

Pheromone, My Love

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Rating: PG

Submitted: January 2022

Summary: Clark may not have been affected by Miranda's spray, but that doesn't stop him from letting his emotions get the best of him.

Story Size: 6,937 words (39Kb as text)

Author's Note: Well, this story just flew in and landed in my head at 3:30 a.m. one day, and then it practically wrote itself in a manic frenzy over the course of a few days. I was lucky to have a trio of cheerleaders for this one; they begged for more at every turn! Thank you to lovetvfan, AnnieM, and KathyB for the help and enabling... I mean encouragement!!

And extra thanks goes to lovetvfan for giving me the idea helping me with a pivotal part of this story and for giving me way too many fun plot bunnies lately but also being willing and eager about BRing (and/or co-writing) every single one of them!

I don't own the characters or any of the recognizable dialogue from the show. And as is the case with many of the stories I write, this story has some borrowed lyrics. The fantastic song Roller Coaster by Bon Jovi influenced me as I wrote parts of this.

He shouldn't have done it.

He'd effectively shot himself in the foot. The longest, most passionate kiss he'd ever shared with Lois... that feeling... oh, God, that feeling of her total abandon, her lips crushed against his as he'd turned and dipped her — as if they'd been dancing — so he could have better access to her mouth. The world melting away and her melting into his embrace. All their kisses before paled in comparison to this one, and if he'd thought he'd been attracted to her before, his body *yearning* to merely touch her, simply be near her... he'd been wrong. Because now? Now, it felt as if he'd awakened a part of his heart and soul he'd only dreamed of finding. And now he couldn't turn it off.

He'd said it. He'd gone and said it, too. On top of the kiss, before the kiss. He'd told her that he loved her.

And now? As he gazed at her across the conference room table, watching her stare, moony-eyed off into space, no doubt daydreaming about their incredible kiss, he knew for certain he shouldn't have done it.

She took a deep breath and sighed, and then she turned to him. "Clark, do you think Superman will call me or drop by later?" She had that same dreamy, lovestruck look in her eyes, the one she'd had right before she'd launched herself at him right there on the tarmac, taking advantage of him right back.

He swallowed as his heart sank, and he played dumb.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, c'mon, Clark. Surely you heard that Superman kissed me earlier." She smiled, clearly recalling the kiss again. He couldn't blame her. It was a phenomenal kiss. He could only blame himself. "Wow, what a kiss it was." She sighed dreamily again, and he wanted to crawl in a hole.

"I heard *you* kissed *him*," he said, unable to stop himself from correcting her, though he disguised it with a teasing tone.

She waved her hand in the air as if to dismiss the fact that she'd effectively taken advantage of him. Exploited the situation. Cashed in on the opportunity.

Made the most of an opportunity... he hadn't thought he would be getting any time soon.

And he wouldn't now. Be getting another opportunity to kiss her again any time soon. Unless he wanted to pursue her as Superman. He let out a sigh, one of resignation of a fate of his own making.

She gave him a weird look as if he'd gone off the deep end. "What's wrong with you tonight?"

He bit back a second sigh. "Nothing, Lois. Nothing at all." He hoped he sounded bored and carefree.

She stood up and went over to grab herself a cup of coffee. They were staying late to catch up on work and sift through new leads that might have been missed while the newsroom had been... otherwise occupied. As she was stirring in the creamer and sweetener, she mused aloud, "It's just incredible. Love without boundaries, without insecurities or hang-ups or reasoning. You could be swept off your feet by just about... anybody." She looked at him... somewhat pointedly.

So she was still feeling uncomfortable with her attraction to him. Well... now, so was he. "Your problem, Lois, is that you can't admit your true feelings."

She sat down with her coffee. "Hmph. That's ridiculous."

He just raised an eyebrow at her. It had been 48 hours. A relentless two days.

She scoffed, but a slight blush rose in her cheeks. "Okay, maybe somewhere, buried incredibly deep inside me, is some eensy, weensy, microcosmic, although highly unlikely, possibility that I could feel some sort of unmotivated and completely unrealistic attraction to you."

