

There's a Fine, Fine Line

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Summary: Lois' inner thoughts after Clark dumps her "for her own good."

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Author's Note: This is in response to Kerth Challenge #4, which had the prompt of using the lyrics of the next song you hear as the title of the story.

There's a fine, fine line between a lover and a friend.

There's a fine, fine line between reality and pretend.

He dumped me.

Clark.

He dumped me.

The same man who's been staring, moony-eyed at me since the second we met, *dumped me*.

And for what? My own good? Ha! More like because he can't handle the fact that I'm not some porcelain doll who's going to sit on the sidelines while he does all the dangerous work. I've been taking risks for far longer than he knows. I've taken risks the entire time I've known him. And, okay, I'll admit, maybe I've been a little more reckless since Superman decided to befriend me. *Maybe*. It's literally in my job description to do so.

But now that I know that Clark actually *is* Superman, all of a sudden, my risk-taking in the name of nailing down a story is a problem. I haven't changed the way I act since I figured out his secret. And the dangers he and I have faced haven't been any more or less deadly or dire since he was forced to come clean about his penchant for flying around in Spandex. Perhaps different in some ways, maybe even more unique, but certainly not more frequent or more concerning. But suddenly he's got ridiculous notion that us being close is going to get me hurt beyond repair or perhaps even killed. As if I haven't looked potential death in the eye a thousand times before.

It makes me wonder, honestly, if my safety actually *is* his reason for this one-sided desire to be apart. Sure, he's gone into full "nanny mode" since I let him know that I realized what it was that he was hiding from me. But maybe there's something more. Something deeper. Something that has more to do with his own, personal insecurities than whether or not he can manage to keep me alive long enough

to draw from Social Security.

He pretends, I know, to be completely okay with my knowing about his alter ego. He tells me all the time about how he feels relieved to be done with the lying and the hiding and all of the evasiveness he always had to maintain. He tells me how he's glad to not have to hold me at an arm's length anymore, how good it is that he can be his true self around me. But...maybe there's a part of him that's still afraid. Afraid I might still reject him. Afraid that I might find his Kryptonian roots too weird, too strange, too far from human to handle. Afraid that I might still out his identity to the world – accidentally or purposefully.

But even that doesn't make any sense to me. Doesn't he know I would sooner die than to put his identity – *his life!* – in peril like that? Doesn't he trust me to stick by him? Doesn't he realize how deeply I've fallen for him? How can he look at me and not see how much I love him?

Maybe all that time lying to me, pretending he wasn't interested in me, pretending Superman was only ever going to be a friend to me, skewed his view of the world. Maybe all that energy he wasted on worrying that I would only agree to date him if I knew he was Superman colored his view of relationships. I guess I can't blame him there, at least not too much. I'll admit it, when I first caught sight of him in that blue and red uniform, I was dazzled. The celebrity crush hit me hard. It was like I was suddenly twelve years old again, covering every square inch of my bedroom walls and ceiling with posters and carefully extracted full-page magazine photos of the celebrities that made my heart race. Superman made my heart race too, and all the while I practically ignored Clark – the man I was too afraid to allow myself to develop feelings for.

So, I get it. The idea that he wanted to be sure that I was choosing the man over the fantasy is something I can understand. Maybe I don't love the fact that he was, in a way, testing me, but...well, I can't say I would have done things all that differently if I'd been in his shoes. I'd want that peace of mind too.

Still, he knows now that *he's* the one I want. Clark, not the flashy hero who can lift rockets and ingest explosives. He knows that I love the man, not the costume or the powers. He knows that he's my best friend, on top of being the man I'd started to see a future with. So why is he still running scared?

And you never know 'til you reach the top if it was worth the uphill climb.

There's a fine, fine line between love

And a waste of time.

Being with Clark is the best thing that's ever happened to me. He's made me feel safe and secure and loved in ways that I never knew could be real. All those feelings of butterflies in the stomach and the heart floating on clouds... all of it had always sounded like a fairytale to me before I met Clark. Sure, I'd experienced rushes of lust and even what I thought was love. I've been with men I'd tried to convince myself that I'd cared about – like Lex. All of it was fleeting at best and contrived at worst. Very, *very* contrived.

With Clark, it was different. Effortless. Natural. All-encompassing. I never once doubted my feelings for him

once I opened my heart to him. I'd doubted *his* feelings toward *me* on occasion, it's true. But what else could I think when he would run off during an important conversation, only to return sometimes hours later and act like I hadn't been trying to talk to him? No other logical explanation made sense at the time, until I recognized that those moments had been caused by his inability to listen to a cry for help without offering his aid. An admirable quality in most circumstances really, but, selfishly, I felt like I was sort of "second best" in his priorities.

