

One Defective Bulb

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Written for the 2007 Christmas ficathon. Lois goes to replace the light bulb that mysteriously blew out at the marina condo.

This story is set right after the end of 'The Phoenix'.

Content warning: Fluff. Fluff. Fluff. Oh, and did I mention that this story contains nothing but fluff? If you're looking for something deep and/or angsty, you're in the wrong story. This is a ficathon story with the specific directive that it contain no plot. The full request is detailed at the end of the story.

My undying gratitude goes to LaraMoon for nudging me along and making the suggestions and doing the research that made all the difference. I couldn't have done this without her.

For Missy G. with the warmest of (belated) holiday wishes.

How hot did a light bulb have to become to shatter?

Lois shook her head in disbelief as she dropped what was left of that defective bulb into the trash can. Even more curious, when it had exploded, it had somehow burned two tidy little holes through the lampshade.

"Weird," she muttered to herself, running her finger over one of the neatly rounded scorch marks. Then again, the world was a weird place in which the unexplainable happened all the time. Vehicles crashed, people ran amok, and Pulitzers were awarded to stories about the decreasing effectiveness of pesticides in lieu of worthier stories. Right now, somewhere out in the gathering dusk, there was even a man who could fly. Lois wasn't sure anymore which was weirder — that Superman existed or that she took his existence for granted.

And speaking of men she took for granted...

Lois glanced over at the frosted glass of the bedroom door, her memory replaying the shadowy glimpse of her partner's amazing physique she had seen there.

Should she call Clark? She had told him she would talk to him in a couple of days, after all. Suddenly she wished she had been more definitive — and a little less hesitant — about appearing eager to see him again. If she called him now, it would be a day earlier than she had implied and he might read too much into that.

Or was she the one reading too much into Clark's actions? She had spent the last two days examining the nuances of every word he had said on their "almost" date. It was so unfair that she was still left breathless by the recollection of Clark cradling her in his arms as he carried her to the bedroom door. He had been so sweet that night. So understanding, so gentle, so... appealing. Or was she imbuing too much meaning into a gesture he had only meant as comforting and friendly?

The thought of being with Clark again, of him looking at her with that expression of warmth and undisguised affection that he sometimes had, made her heart race just a little faster. Bobby had said Clark was "moonin'" over her. What if that were true?

Lois moved towards the phone and then stopped herself. It would be a bad idea to talk to Clark while she was still obsessing over him. Heaven only knew what she might say. No, it was

better to wait until she could carry on a rational conversation. Better to wait until she had stopped thinking about how snugly his t-shirt fit the muscles she had absentmindedly caressed when they fell to the couch together.

She sat down heavily on that same couch and released a sigh for what could have been — if only she had ordered take-out from somewhere else. Her hand stroked over the cushion next to her. If only she'd been a little more clear-headed that night, she would have... what? Lois let out a self-deprecating laugh. She wouldn't have done anything. She might be bold enough to plant a kiss on Superman, but the thought of kissing her partner was enough to make her legs start shaking.

Why? He was just a guy. A guy who teased her and constantly corrected her copy. A guy who wore ugly ties and ate junk food without ever gaining an ounce. A guy who was annoyingly happy and positive all the time. Did he have any idea how irritating it was that he was so unfailingly cheerful? Couldn't he be pessimistic, just once in a while? Couldn't he go more than an hour without giving her that smile that made her insides melt? Would there ever be a day where he didn't help her put on her coat, or hold the door open for her, or do any number of those old-fashioned gestures that made him so fascinating?

The front door opened and Lois stood up quickly, feeling as though she had just been caught stealing. Her agitation increased when she saw that it was Clark in the doorway. He had a bottle of champagne tucked beneath one arm and was holding a lampshade.

"You're too late," she blurted out. "I've already taken care of it."

"Great minds, I guess." He grinned at her and nudged the door closed with his elbow.

"Yeah," Lois said, still thoroughly flustered by his sudden appearance. "I guess I should have called and saved you the trouble."