"As long as you're being honest with yourself, Lois," he teased.

She rolled her eyes at him and picked up the file folder she'd been sorting through, focusing on the papers within. He tuned into her heartbeat because he couldn't help himself. It was a little fast, but slowing to normal.

Clark picked up his pencil and pretended to jot notes on the folder full of research and press releases in front of him. He wasn't even sure if the folder was his, but it might as well be now since everyone else had gone home already. He willed himself not to think of the kiss and not to think of the past few days.

If anyone should be honest with themselves it was him. There was a reason Lois was and had been attracted to him. A big, red and blue moronic reason.

Pheromones didn't see clothing. And Clark hadn't realized it until just now. He'd been so... distracted.

Physically distracted and mentally distracted, his body warring with his mind, both warring with his conscience for two days.

He'd foolishly let himself be wooed by her torturous distractions, thinking that, because she'd been relentlessly pursuing Clark, it was Clark she was after.

As if she'd been reading his mind, she suddenly said, "Like it matters."

But she couldn't have known what he'd been thinking. "Like what matters?"

"That I'm attracted to you," she said matter-of-factly, like all of a sudden it was just okay for her to admit.

Wait, what? All of a sudden, she was just okay admitting it? What had changed — oh.

"You're not attracted to me anyway." She shrugged. Like she didn't care. At all.

Yesterday, she had cared A LOT. Insisted on his attraction to her. And he'd teased her that he wasn't. Oh, God, why had he done that?

He threw a Hail Mary pass. "Oh?" he challenged, trying to will as much charming Clark bantering tone into his voice. "That's not what you said yesterday. In fact, you were pretty sure of yourself." He tossed in a Clark grin that he desperately hoped made it look like he was sure of himself. Because he was not. At. All.

She scrunched her nose at him and gave him a smirk. "You're an attractive man, Clark. And you know it. It's fine."

"What's fine?" He was lost. So very, very lost. Usually, he could keep up with Lois logic, but this seemed... like something else entirely.

She scoffed again and rolled her eyes. "Are you sure you're okay? You're a bit slow today. I meant, it's fine if you don't like me like that."

No. No, no, no... that wasn't it at all. That was definitely not fine. How had he managed to screw this up so royally?

But what did he say now? Take it back. Say he lied and that he *was* attracted to her. That he *did* like her like that. His mind was screaming options at him, but he couldn't get his mouth to move to say them.

How would he explain the perfume and his lack of reaction? There would be no convincing her because...

She continued as if he wasn't having a crisis inside his head. "It's fine because I know now that Superman loves me. He's attracted to me. And now I just have to get him to see that we could be a good thing, me and him."

Oh. There it was. Again. Hoisted by his own... spandex.

And now she was just going to... strategize with him, her best friend, about how to go out with... him... is this what headaches felt like?

And she just kept talking. He didn't even have to speak in this dialogue, it seemed. "You're friends with him, right? I mean, you always seem to know how to get a hold of him. Can I have his number?"

"What?" he asked, somewhat panicked. Even if he *wanted* to play best friend matchmaker... he... well, he couldn't exactly give her his own number.

Lois ducked her head and blushed again, and he wished it wasn't so adorably attractive when she did that.

Especially since she was doing it because she was flustered about the idea of talking to Superman about a romantic relationship.

She must have taken his question and subsequent silence as some sort of denial of her request because her demeanor shifted, closed off just a bit. "It's fine, Clark. He probably asked you not to share it, and it's not my place to ask for it... besides, he's probably off resting and letting the pheromones — well, he's probably busy."

And with that last line, she'd gone from slightly guarded to sad, so quickly that it made his own heart clench a little just to watch it. He wondered what had done that, the thought she'd left unspoken. "It's not that, Lois! He just... doesn't have a phone."

She perked a little at that, and like an idiot, he doubled down on it.

"I'm sure he'll find you and talk to you soon." Because he's a damn lovesick fool.

That made her smile and his heart did a flip. A fool indeed. Why was he doing this to himself?

He smiled back at her and watched helplessly as she went back to her own notes, biting her lip as she concentrated on the papers in front of her.

