fathom. "I'm so sorry, Lois. I'm so sorry."

The pain and shame overwhelms me, and I can't stop the tears from falling, selfishly making her witness my pain when I'm the cause of hers. It isn't right, and I do my best to ignore them. She doesn't, though. And I wish I could go hold her, soothe away her pain, but I can't be certain that she would even welcome my touch.

It's too much. It's been too much.

Having to save her like that. Then leave her not knowing if she'd be okay. And then... realizing that in one lousy second I'd lost my partner... and my best friend... and... and my whole life. Everything normal and ordinary that I'd worked so hard all my life to be. Everything was gone. Had been gone.

And I've been trying not to think of it ever since. It doesn't matter, shouldn't matter now that I'm "back". There was nothing to grieve. We just... have to reset. Go back to normal. Everything is as it was before.

And yet somehow, everything is different.

Every day after, she was there. Looking at me like she would be lost without me. Haunted eyes and halting breaths. Always looking over at me as if she was afraid I would disappear.

Almost how she's looking at me now, watching me cry, her not-so-heroic and terrible friend. How could I let her think I was dead?

My breath catches again as I watch her stand and come to wrap her arms around me. It's not right. She shouldn't be comforting me. I'm the one that hurt her. I sit up and open my arms and she's in my lap instantly, wrapping her arms around me tighter and I do the same. I need to make sure she's still here, that I haven't lost everything. That I haven't lost her.

"I'm so sorry, Lois." It sounds so weak. Not enough. Never enough.

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I hold him, cling to him tightly, wrapping my arms around him to make sure he's still here, that I haven't lost everything. That I haven't lost him.

The feelings, images replaying in my mind are all too vivid and real, and the only way I can ever reassure myself lately that I haven't lost him is to hold him. To feel him solid and warm in my embrace.

He tells me he's sorry, and it makes me sob harder, hearing that voice, the voice I thought I'd never hear again.

He's stroking my hair and rubbing my back, rocking me as he holds me in his lap. How could he think I wouldn't need him?

"I'm sorry," he says again. "I had to."

"I know," I whisper into the S, the silken-threaded embroidery that's somehow scratchy against my cheek.

"I'm here. I'm here. I'll never leave you again." His voice is a hoarse whisper against my hair. "I should have told you." He holds me tight.

I nod my head against his chest, and I don't want to say it but I need to. "I hate you," I say in a small voice, both praying that it's too soft for him to hear but knowing he'll hear it anyway. It's the faintest whisper but it feels like I'm screaming.

He takes in a sharp breath, and I wonder at how this invulnerable man can be so vulnerable when it comes to me. How three small words can wound him so, like a bullet to the chest. And I wish I could take it back.

I hate him and I love him. He hurts me and he heals me. He's such a contradiction, but I can't think beyond the basics — that I am hurting and I need him to hold me.

"I know. I'm so sorry, Lois. So sorry," he rasps out between shaky breaths, and I hold him tightly once more.

And it doesn't make sense. None of it makes sense. He's the one who hurt me. I don't even know... can't even begin to know how to process this.

"I don't know what to do, Clark. What do I do? What do we do?" I'm whispering again because I'm not sure if my voice even works properly.

"I don't know. I'm so sorr —"

I smack him hard right on the S, somehow not hurting myself, my hand against a steel chest, and I know he must be protecting me even now, especially now. But it doesn't

protect me from the anger. "Stop saying sorry!" I yell, sitting up straighter now to look at him. "I know you're sorry. Make it better, Clark. Fix it. Don't be sorry. Fix it."

"How?" he asks in a broken whisper. "Tell me how to fix it. I'll do anything."

There's no easy way out of here. I stare at him, his earnest and desperate face, so oddly streaked with dried tears. He's Clark but he's not. Superman but not. And I can't seem to quite reconcile the two of them together into one.

"I want to talk to Clark," I say as I sniffle and swipe at the wetness remaining on my face.

"I'm right here," he says softly, Clark's voice out of Superman's lips.

"I mean... can you change, please?" I gesture at his suit, the bold red and blue too loud to bear right now.

Confusion flits over his features briefly, as if he'd forgotten he was Superman. But then he seems to remember, and I stand to let him up.

I stand here awkwardly, trying to decide what to do or where to sit, but he's back before I can even weigh my options. He's a contradiction again. Clark hair with no glasses, and Clark's sweatpants and t-shirt... but Superman's speed. I wish he'd taken longer so I could have had a moment to think. But I know that wouldn't have helped. I had time to think before he flew through the window.

He gestures toward the couch, and I head that direction, grateful for the easy option. I sit on one end of the couch, my back to the arm rest, and he hesitates a moment before sitting in the middle, facing me.

I stare at him, unsure of what to say. Neither of us knows what to say. It was easier when we were just holding each other, and I long to be back in his arms. I can't figure out how to get back there, though. My heart is in my throat, terrified that there isn't a way back.

He sits quietly, clearly giving me space to think. I'm grateful for it but also resentful. I want him to fix it. Make it better. And I don't think there's a way for him to do that.

A strong feeling floods my chest, something not quite anger and mixed with... I don't even know. Confusion. Love. Grief. And I know it's up to me. It's wildly unfair, but it's up to me.

I have to be the one. Let him be sorry. Say it's okay to move forward, to not forget it happened but move past it. Accept him as he is, for who he is, all of him. Even though he lied. Even though he made a horrifically painful mistake. Even though he was the one who hurt me.

I look up and find his eyes, his beautiful, soulful and worried eyes. And the feeling surges, overflowing and spilling out of me, coalescing so quickly and profoundly and easily into love. Love tinged with sadness and confusion and grief, but so powerful it's hard to breathe.

I manage only a whisper. "No more lies."

He shakes his head vehemently. "No more."

"And no more excuses."

"I promise."

"Not even when they're real." I nod back in the direction of the cheese.

He chuckles and his laughter never sounded so good.

"I'll have it mailed to work from now on." He smiles at me briefly.

And then there's a slightly awkward silence between us, and I can only sit there. I feel suspended in place as the feelings start to come over me like waves in the ocean, surging, crashing, and receding only to come again. I watch him, his eyes regarding me carefully, and I can tell that he's feeling something similar if not the same.

I wonder again how I can get back to his arms. "Clark..." I say, his name a plea on its own, but he's holding me before I can even ask the question.

I sag into him as his arms come around me, warm and sure and definitely Clark. I cling to the cotton of his t-shirt and rest my cheek against its softness, his heartbeat strong and reassuring in his chest.

Part of me wants to never move from this spot, so safe and comforting. But the growling of my stomach ends the moment too soon. His chuckle rumbles in his chest and against my cheek, and I can't help but laugh too, a pleasant release after the roaring tide of emotions.

I raise my head up to look at him. "You said something about quesadillas?"

THE END

End Notes: For decades, I avoided the fate that apparently befalls all FoLC fanfic authors: I was hit with my first TOGOM story. Quite unexpectedly. I just meant to write about the Cheese of the Month... but turns out that excuse was used just the week after TOGOM, so I managed to run headlong into Angstville. And here we are.