"It's no problem." Clark's gaze moved past her to the couch and he lifted one eyebrow inquisitively. "So what are you doing now?"

"Resting," she said quickly. "I was just resting."

She saw the unmistakable spark of mischief in his eyes — or maybe that was just the reflection off his glasses — as he said, "It's hard work, changing a light bulb."

Lois frowned. Had she really thought Clark was attractive? Sure, he looked really good in that dark leather jacket. But he also had an irritating propensity to be just as self-satisfied as all the other men she'd stupidly found charming.

"Not the light bulb," she sniffed in irritation. "Did it ever occur to you that maybe I walked here tonight?"

"You did?" Clark glanced down at the items he was holding. "You walked all the way here carrying a lampshade and a bottle of champagne?"

She narrowed her eyes at him. "No," she admitted grudgingly. "I, uh, oh never mind. I'll be going now."

Shouldn't he move away from the door? Where were his manners when she needed them most? Lois was almost to the door when he finally did move, taking a step forward to set the lampshade down on the coffee table. She startled, though, when he reached out to touch her arm to stall her.

"Wait." His tone was much softer than it had been before. "I'll walk you home."

Lois looked up at him and her heart began to pound frantically at this unexpected and lucky break. She shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant. "Sure. Why not?"

Lois knew she was talking too much, but she felt unaccountably afraid of lapsing into silence as they walked along the waterfront. Clark's geniality had continued and he seemed content just to listen to her ramble about the inequities of parking

tickets. Finally, at a loss for words, Lois turned and rested her arms on the rail to take in the view of downtown Metropolis on the other side of the river. There was a cool breeze coming off the water and she shivered involuntarily.

Clark wordlessly took off his jacket and draped it over her shoulders. She would have protested, but it was still warm from his body. Not only was it warm, but the jacket also held the mild musky smell of Clark mixed with the thick essence of leather. The weight of it across her shoulders was thrilling, almost like an embrace.

“Thank you,” she told him and gathered the jacket closed in the front. “But you’re not going to freeze now, are you? Because I don’t want—”

“I promise you, I’m fine.” Clark looked out over the West River as a container ship began to cross beneath the Ninth Street Bridge.

“It’s gorgeous, huh?” she asked him.

“I still can’t believe sometimes that I’m really here. Growing up, Metropolis was like this mythical place. I saw it in movies and on TV, read about in books and magazines, but I could only dream about living here.”

“So has it lived up to your expectations?”

“Definitely.” Clark leaned forward to join her in resting against the rail. “Being here is still like a dream come true.”

Lois smiled at the lights across the river, feeling proud that her hometown had lived up to Clark’s dreams.

“What about you?” Clark asked. “What was it like growing up here?”

“It was magic. All those tall buildings, so many bright lights, always something happening somewhere. I can’t imagine living anywhere else. And the people — there are so many people — and they all have a story. That’s part of why I went into journalism.”

“It wasn’t just to see what’s behind all those closed doors?” he teased.

“That’s right,” she answered lightly. “I’m only in this for the glory.”

“There was no glory in risking everything to help Eugene Laderman when he escaped from prison. You used the power of the press to help an innocent man, that took courage.”

Lois looked up at him, immensely flattered by this unexpected glimpse of herself through Clark’s eyes. It dawned on her that he might see her much more clearly than she had ever given him credit for. Wrapped up in the warmth of his jacket, she suddenly wanted to let him know that she didn’t really view him as an interloping hayseed.

“That story was when I realized that having a partner might be a good thing, you know. That maybe having *you* for a partner was a good thing.”

“For what it’s worth,” Clark said, nudging her elbow with his, “I always thought our being partners was a good thing.”

“How about a toast then? Or are you saving that for a special occasion?” Lois gestured at the bottle of champagne he was still holding.

“Anytime I get to see you in the moonlight is a special occasion.” Clark pulled away the foil from the top of the bottle and worked the cork loose. It popped and he managed to catch the cork just before it sailed out of reach.