What exactly was Superman going to say to Lois? That he'd lied? Superman didn't lie.

It had been Clark Kent out on that tarmac, masquerading as the symbol for truth and justice. Clark Kent, who had spent 48 hours painfully aroused and wildly out of his mind. Clark Kent, who had... well, it hadn't been — wasn't — exactly a lie, was it? He *did* love her. And that kiss? That had been no lie, indeed.

It was just that Lois hadn't known she was kissing Clark.

And that brought him back to square one. Or was it zero when you had put yourself even further behind than where you'd started? He scratched at the paper with his pencil, drawing a square and writing a big, fat zero inside. He tapped the pencil nervously against the page.

It was really best if he put her off her infatuation with Superman, right? He ought to have stopped that in its tracks the moment it'd started, if he was honest with himself. But apparently, he was having a lot of trouble being honest with himself today.

It had just been so... intoxicating to have someone so attractive look at him like that. He'd had plenty of women — even some men — look at him like that, but none he'd been so utterly smitten with. None who were so brilliant and challenging and talented. None who he could imagine spending the rest of his life with.

So, yeah. It had been irresistible to let her have her superficial lust and attraction, her infatuation and hero worship. And then it had spiraled out of control already in just the few short months he'd been Superman.

Even *if* he decided to just... roll with it. Showed up in his cape at Lois' apartment and said, "Yep, I love you!" Then what? Superman couldn't go on dates. Superman couldn't have a relationship.

Superman wasn't... real. Not exactly. He was just a costume so he could use his powers. Clark was who he was, who he had been all his life.

“How would you even go on a date?” he asked, and suddenly he wasn’t entirely sure if he was legitimately asking for ideas or trying to discourage her.

She looked up at him. He’d startled her after such a long silence. Well, at least one of them had been working.

“What?” she asked, clearly having been actually focused on work enough that she either hadn’t heard him or remembered what subject they’d been on.

“Superman. How would you even go on a date?”

“I don’t know.” She seemed a little flustered or perturbed. Or both. “What’s that supposed to mean?” Defensive. She was definitely feeling defensive.

He needed to be a little more delicate. “It’s just... wouldn’t it be a little, I don’t know, conspicuous to go to dinner and a movie together?”

“Are you trying to mock me now, Clark?” Her voice was indignant.

“No, no. Sorry,” he said, giving her an apologetic look. “I just don’t want to get your hopes up, see you get hurt.”

“What do you mean? If there’s something you — did he tell you something?” she asked, dropping her pencil and sitting up a little straighter and adjusting her shirt.

Did he tell himself something? About her? All the time. He talked to himself — himself? — all the time. He wondered idly if he should just save his mother the trouble of tracking down and acquiring the Kryptonite.

“No, not exactly. I just... ”

“You just what, Clark?” she asked impatiently, though he could see some insecurity, uncertainty in her eyes.

He wondered if he should just drop it. It’s like he was backpedaling right into oncoming traffic, and he might end up hurting her worse. “Never mind. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No, go ahead,” she challenged him, and he marveled as he watched the insecurity slowly disappear behind indignation. “Please, tell me why you don’t think I should date Superman.”

“It’s not that I don’t think you should. It’s that... you’d have to share him with the world.” Yeah, that was a good point, right? A ‘con’ in the list of dating Superman. “Think about it. He’d always be dashing off to rescues, leaving you in the middle of dinner and — ”

“So he doesn’t deserve a personal life because he rescues people and saves the world?”

“I... didn’t say that.”

“Why else? Seemed like you had a whole list of reasons ready for me to go,” she said, crossing her arms over her chest. “Let’s hear them!”

“You’d have to keep your relationship a secret. For your safety, and... others. You wouldn’t be able to talk to your friends or your family about your love life.”

“I hardly talk to my family now, and you’re my only friend, Clark. Can I talk to you about it?”

“I-I guess so... ”

She shrugged. “So, what else?”

Somehow, he’d gotten himself into a sparring match with Lois about himself. And he was trying to convince her not to date him... and suddenly he was very glad he was doing such a poor job of it. But at the same time, he still couldn’t figure out how dating Superman was even a logical

possibility. And he didn’t *want* her to date Superman.

