

A Date-less New Year's Eve

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Summary: Lois reflects on her life, Clark's resemblance to Superman, and the need for some good Thai food.

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A Ficathon story (requests are at the bottom). For the purposes of this story, assume that the episode "Metallo" happened between Christmas & New Year's. Thanks to CarolM and Wendy for looking it over for me. EditorJax, this is for you :)

The sun set early this time of year, the fading light perfectly reflecting Lois's frame of mind. Perry had sent her home early for New Year's Eve, but it wasn't as if she had a date, or even anything in particular to do. Unless watching a party on TV counted, but she couldn't get too excited about Dick Clark's program. And it was too early for that, anyway.

Which left her not much to do but think. Another year gone by, and what had she gained? She crossed the room and sat on her sofa. Well, she'd learned a lot about herself this past year. Most of it depressing.

For instance, a year ago she would have insisted up one side and down the other that she had no time for or interest in romance. Yet when Lex had offered, she'd fallen for it. Just like she'd fallen for Superman. Two romantic disasters in one year.

She ought to swear off men for life, but instead she found herself yearning for ... something. Something real. Forget about glitz and glamour and excitement; she wanted something deeper. She just didn't know how to go about finding it.

Her thoughts drifted towards Clark. He was such a good friend. It had shocked her, the other day, to hear herself comparing him to Superman. In a good way. "He's a lot like you," she'd blurted out, and then hadn't known how to recover her mistake. Only it wasn't a mistake, was it? They were more alike than she'd ever realized. Sure, Clark was often more irritating, but he could also make her laugh, more than Superman ever did.

It had been slowly dawning on her that Clark was important. Of course, about the time she'd started paying attention, he'd told her that he just wanted to be friends. It was just her luck.

Restless, she stood and walked to the window, gazing out over her city. The sky was now completely dark, and all the city's artificial lights were springing to life. People walked along the sidewalk below her, never looking up. They probably had somewhere to go, either out to a party, or in with someone special. She spotted a couple holding hands, and started to roll her eyes, but somehow she just couldn't work up any scorn. Only about a week ago, Clark had held her hand, right here by the window.

It had felt ... right. No glitz, no glamour, but a quiet moment of satisfaction and contentment. Connectedness. She put her hand against the window frame and leaned her cheek against it. The whole evening had been magical. It was almost as if Clark was seeing her as something more than just a friend.

She couldn't quite convince herself of that, though. Clark was

dating whatsername, wasn't he? He hadn't said so, but it sure looked that way. Lois didn't have any claim on him. She sighed and turned away from the window. She was lucky he still wanted to be friends, that she hadn't lost him entirely.

A few days ago, she'd seen him kidnapped in front of her eyes. A month or so back she'd seen him shot dead. The mixture of terror and grief had been potent. Who was she kidding? He was more than a work partner, more than a friend. She was in lo — well, he was important to her. She just wished she knew if he might ever feel the same about her.

Now that she'd noticed, she couldn't quite get over his resemblance to Superman. Well, not resemblance, exactly, although he did have the dark hair. But all of the qualities that were important to her — the gentle strength, the innate goodness — were as much a part of Clark as they were of Superman. She should have seen it before except that, well, she hadn't wanted to — and, truth be told, it had taken a while for her to recognize and appreciate those qualities in Superman, to separate them out from his general wonderful-ness, to learn how to try to explain her love for him. Besides, Clark was more complicated. There was more to him than just those qualities, so they weren't exactly obvious.

Well, enough of this. She shook herself to clear her head and started towards the kitchen. She really ought to eat something. She was scanning the nearly-empty interior of her refrigerator when the phone rang. Yes! Phone for take-out, that was what she should do. Um, and answer it.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Lois, it's me... Clark." There wasn't anything more than simple friendliness in his tone, but her heart skipped a beat just hearing his voice.

"Oh, Clark, hi! I was just—" thinking about you, she managed not to say. "Looking for something edible."

He laughed. "In your kitchen?"

She grinned, shifting the phone to her shoulder and closing the fridge. "Well, yeah, that didn't turn out so good. How are you doing?"

"I'm fine, thanks. Fully recovered."

"That's good." She seemed to run out of things to say, or rather she was so overrun with choices that they clogged the field and nothing emerged.

He didn't seem to notice. "So, what are you doing tonight?"

"Oh, I've got big plans," she deadpanned. "Me and my television set. That's later, though. Right now I just want something to eat, and I may not have anything on hand, but you know me, queen of take-out."

"Speed-dialer extraordinaire," he agreed gravely. "Should I get off the line?"

"No! No need for that. I don't know what I want to eat, so I don't know where to call."

"What are you in the mood for?" There was a smile in his voice.

You.

"Well, let's see... I had Chinese yesterday, and you were here with pizza, and of course we had all that turkey..." her voice slowed, giving her more time to appreciate the happy memories. She shook her head a little and tried to focus on her stash of take-out menus. "You know what I could really go for? Some good Thai food. Only I don't think I can manage that."