“Impressive,” she said with a laugh.

Clark gave her a pleased smile. “You think?”

“Absolutely.” Oh, she was in trouble. She was already giddy and she hadn’t even had a single drop of alcohol yet.

He held the bottle out in invitation and she took it from, tipping it back for a quick swig. The champagne bubbled over as she drank and she wiped her chin with the back of her sleeve as she handed it over to him.

Clark took a sip, laughing as it bubbled over on him, and then

passed the bottle back to her. She put her lips to the opening and the thought raced through her mind that it was almost like kissing him. At the very least, she’d just shared germs with him. If she kissed him now, would he taste like the champagne?

They passed the bottle back and forth a few more times, content simply to watch the view. Then Lois asked, “What do you think happened to that light bulb?”

“What?” He coughed, apparently choking a little on the fizz.

“That night? When we were watching Bender? It sounded almost like it exploded, you know? How hot does a light bulb have to get to explode?”

He still sounded a little choked up as he answered. “The filament in an incandescent bulb burns at 2500 degrees Celsius.”

She blinked. “That hot?” Then she gave him a wry smile.

“You should go on ‘Jeopardy’. I’ll take things only I know for five hundred please, Alex.”

He laughed and gave an embarrassed shrug before taking another drink from the bottle.

So cute, she thought as she looked back out at the river. He’s so cute when he’s flustered. Oh hell, who was she kidding? He was cute all the time. She just hadn’t wanted to see it until recently. Several seconds ticked by as she listened to the water lapping against the pier and watched the line of taillights working their way across the bridge. What had he meant by that moonlight remark? Was he just teasing her again? Or mooning over her?

Lois tore her eyes from the river to look at her partner and saw that he was watching her, not the view. For a heart-stopping moment she was sure he was going to kiss her. If he tried, she wasn’t about to disappoint him. Then he gave a self-conscious shrug and held up the bottle in invitation.

“No, thanks,” she said. She was starting to feel a little light-headed.

Clark re-corked the bottle and set it down between them.

What if he had kissed her? A shiver went through her at the idea of Clark’s lips on hers.

“Are you still cold?” he asked.

Not wanting to admit the true reason for her tremor, she stammered, “I guess, uh, maybe, uh, a little.”

She should have thought of this sooner, Lois thought as Clark’s arm went around her shoulders. The faint possessiveness of his touch made the mild champagne-induced buzz she was experiencing take on a whole new flavor. There was a pleasant awareness gathering inside her as his fingers made lazy circles on her upper arm.

“Better?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she said. Lois closed her eyes and let her head tilt just a little until it was resting on his left shoulder.

Two seconds later she felt the weight of his chin on top of her head. Please, she thought. Don’t let this moment end. Let it go on and on. “Much better,” she whispered to herself.

Clark made the softest little hum, just a faint vibration against her hair. For a split second she wondered if he had heard her. Lois smiled to herself and pretended that he had; that he was just murmuring his agreement.

And then what? Her mind raced ahead, filling in the details. Clark would say something, low and sweet, that she was beautiful maybe. Or that her story on sexual harassment in the military deserved the Pulitzer over one on pesticides. Or maybe he could say both of those things. He’d tease her that he was going to harass her because she was so beautiful. And then he would tip her chin up and kiss her. He had kinda, almost, kissed her before. Sure, it was done out of self-preservation or to maintain their cover on a story, but she had never quite forgotten the pressure of his lips on hers.

What was he waiting for?

Surely he had to be freezing by now. The wind was starting to gust and she was just at the point of asking him if he wanted his

jacket back when he gave her shoulder one last squeeze and said, “Come on. Let’s get a cab.”

The ride home passed in a blur as Lois wove ever more elaborate fantasies in her head about how the night might end. He had to kiss her — he just had to. It wasn’t until they were standing in front of her door that she realized how silly she was being. What had happened to her? It had to be the champagne that was affecting her judgment.