“He doesn’t have a place to live, so... ” What was his point on that one?

“So his housing status should dictat — wait, he doesn’t have anywhere to live? Where does he go when he’s not performing rescues? How does he relax? Clark! That’s so sad... does he relax at your place? Does he have other friends he can talk to when he’s had a hard day? Please tell me he doesn’t spend all his time doing super feats — the man deserves to relax! Clark... are you still listening?”

He... but Superman wasn’t... real. He didn’t need to relax because Clark did that. He...

“What about when he has a really difficult rescue? And last week when the whole city was against him... Clark? Even *you* gave up on him! How did that make him feel? I know I said it wasn’t my place to ask, but now... I mean, aside from the whole dating thing. Could you *please* let him know I need to talk to him?”

“I... I... ”

“I won’t even tell him I love him. That’s not important right now — ”

His eyes went wide. “You love him? *Love* him?” He didn’t know if he was shocked or angry or thrilled.

She opened her mouth and closed it like he’d taken the wind out of her sails.

And she’d just... gone straight ahead and taken his sails. What. Was. Happening?

“You can’t possibly love him... ” Incredulous? Maybe that’s what he was feeling?

“Why?” she demanded.

“Because you hardly know him, Lois!”

“How would *you* know? Maybe I’ve spent a lot more time with him than I’ve told you about!”

She had. She definitely had. But she didn’t know that. And she couldn’t love Superman... Superman wasn’t real. And her crush was superficial. And, and... “Maybe you don’t know him as well as you think you do!” he blurted out, frustrated and hurt that she was just lying to him now, implying she knew Superman better than she did and trying to convince him that...

“What’s that supposed to mean? If anything, I’d say I know Superman better than anyone on this planet other than maybe you.”

He scoffed at that. “So what’s his favorite color?”

“I don’t know! Red? Blue?” She was definitely flustered and angry and he just couldn’t help himself from digging in his heels.

“His favorite food?”

“Clark!” she yelled and stood abruptly.

“What?!” he yelled back.

“What is *wrong* with you? You can’t just quiz me on trivial things. Love has nothing to do with knowing someone’s favorite color. And you certainly don’t have any right to tell me how I feel!”

“But he’s not *real*, Lois! He’s just some flashy costume and exciting powers. He doesn’t have a favorite color or food or a place to live. He doesn’t have a phone number or social life, and you can’t date him! And you certainly can’t love him.”

Anger roared in her eyes, her nose flared, and her hands

were fists at her side. And then she stormed past him through the open conference room door, yanked open the door to the stairwell and, disappeared behind the door as it slammed shut behind her.

He... she...

Clark sat frozen to the spot, his body twisted around in the chair and facing the stairwell exit door. He couldn't even bring himself to x-ray the door because he wasn't sure what to do if she was still on the other side.

She'd left. Stormed out.

The sound of his own pulse was racing in his ears as he just continued to stare at the door.

What had he done?

Slowly, he turned back to face the table. Everything was still in its place — their notes and files spread across the table, Lois' fresh coffee mug half full, and her purse sitting upright on the end of the table. She'd forgotten her purse. For most, he'd assume that would mean they'd be back soon and that they wouldn't get far, but with Lois... that guaranteed nothing.

Her coat was here too, and he wondered if he should go out looking for her. But he knew he was the last person she wanted to see right now. At least it wasn't snowing like it had been last week... well, the parts of last week not subject to the freak heat wave.

Just last week...

He turned again in his chair, this time to look out at Lois' desk. Just last week, he'd been ready to give up everything and leave. Not ready, no. But he'd left, sure that he'd been the cause of the danger to everyone he held dear. Just last week, he'd sat across from Lois at her desk and told her the same thing he'd yelled at her tonight, that she didn't know Superman as well as she thought she did.

And she'd proved him wrong.