And still I toughed it out. Forced down my feelings of selfishness, of inadequacy. Put on a brave face, told myself that it didn't matter, that it was wrong of me to want or demand his full attention at all times. People would die if not for his help. And I knew, deep in my heart, that it killed him every time he had to make that decision to leave me while he tended to a rescue. And maybe I would have learned to truly move past those selfish feelings in time. Maybe it would have gotten easier to let him go without a pang of jealousy in my heart. But now? Now I may never know, now that I'm once again relegated to being "just a friend."

Friend.

Ugh.

I'll admit that I can't imagine my life without Clark in it, in some capacity or another. Losing him back when I was set to marry Lex was a big wake up call for me. Realizing that, if push came to shove and I had to say goodbye to one of them forever, that I would always choose to keep Clark in my life, was the jolt I needed to really understand that not only was I not in love with Lex, I never would be. Clark saved me from the worst mistake I'd nearly ever made in my life.

So yes, I want to remain friends with Clark. But at the same time, it hurts. Because I don't want to be just his best friend. I want to be his wife. And I was *so* ready to tell him that. So ready to make that leap of faith. So ready to forgive the years of lies he'd constructed to keep his super side hidden.

Then he dumped me. Tore my heart out and crushed it beneath his heel. Left without letting me argue my side of things. Made the decision for both of us without even stopping to wonder what it is that *I* wanted. He wasted my time and his, and for what? Nothing but heartache and regret for losing what might have been.

Because I know it's not just me who's hurting right now. He tries to put on a brave face. Tries to act like things are okay between us, if not normal. But I know him too well. The pain is there in his eyes every time he looks at me. There's a hesitancy to the way he approaches me. A strained quality to his voice when he speaks. It's the same wounded way he moped about after I didn't immediately say yes to his proposal, when all I asked for was some time to process his alter ego and all of the untruths he'd spun to protect it.

There's a fine, fine line between a fairy tale and a lie.

And there's a fine, fine line between "You're wonderful" and "Goodbye."

I guess what hurts the most is how quickly Clark changed his tune about me. One minute, the man can't stop ogling me, and the next, he can barely even look at me. I

hope that's because he's ashamed of his actions. I hope his guilt is eating him up alive. It would serve him right, the louse.

Still, I can't quite wrap my head around what happened. Every time I try, it's like getting whiplash.

How can a man go from "Will you marry me?" to "I'm breaking up with you, not because I want to, but because I feel like I have to?" in the span of just a few short weeks? How does someone – anyone – just stop caring like that? Not that I think Clark doesn't care, or that he's not hurting too. I know he is. But to go from acting like I'm the center of his universe to this?

I can't make sense of it, no matter how many mental gymnastics I perform.

I guess if someone doesn't love you back

It isn't such a crime.

But there's a fine, fine line between love

And a waste of your time.

I mean, if Clark's really over me, I guess I can't be mad at him forever, right? It's not a crime to lose interest in another person. God knows I've had my fair share of experience with that. I mean, I never even loved Lex and I walked down the aisle ready to marry him. Thank God I came to my senses before I could say "I do."

And then there was Dan.

Dan was exciting at first, because he gave me the undivided attention I knew I so rightly deserved. The one thing Clark could never give me because he was too busy hiding his alter ego behind his paper-thin rationale to protect his insecurities. But soon those blinders fell off and I saw a different side to Dan. He was lying and hiding too. I started to wonder if I was giving out some sort of signal to the universe. "Hey, send more men I can't trust!" And unlike Clark, Dan started to seem...controlling. He'd ask me something and then just assume I was okay with it. Or send inappropriate – even creepy – gifts to the office. I actually understood and empathized (at times) with Clark's inability to make Mayson Drake understand that he just wasn't that into her. I was getting a similar treatment from Dan. And I knew that, like with Lex, this wasn't someone I could ever see myself with long term. So I ended things.

So, no, not having feelings for someone doesn't make you a bad person. It didn't make me a bad person all the times I felt no chemistry between myself and whoever I was seeing at the time. And it doesn't make Clark the villain now, but only if his change of heart about me is real.

There's not one single cell in my body that this thinks his abrupt reversal of feelings is truthful.

And that makes him a jerk.

And I don't have the time to waste on you anymore.

I don't think that you even know what you're looking for.

For my own sanity, I've got to close the door and walk away.

Oh!

So...what now? What am I supposed to do? Where do I go from here?

I feel lost. And that's a feeling I'm not used to. I don't like it. I usually know exactly what steps I need to take in most situations. Or at least a fairly decent idea of what

direction I need to go in.

But this?

I'm torn in two directions at once.

One the one hand, I don't want to give up so easily.

Clark was everything I ever could have wanted in a man.

He was just about perfect in every way, his need to dash out and save the world in the middle of a date notwithstanding.

Without him, there's a gaping void where my heart should be and the pain is excruciating.

On the other hand...

Maybe I *should* give up. Just walk away from the wreckage of my shattered hopes and murdered dreams. Just put it behind me. Let the pain destroy me faster so I can rise from the ashes all the sooner, stronger than I ever was before. Be done wasting my time on someone who can't get his act together.