“Oh, your jacket.” Lois took it off and held it out to him. “Thanks for the loan.”

Clark draped it over one arm and looked down at his feet.

It dawned on her that she should unlock the door and go inside now. Disappointment that he wasn’t going to kiss her made her clumsy and she fumbled with the locks on her door.

“Well…” Lois leaned one shoulder against the door, giving him one last chance before she opened it.

“Well…” Clark let out a nervous laugh.

It wasn’t going to happen. She looked like an idiot, standing there and waiting for him to kiss her when he obviously only thought of this as a friendly escort home. It wasn’t even as good as an almost date. This entire evening had been nothing more than Clark being old-fashioned again. That thought made the lingering sweetness of the champagne seem bitter.

“Good night, Clark,” she said glumly.

“Good night, Lois.”

He swallowed and then, suddenly, he was leaning closer. She scarcely had time to process the fact that this wasn’t her overactive imagination before his lips met hers in the barest touch. He didn’t move away but hovered, just a fraction from true contact. For a thrilling moment, neither of them moved. Then Clark pulled back slightly and she saw that his eyes were closed.

The fact that he had closed his eyes went through her like wildfire. Closing his eyes meant this was a real kiss, not an almost kiss. In a split second she had closed her own and leaned forward again to kiss him. She heard a whispering sound as his hand came up to cup her cheek and something dropped between them. His jacket, she realized. He had just dropped his jacket to the floor in his eagerness. Another wave of longing blazed across her senses and she lost her grip on the bottle of champagne. It hit the floor with a thud and he broke the kiss to laugh.

“We’re making a mess in your hallway,” he murmured.

“Doesn’t matter. I don’t have anything left to lose now.” She giggled against his mouth as she combed her fingers into his hair. It was just as silky and wonderful as she had ever imagined, now that she was able to really get her fingers into it.

“Me neither,” he whispered and kissed her again. This time his kiss was considerably less guarded. His mouth moved deliberately on hers, enveloping her upper lip between his, running the leading edge of his tongue across it as he got a good taste of her. Lois found herself backed up against her front door as he deepened the kiss. Not caring if — or what — the neighbors saw, she kissed him back, indulging fully in the long, slow, delicious dance of his mouth on hers.

His breathing turned heavier and he made a soft moan as his hand moved to the back her head, his fingers tightening in her hair. There was something urgent in that gesture and it made her knees wobble. She wound her arms around his neck for support, enjoying the sensation of his body pressed fully against hers.

Clark made a muffled groan and lifted his head. “I’d better leave now,” he offered regretfully.

“Oh,” she said, unable to come up with anything else. “Okay.”

“Can I call you tomorrow?” he asked, his voice softly hopeful.

“Y—, yes.”

He bent and picked up his jacket and the champagne. Clark

handed her the bottle, his fingers brushing against hers as he left it in her still-shaky hands.

“Til tomorrow then,” he whispered and bent to kiss the corner of her mouth. “Good night, Lois.”

“G’night.” She barely managed to get the words out. All she wanted to do was throw her arms around him again and drag him inside with her. Her mind swam with the thought of kissing Clark for hours on end. It sounded like heaven.

Once the door was shut safely between them, she leaned back against it and realized she knew exactly what had made that light bulb explode. Clark — it had to be Clark. She was about ready to shatter herself right now. Being close to him could superheat anything. Lois blushed as her thoughts took a decidedly fiery bent. She was going to kiss him again tomorrow; she knew that with a certainty.

And there wasn’t going to be anything ‘almost’ about it.

THE END

Missy’s request:

Three things I want in my fic:

1. Set after The Phoenix
2. Lots of romantic tension
3. Their first kiss — without car bombs exploding, dying DA’s, or anything that takes away from their first moment

Preferred season(s): S2

Three things I do not want in my fic:

1. A-plot
2. ‘Jimmy or Perry or anyone interruptus’
3. Lois or Clark romantically involved with a secondary character