Or, rather... she'd be the one to save him. She had never given up on Superman even when he had himself. Her tenacity, her unwavering belief that Superman needed support, deserved saving just as much as anyone else in Metropolis. And even now? She'd asked to talk to him, to reach out... to make sure that Superman was doing okay after everything that had happened. Because... she was worried about him, the man beneath the spandex. Worried that he might not be doing okay because his whole adopted city had turned against him when the going got tough.

And she believed that he deserved a personal life. That he should relax after a hard day's work. That he needed a friend to talk to after a difficult rescue.

Lois was all of that for him, all of that and more. Everything. She was everything to him. So much more than he even realized.

Because... whether or not he saw Superman as one-dimensional and not real, Lois didn't. She saw deeper than everyone else. She just didn't know who the man underneath the suit was. It was time she did. She deserved that much.

With a deep breath to center himself again, Clark set about speed-reading through the rest of the files, taking notes, and then organized everything when he was done. A pang of guilt hit him as he set the file folders, complete

with neatly written notes of lead to follow tomorrow, on their desks. The absolute least he could do was spend 30 seconds to make sure she didn't have to worry about the work they didn't finish because he'd caused a fight. He turned out all the appropriate lights for when the night staff would arrive, grabbed his things as well as her purse and coat, and headed out of the newsroom.

She wasn't in the building any longer, that much he knew because he'd extended his hearing a good distance and hadn't heard her heartbeat. His best guess was that she'd gone home for the night and presumably had gotten a spare key from a neighbor or her building's super.

He flew over her apartment, intending to land in the alleyway and make his way to her front door, but when he looked down to check, all her windows were dark. He did a quick scan and didn't find her inside. She hadn't been home yet tonight.

A small note of panic started to play in his chest, her penchant for being in mortal danger ever-present in his mind. He stayed hovering over her building and stretched his hearing once again, listening intently for her heartbeat or any sounds of distress she might be making. But there was nothing.

He took a breath to try and calm himself. There wasn't necessarily a reason to panic yet. It was possible she'd just gone to get something to eat and hadn't made it home yet. He'd just drop her purse and coat off at his place, grab a quick bite for dinner himself, and then head on a patrol of the city. She'd show up. It'd be fine. She'd be fine.

He zipped home and changed in the alley next to his building. He'd just go in through the front door on the off chance that she was waiting for him in the lobby. Chances were low. In fact, he was starting to think he should have left her purse and coat at the Planet at her desk because that would be the first place she'd go to look for them.

Good grief. He sure was batting a thousand today. He sighed at himself. He needed to sit and think for a few minutes and figure out his next move. But honestly, at this point, he should probably just call it a night. She was a grown woman who could take care of herself. Yes, one who got into more than her fair share of danger, but he hadn't heard her cry for help. She didn't want to see him tonight. If she did, she could call. So it was best that he just go home and be there in case she did call. And if she didn't, then maybe he would stop by tomorrow before work and bring Lois some coffee and croissants, see if she was willing to let him apologize and... explain.

As he'd thought, she hadn't been in the lobby, so he'd just grabbed his mail and headed towards his door. He'd been looking through his bills and the junk mail as he unlocked the door, so it wasn't until he'd closed and locked the door and turned around and looked up that he saw her. Sitting there on his couch.

She'd made herself comfortable, of course. Helped herself to a cup of tea and his Midwest U sweatshirt. Her shoes were off and set to the side of the couch, and she had both legs curled up on the couch underneath a throw blanket.

"Lois, what are you doing here? How...?"

"I picked the lock," she said simply, not moving from

her cozy spot on the couch.

"I... uh..." He hadn't been expecting this, expecting her. Expecting her wearing his clothes or that it would catch a strange place in his heart at the sight of it.

She'd come straight here and been here all along. Of course, she had. To be honest, it should have been the second place he looked after her own apartment. He just hadn't thought she'd want to talk to him tonight. He stood at the top of the steps awkwardly, his hands and arms full with his mail, keys, her purse, and her coat.

He watched her face and saw her work to bite back a smile. "Why don't you set everything down and come sit down?" She patted the cushion next to her. "You keep it pretty cold in here, so I hope you don't mind that I turned up the heat and borrowed something warm." It wasn't even really a question. Just a statement of facts.

