

The Family Hour Interlude

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Summary: Dr. Klein delivers the news to Superman that his biology and an Earth woman's are not compatible for reproduction. An added scene to the series finale episode, "The Family Hour."

Story Size: 996 words (6Kb as text)

Author's Note: While rewatching "The Family Hour," I wondered how the conversation between Dr. Klein and Superman might have gone. This short fic is the result.

Content warning: Please be aware that this story does touch on the issue of infertility.

Bernie paced. He'd been pacing for about ten minutes now, and he wondered if he might not be able to stop.

Superman would be here any minute. And then, what would he say?

Scientifically, his tests were reliable, comprehensive, and conclusive. He'd run every test that he'd been able to think of, as well as a few recommended by a colleague who was a reproductive specialist.

All evidence had supported the conclusion — that is, Superman's biology was incompatible with an Earth woman's for reproduction.

Last time he'd spoken with the superhero, he'd been hopeful. His initial examinations had been encouraging. However, as he'd moved on to chromosomal and molecular analyses, the outcome had started to look more dismal.

And he somehow had to tell this to the superhero — the man whom he respected more than anyone else he'd ever met. The man who had looked cautiously optimistic the last time they'd spoken. The man who had hinted at having a very special woman in his life and who had seemed delighted at the possibility of starting a family.

Bernie stopped pacing as he heard the door to his laboratory open, and he wheeled around to see Superman step into the room, smile at him briefly, and close the door.

When the superhero turned around again, their eyes met only for a second before Bernie tore his away. The optimism, hope, and expectation bursting from the younger man's expression were too much.

Bernie felt his heart start racing, and he turned away, resuming his pacing. He couldn't do it. He couldn't look

the man in the eye and give him the bad news.

This, he knew, was why he hadn't gone into clinical work.

"Dr. Klein, I came as soon as I got your message from Clark Kent. If this is a bad time, I can come back later," Superman offered in what passed as a casual tone.

But Bernie could hear the reservation in the superhero's voice. The resignation, really.

Bernie once again stopped his pacing and turned around slowly. Superman watched him, but the expression on his face now was the carefully guarded expression of a powerful man who couldn't afford to let his feelings and control slip.

Bernie lowered his gaze back to the floor and stepped over to his lab bench. He'd prepared a full report, because that's what a good scientist did. Charts and data and all. He reached over with a trembling hand and picked up the folder.

"Superman, I..."

When he ventured to look up at the superhero again, he saw Superman staring at the ground, his mouth tightened in a frown.

"I want you to know that I ran every possible test I could. It's all...it's all here." Bernie held up the folder, but Superman just nodded. "I'm — oh geez, I don't know how to say this, Superman. I wish I had better news for you. I wish I could tell you... But I can't. And I'm sorry. The results, all the tests I tried, everything just —"

Bernie stopped talking abruptly as Superman raised his eyes again, looking for all intents and purposes like his normal, unperturbable self, that is, except for his hands, which were balled up into tight fists. Bernie looked away again and shook his head as he offered Superman the folder.

"Your molecular biology is too different, Superman," he finally managed, his voice low but surprisingly steady. "My findings suggested that any attempt at reproduction... would not yield a viable fetus. I'm sorry."

Superman slowly stepped toward Bernie and took the folder, then flipped through the pages at superspeed. When he finished, Bernie watched as his eyes closed for a long moment, and he saw the younger man's jaw set.

"I appreciate this, Dr. Klein. Your tests appear very thorough, and..." Superman's voice trailed off with an uncharacteristic uncertainty before the superhero again squared his shoulders, cleared his throat, and spoke. "I do wish the results had been different, but I'm truly grateful for your help."

Superman set the folder back on Bernie's lab bench, blinked again, and nodded.

"I'd better be going. Thanks again, Dr. Klein."

And he disappeared in a blur that scattered papers across the lab bench and onto the floor.

Alone once more, Bernie lowered himself down onto his stool, his hands shaking as they came to rest on top of the bench.

He felt heavy with guilt, although he'd done everything he could.

It just wasn't fair, he thought. It wasn't fair that the hero who had given the world so much couldn't have something it was clear he desperately wanted.

Bernie stood and started cleaning up the papers that had scattered on the floor. As he did, his fingers landed on a printout of an attempted alignment of Superman's Kryptonian chromosomes with those of a human woman. He stared at the page for several moments, squinting and turning it upside down. His eyes widened as several patterns appeared to emerge. Patterns he hadn't noticed before. Patterns that might make the impossible...a tiny bit less so, given a little...luck? If the chromosomes with the greatest homology would line up, just so... And if the extra Kryptonian genes...

His grin grew slowly as his mind whirred with possibilities — thinking, calculating, connecting dots. He hurried out to the breakroom, poured himself a large cup of coffee — extra milk and sugar — and raced back to his laboratory.

Maybe he hadn't done every possible test after all.

THE END