"Why not?"

"Well, my favorite place closed about a month ago — family reasons, I think — and I don't want to take a chance on something from the Yellow Pages, because you never know if you'll get good food, or kinda-good food, or food you really shouldn't be paying money for. Hey, you're always trying new places, right? Have any recommendations?"

"Well, let me think," he replied. "Yeah, I think I know just the place. They're kind of a hole-in-the-wall location, though..."

he sounded uncertain now. “How about I come get you, and I’ll take you there?”

“Oh, okay.” Lois felt just a little breathless. She scolded herself — it wasn’t a bit unusual for them to take in a meal together. Even if he was picking her up and taking her out.

“You sure? I mean, I could try giving directions, but it’s —”

“No, I think that’s a great idea,” she hastened to reassure him, then felt doubt strike, thinking about a certain blonde. “Unless you’d rather not. I mean, New Year’s Eve, you probably have plans already and I shouldn’t impose...”

He laughed, a warm and pleased sound. “No, all I had planned was to watch some old movies. They’ll wait for me.”

“Okay, then.” She could hear the smile in her own voice. Yay, no whatshername! “Do we need to call ahead? What should I wear?” She winced, worried that it sounded like she was expecting a date. “Are jeans okay? How soon can you get here — I mean, tonight the cabs are probably pretty busy, and all...”

“I can probably be there in about twenty minutes, Lois. It’s not a fancy place, so we shouldn’t need to call and you can wear jeans if you like. If you’ve got comfortable shoes we might even walk; it’s not too far.”

“Oh, okay.” She smiled. “I’m looking forward to it.”

“Me, too. I’ll be there in twenty. See you soon.”

“Bye.”

The smile grew more dreamy. Clark was apparently not dating anyone, and he was taking her out to dinner. Suddenly the evening was looking a lot brighter.

“Thanks for dinner, Clark,” she said as they exited the restaurant. “It was great.” She knew she was sounding date-like but she no longer cared.

He smiled at her. “Thanks for keeping me company.” He was acting date-like, too, if it wasn’t her imagination. It wasn’t unusual for them to flirt a little bit, but tonight...

“Well, someone had to keep you out of trouble,” she said lightly.

Dinner had been enjoyable — the food was excellent, but more importantly she’d really enjoyed spending the time with Clark. Her new perspective on romance seemed to have opened her eyes to something she’d always taken for granted, so she’d been aware of her own enjoyment, and the part he played in it. He had a great sense of humor, was good-tempered, and was a good listener. Somewhere along the way she’d realized how nice it was just to look at him.

She didn’t normally pay attention — he was just Clark — but tonight she’d really focused, and had come to the conclusion that he was gorgeous. Even the glasses, she decided, looked good on him. It was hard to imagine him without them.

She smiled to herself. She had it bad. She’d even missed him when he’d taken a bathroom break — it had felt like forever until he’d returned.

“So, can I walk you home?” She looked up, to find him gazing down with such a warm expression her breath caught. That was not the look that a man gave to his work partner. As soon as she saw it, though, he seemed to withdraw, his expression reflecting only friendship.

Okay, now she was going to have to investigate. The relentless curiosity that made her an exceptional reporter was now fully engaged; who was Clark and what did he really feel? “Please walk me home, Clark.” It was only a few blocks, and the night was mild. “Good weather, considering,” she commented.

He chuckled as they crossed the street. “Yeah, the crowds in Metro Square are lucky this year. Last year it was practically sleeting.”

“They’re nuts,” she declared, but felt a tug of affection toward them anyway. Watching the ball drop was a tradition, and even though it wasn’t really her tradition, she liked knowing that

others were doing it. She glanced at her watch. “Oh my gosh, Clark, it’s almost 11! How did that happen?”

“Good dinner?”

“Good company. Not to mention,” she hadn’t quite intended to add, “that exceptionally long bathroom break of yours.” She grinned at him. “What did you do, make a couple of phone calls?”

He ducked his head, looking uncomfortable. “Not exactly. I’ll, ah, tell you later, okay?”

She nodded peaceably but under the surface her instincts were stirred. She hadn’t really thought much about his absence — it was just sort of a Clark-thing that she no longer questioned. His response hinted that there was something there, she just couldn’t tell what.

Apart from the distant party sounds in Metro Square, the streets were fairly quiet, and so were they. Lois knew it was at least partly because she was preoccupied with thoughts of getting closer to Clark. He wasn’t talking much, either, though. What was he thinking?

She briefly wondered why, if Clark felt about her the way she hoped he did, he hadn’t showed it. Then again, she hadn’t exactly encouraged him, had she? Quite the opposite, really, and even when her feelings had begun to change she’d done her best to hide it.

What if she changed that? That could be good. Send out some signals and gauge his responses. No time like the present.