He nodded quickly, trying to snap himself out of this stupor. He set everything down on his kitchen table and headed for the couch. He sat down, not on the cushion next to her, but at the opposite end of the couch, his legs turned to face her.

She bit her lip and seemed a bit nervous. She took a sip of her tea before setting the mug down on the coffee table.

He'd been prepared to... well, he'd been prepared to prepare a speech tonight to give to her tomorrow, to tell her everything and pray that she'd forgive him his behavior tonight and deception, his lies. He just wasn't sure where to start. He looked up to meet her eyes, hoping that she might give him some inspiration on where to start, how to even begin to untangle this mess he'd made.

"You're wrong, you know?" she said calmly, no edge of anger or even annoyance in her voice.

Of course she'd beaten him to the punch. She hadn't come here to just sit on his couch and stare at him with his mouth agape. He just... wished he knew where exactly she had picked to start. Because, yeah, he knew now he was wrong, but he was wrong about oh so many things.

He settled for just nodding. Nodding was safe for now.

He waited for her to continue, watching her as she looked down at her hands, only partially peeking out from the sleeves of his sweatshirt. She rubbed her thumb against the ribbed material of the cuff, and then she nodded to herself as though she'd decided something or had finally worked herself up to saying whatever it was she was going to say.

"Superman is real," she said, her voice quiet but sure.

He nodded, afraid to speak.

"And I do love him."

She looked at him with a calm intensity that he wasn't quite sure what to do with. It wasn't a dare to contradict her, exactly, but it almost felt like one. His pulse was racing in his ears again, drowning out any hope he had of hearing her heartbeat right now. He searched her face, looking for clues. She'd said it with such certainty, but there was just no way...

Her head ducked down again for a moment and then he followed her gaze as she looked up and over to the left to survey the pictures on the wall, the mementos and knickknacks he had on his shelves.

"His favorite color is blue," she said softly.

The silence hung between them for a moment more.

She finally looked back at him, her eyes steady. "His favorite movie is *Bull Durham*, but he pretends it's *Lethal Weapon* when I come over because he knows that I like it better."

He drew in a sharp breath.

"His favorite food is pasta, but only when it's homemade or from his favorite restaurant. He has a phone number. A social life. A place to live. Parents. Friends... A best friend."

The distance between them on the couch seemed all at once too small and too great. And his breath was shallow, his chest filling with equal parts love and fear and hope. He felt the tears pricking at the back of his eyes, and he watched as she swiped away her own tears with the cuff of his sweatshirt.

"Say something, Clark." There was a slight tremor to her voice now, all the calm and bravado worn off.

"Can... can I kiss you?"

More tears spilled down her cheeks as bit at her bottom lip and nodded desperately.

He was by her side in an instant, his hands coming up to cup her face as he used the pads of his thumbs to wipe her tears away. He leaned in to press his lips gently to hers, a slow and almost painfully sweet kiss, as if he only had this one perfect moment to tell her how much he loved her, was grateful for her, would do anything for her. He pulled back ever so slightly to look in her eyes, and he saw it there. He saw everything he ever wanted, everything he never knew he needed.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I'm so sorry. I love you too."

She rested her forehead against his and closed her eyes. He did too, and like a song, he finally heard her heartbeat fill his senses. He let his hands slide down to her neck and shoulders. After a moment, he pulled back and looked at her face, her beautiful, beautiful, tear-stained face.

She opened her eyes to look at him again, and he brought a gentle hand up to wipe her tears away... or maybe just to touch her, to feel her skin beneath his fingertips. Oh, how he wished he hadn't made her cry. His heart clenched at the knowledge that he'd caused her pain.

She was searching his face now, and then her fingertips of one hand joined the quest, brushing over his brow, down his jawline, and ever so gently across his lips. He kissed them tenderly. He wasn't sure what she was looking for... the truth, maybe?

"You know," she started softly as her hand dropped back to her lap. "You can't just tell someone you love them, kiss them like that, and... what... You didn't expect me to forget that... did you?" There was no anger or accusation in her voice, only wonder or maybe confusion. And some sadness too. "What were you thinking?" she asked, her voice low but curious.