It's better that way, isn't it? Not to chase the phantom of what might have been? Shouldn't I focus on preserving my sanity by not pretending that I ever really stood a chance of making a life with him? Because if I keep holding on to the hope that he might change his mind, I'll just drive myself crazy. I know I will. I've done it before; this is nothing new to me. I'll overthink every interaction, overanalyze every word he speaks, obsess over every move he makes while we're in each other's company, however long or short a time that might be.

Why should I bother? Why should I put myself through that hellish torment?

Let *Clark* be the one to suffer sleepless nights and drive *himself* to distraction with endless overthinking. Let *Clark* be the one to question everything I say or do. He deserves it. And maybe - just maybe - while he's staring at his ceiling at 2am unable to sleep or flying endless patrols over some sleepy city, he'll figure out what he wants. Because the way I see it, he doesn't have a *clue* right now as to what he really wants. He can't sulk because his proposal didn't go the way he wanted it to and also turn off his feelings for me so quickly. Shutting off his human desires and feelings *isn't* one of his otherworldly powers.

A toddler. That's what he reminds me of right now. The bratty kind who can't stand the thought of someone playing with his beloved toy, so he breaks it. And then cries because his favorite toy is broken.

And it's not my job to comfort him in this case.

I've already been hurt by him. I'm not ready or willing to be hurt again.

There's a fine, fine line between together and not.

And there's a fine, fine line between what you wanted and what you got.

I deserve better than this. I deserve better than *him*. Only...he's the best man I've ever met, aside from this breakup. The lies about Superman I can understand, if not overlook. I can appreciate that he felt he needed to hide who he was to protect himself...at first. Because, like it or not, he's right to wonder if I would have used the knowledge when I first met him to secure my Pulitzer. I have to wonder myself. And as much as I want to swear to the fact that I am a better person than that, there's a small, but incredibly vocal, part of me that knows how ruthless I can be in the pursuit of a story. I once stole his story right

out from under his nose, after all. I felt guilty about it, sure. But I did it anyway and never confessed my crime to Perry. So would I really have balked at the idea of outing his identity to the world, just to advance my own career?

I'm not sure, and that scares me.

So I understand why he never said anything in the beginning. And I can even understand, to a point, his hesitancy to tell me once we were dating. Am I happy about the fact that he said nothing? No. But I can forgive him for being insecure.

This breakup, however, is a different story all together.

We're supposed to be a team, he and I. We're supposed to be partners, both professionally and personally. We are... were... a couple, serious enough that marriage was on the table. And then he unilaterally decided that we couldn't be together anymore.

It enrages me.

Mature couples are supposed to talk through things like this. We're supposed to make huge decisions together. Since when does he think his opinions - his ungrounded fears - take precedence over my own opinions? Why do his so-called needs - and I'm not entirely convinced being apart from me is an actual *need* - outweigh mine?

I wanted a life with him. I was ready to say yes, that I wanted to be his wife, that I needed him as my husband. I was on the verge of jumping into a new life - one with a spouse and a home and maybe even children one day. And what I got was rejected before I could even speak.

You gotta go after the things you want while you're still in your prime.

There's a fine, fine line between love

And a waste of time.

I should walk away, chalk this whole experience up to a nightmarish waste of time.

But you know what?

I don't want to.

I'm not giving up. If Clark thinks I'm going to just meekly accept this breakup, he's got another thing coming. Because I am Lois Lane. More importantly, I am *Mad Dog Lane*. I've never once sat on the sidelines and accepted a defeat. I'm known for my tenaciousness. When I go after something I want, I get it.

And what I want is Clark back.

Maybe it's stupid of me. Maybe the only thing I'll "win" is another round of heartbreak. But I have to try. It's not in my nature to walk away from something I want. I'm too young, too passionate to give up. I'm in the prime of my life. I'm not going to waste my best years pining for what could have been. Because, for me, Clark was it; the one person I could easily spend the rest of my life with. I'm not interested in finding someone new. No one else could possibly *hope* to hold a candle to Clark, and I'm not even considering his super side. It's Clark or no one at all.

I'm not ready to throw away my chance for my fairytale happy ending. I will fight like hell to get what I deserve. To get what I need. To get what I want. And to give Clark what I know he wants as well. So, no matter how possibly ill-advised it may be, I'm not giving up on us.

And who knows? Maybe I'll triumphantly win him back. Maybe I'll lose him forever, another spectacular

federal disaster to add to my collection. I won't know
unless I try.

I don't intend to lose him.

I. Am. Mad. Dog. Lane.

I'll get him back or I'll die trying.

Because even after all he's put me through, he's worth
the effort.

And, more importantly, *I* am worth the effort.

He may have drawn some fine lines in the sand, but I've
never met a line I haven't been willing to cross or been able
to erase.

THE END