She moved closer to him, bumping him a little at the hip.

“Oops,” she said lightly, “broken pavement.”

“You okay?” he asked, his hand moving supportively towards the small of her back.

She promptly moved closer and put her arm around his waist. “I’m fine.”

After a brief hesitation, he brought his arm up and draped it across her shoulders. He glanced sideways at her, a questioning look on his face, but she just smiled. This felt right. Close to him was where she wanted to stay.

All too soon, they reached her building. Clark slowed down, but she tightened her grip and kept going. “Come on up with me, Clark.”

“You sure?” He sounded surprised but pleased. “You know,” he added, slowing down to look her in the face. “At midnight, it’s traditional for people to kiss.”

He was clearly giving her a chance to back down, or set some boundaries. Normally, she would have. Tonight, she gathered her courage and smiled. “In that case, you should definitely come in.”

His eyebrows climbed, but he no longer held back. They rode the elevator in silence. Lois felt a delicious shiver at the feel of his strong body against her side, and in anticipation of what might happen. Seemed like giving him signals was working pretty well.

They moved apart while Lois opened her door, and that seemed to restore a little normality. She closed the door behind them and worked on her locks while he wandered to her living room. She turned to see him standing in front of a sofa, a serious look on his face.

The silence was a little unnerving now, so she snapped the TV on to the New Year’s Eve party, the volume low. Then she walked over to face him. “Hey.”

He didn’t smile, but his gaze was intense. “Hi. Lois, I really enjoyed tonight.”

“Me, too. And it’s not over yet.”

“Isn’t it?”

She shook her head. “I made a New Year’s resolution.”

He looked a little thrown by the change in topic, a quizzical look on his face.

“I was thinking, earlier... about my life, and choices, and

realizing how many things I've done wrong.”

“Lois, you haven't—”

“Hush, Clark. You know I have; my personal life has been close to a disaster. But even through all that — well, most of that — you were there for me. And I never really gave you a chance, never paid attention to the wonderful guy who was right under my nose.”

His face softened into a smile. “I liked being there for you, anyway.”

“I'm glad. It's just, gradually, it's been dawning on me how important to me you are. When you were dead, I didn't think I could go on living—”

“What?” He frowned, and reached out to cup her elbows and draw her closer. “I didn't know... I'm sorry.”

She managed a wobbly smile. “I know. I tried to say something, but you fell asleep and I lost my nerve again, but then this week you were kidnapped, and I knew I couldn't stand to lose you. So that all got me thinking, tonight, and I realized that I...” she swallowed hard. “That maybe I loved you, and I had to know if you felt anything at all like that for me, because I thought maybe you did, or at least you used to, but then things went so well tonight...”

His hands slipped up her arms to her shoulders. “Lois... I don't know what to say.”

She stared at him, a lump forming in her stomach. “Oh. Well, I just wanted to know,” she repeated, feeling humiliated at being turned down. She looked away, blinking.

“You don't know yet,” he said, and she looked back at him. He was smiling so tenderly that it short-circuited her embarrassment. “Lois, I never wanted you to feel uncomfortable with me, but... the truth is, I love you. I have loved you ever since we met.”

She stared at him, her heart thumping. “Really?” she whispered.

He nodded, then leaned forward and kissed her. He backed off immediately, checking for her reaction. She reached up and pulled him back in for another, longer kiss, relief and joy coursing through her entire body.

A long while later, they pulled apart far enough to breathe. “Clark, I love you,” Lois said, feeling a burst of happiness just from saying it. “I love you.”

“I have wanted to hear that for so long,” he replied softly. “I love you more than I ever thought I could love anyone.”

She kissed him gently. “I'm sorry it took so long for me to see you, Clark. I thought I loved Superman, and I didn't see how like him you are.” She gazed at him happily, struck by a stray thought. “Hey, remember last year? I said every woman in love thinks her man looks like Superman. Turns out to be true.” She giggled. “You do look like...” her voice trailed off and her eyes widened as a hundred clues whirled through her mind and coalesced into a new pattern.

She narrowed her eyes at him, a thousand thoughts battling for precedence.

He gave her a little smile and shrugged in a tacit admission. In the background, the cheers on TV announced the arrival of the new year.

She felt her feet leave the floor, and looked down to see them hovering an inch in the air. She rolled her eyes at him, and fought against a grin. The thousand things she wanted to say receded into the background, and she kissed him again.

Everything else could wait.

THE END

Three things I want in my fic:

1. A phone call
2. A kiss

3. Thai food

Preferred season(s)/holiday [if applicable]: 2-4, preferably sometime during the Christmas season and/or New Year's Eve.

Three things I do not want in my fic:

1. Romantic rivals

2. Children/pregnancy

3. A Rickroll. (I'm kidding. I really mean song fic.)

I'm sorry, I couldn't avoid a few references to Mayson, but I kicked her to the curb early on, so I'm hoping that's okay...