"I wasn't," he breathed out. "Thinking. Not at all. And —"

"You can't kiss me like that and say you're not real." Her eyes darted to his lips briefly.

"I didn't know."

She scrunched her face in the most adorable smile and

laughed lightly. “You didn’t know you were real?” She tilted her head a little as if she were examining him.

“I didn’t know Superman was... I thought he was just... I just wanted to help... I thought it was just a costume I put on.”

“Don’t you see you’re so much more than that, Clark?” She reached up to brush his hair off his forehead.

“I think I’m starting to see,” he said quietly.

He still hadn’t quite managed to take a deep breath in while, his chest so full of emotions he wasn’t even sure he could name. He hadn’t even had a chance to wrap his head around everything, all these newfound truths about himself that had spilled out. Truths that the brilliant woman in front of him, on his couch, wearing his sweatshirt... she’d known him so much better than he even knew himself.

She was still staring at him... Curiously. Protectively. Lovingly. And his heart caught, stuttering at the thought that all of a sudden... she was just... his. Not possessively — unless you counted her having complete possession of his heart — but she just... knew. She knew everything, and she was still here just loving him with her gaze and the graze of her fingertips on his brow, his lips, his jaw. She was putting the pieces together, he knew. Knitting together what she knew of Superman and blending it with Clark.

She’d found pieces of the puzzle that he hadn’t even realized existed. “How did you figure it out?” he asked her. And how did you forgive me already, he wanted to add.

Her palm found her way to his cheek, cupping it as she stared into his eyes. “When you did this. You’ve touched me before... both of you.”

His brow furrowed as he tried to recall...

“In the courthouse as Superman, telling me you had to leave.” Her eyes, her voice seemed anguished. “That you didn’t have a choice.”

“... I thought I was hurting people...”

“I know. You weren’t. But I know,” she assured him and stroked her thumb across his cheek. “And then... that same night... when you kissed me goodbye...” She lowered her hand and she looked down at the blanket on her lap, her eyebrows knitted together with what he feared was...

“It hurt, Clark. It hurt my heart that I lost you twice in one day. I should have realized when it hurt the same.”

“I’m sor — ” She cut him off with fingers to his lips.

“Not for this. You don’t need to be sorry for this. You thought you had to.” Her hand fell back to the blanket.

“You saved me,” he said, a mix of wonder and gratitude. He felt as though his heart was reaching the top of a roller coaster, filled with the anticipation of the thrill and the fear of the unknown.

She shrugged and gave him a small smile. “Someone’s gotta save Superman.”

“Can I kiss you again?” He waited with bated breath, waiting for the fall of the car to find out what was around the bend and over the drop.

“You need to stop asking,” she whispered roughly.

They slid right off the tracks, and his heart was flying as he leaned in and crushed his lips to hers. She melted into him, and he captured each sigh and moan as their lips met again and again. Her hands found their way around his neck and threaded through his hair, making his skin and heart

tingle with every touch. When they broke apart, they were both breathless and they just paused there, inches apart, catching their breath.

“Wow,” she breathed. “That was...”

“Better than yesterday,” he said, his voice quiet and husky.

“Definitely.” She grinned widely.

Slowly, they parted and both sat up straighter again, but Clark couldn’t help but slide in closer. He found her hand and grasped it, reveling in the fact that just touching her now made him feel amazing and alive and connected to her in a way he’d never felt before.

He brought a hand up to cup her cheek. “So...” he started. “If you’d figured it out last week, why didn’t y — ” He stopped when she shook her head.

“No, it wasn’t until tonight that all the pieces fell into place,” she told him, and she covered his hand with her own, turning it and kissing his palm before bringing both of their hands to her lap. “After our fight. I took a cab straight here. I didn’t want to go home, and I couldn’t think of where else to go.”

He looked down at their hands and ran his thumb over the soft skin of her palm. “And?”

“And I was fuming, furious that you had the gall to tell me what my own feelings were and accuse me of... being so shallow that I’d only want Superman — you — for your powers and your looks.”

He hung his head. “I’m sorry, Lois. I shouldn’t have yelled. And I had no right to dismiss your feelings so callously.”

She nodded. “You can be sorry for that one. Thank you. Apology accepted.” She gave his hand a little squeeze.

“I was...” He hesitated, afraid to start another fight.

“What?” she asked curiously.

“Well, I was mad, too. I regret raising my voice and how I went about things, but you did have a tendency to... compare me pretty unfavorably to Superman. And you acted differently... flirtier with him, er, me in the suit? Then you’d turn around and call me — Clark — less than.”

“Oh.” Her face fell a bit and it looked like she was thinking, trying to recall what she’d said and done.

He didn’t need to give her examples, did he? He didn’t really want to...

“I’m sorry, Clark,” she said softly. “That was... I’m sorry.”

“Thank you,” he replied as he brought her hand up for a soft kiss. “Apology accepted.”

She gave him a regretful smile. And he nodded for her to continue her story. “I guess I thought... maybe I’d come here and... I don’t even know. Rifle through your address book to find Superman’s address, his phone number. Search for a secret journal you were keeping, detailing your crush on him.”

“What? My what?”

She blushed and ducked her head. “I don’t know... it was starting to make some sort of sense. I mean, with how angry and defensive you were about the idea of me dating Superman. How you seemed to know and be upset about all the ways he just wasn’t able to date.” She paused for a moment and scrunched up her face. “You were pissed,

incredulous that I would dare say I was in love with him. Last week... you wrote that article... heartfelt and heartbroken over how Metropolis had treated Superman. You were *leaving* Metropolis because of what the city had done to him... ”

He guessed that made some sort of sense, in the most bizarre way possible.

“You were leaving... me.” Her voice cracked a little. “Just when I was starting to feel... and then you weren’t attracted to me when I know we were all sprayed... ” She paused, the corner of her mouth turning down for a frown. “I just... it just didn’t make sense. Because I’d thought... I’d been sure... and then I wasn’t... ”

“You mean... ?”

“Those were real feelings, Clark... I still remember them. I still feel them. And I was trying to ignore the fact that I seemed to be falling in love with a man who didn’t want me back. It was devast — It was almost reassuring to think that it wasn’t *me* specifically you didn’t want... I just didn’t... I was a little — ”

“I want you,” he blurted out. “I’ve always wanted you. The spray didn’t work on me bec — ”

“I know. I know now... ”

“And, Lois?”

“Yeah?” she asked hopefully.

“I can promise you I’m not madly in love with myself,” he teased, hoping to make her smile again.

She laughed too. “Can you blame me for thinking it, though?”

“I guess not,” he laughed. “What led you in the right direction?”

She smiled softly and tucked her hair behind her ear with her free hand. “I found this.”

She pulled out a picture frame that had been tucked between her leg and the back of the sofa. It was a picture from Lois’ first trip to Smallville. His mom had snapped it while they were relaxing and exploring the festival. He smiled. It was definitely his favorite picture.

“The way you’re looking at me... the way I’m looking at you... I’d say I’m not sure why I didn’t see it before, but... I hadn’t wanted to.” She stared down at the picture again. “I have rules, Clark, remember? Rules because I’ve been hurt, burned the past by trusting... well, trusting what I thought was my heart. It wasn’t then.”

“And now?” he asked, hopeful and tentative.

She nodded but he wasn’t sure what she was confirming.

“It’s your heart this time?”

She nodded. She hadn’t let go of his hand.

“What’s it telling you?”

That I’m in love with you. All of you. And that I want to be with you.”

“Do you trust it?” His heart hung suspended.

“No,” she said simply, softly, giving his hand a squeeze. She looked back up into his eyes. “But I trust you.”

His heart soared, and he’d honestly never been happier, felt more complete, in his life than he did in this moment.

“Lois? Can I — ” Her fingers flew to his lips again to stop him.

She leaned closer and dropped her fingers... her mouth

now millimeters away. “Clark,” she whispered against his lips. “Shut up and kiss me.”

THE END