

Go for the Brass Ring

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Summary: Superhero significant others commiserate about their lives at a support group.

Author's Notes: I thought it might be fun to visit a support group for those involved with superheroes. Note: I'm not a comic book fan. My superhero knowledge is limited to Lois & Clark, the 1960's Batman TV show, the 1970's Wonder Woman TV show, and recent Spider-Man and Iron Man movies. Thanks to Lynn and Bellarase for the beta.

"I'm sick of bailing him out. The looks people give me at parties when he runs out or he stands me up at restaurants. Or when he leaves and never returns. I'm tired of coming up with excuses for him. Last week he bailed on my mother! My mother! Now she's thinks he's a lost cause and she keeps referring me to her divorce lawyer," Lois Lane Kent complained to the people surrounding her, seated in a circle of folding chairs.

Several highly attractive women nodded sympathetically while clutching their coffee cups.

"That's the problem with having a secret identity," Pepper Potts, a stunning woman with straight strawberry blonde hair, claimed. "It's too hard to sustain."

"But if you don't have one, you become a target," Lois pointed out.

Pepper shrugged. "Hasn't been a big issue for me."

"It hasn't been all smooth sailing for you, either. Look at what Iron Man did to his house," Lois reminded her. "He seems like a loose cannon."

"That's just Tony's style." The woman grinned.

"Personally, I don't know what you see in him. He was arrogant before he became Iron Man. Even though he's become a superhero, he doesn't seem to have changed much," Lois said.

A middle-aged, bearded man, Arthur, intervened before Pepper could respond. "Lois! I understand you have strong opinions, but Pepper is allowed to make her own decisions. And what have we said about being nice?"

"Oh...yeah. Sorry," was her lackluster apology. "Just being honest."

"Maybe you've been safe because no one really knows you're a couple," Barbara Gordon, the brunette Gotham city librarian, snidely hissed.

"Look who's talking," Pepper retorted. "If you and Batman are a couple, then why does he flirt so much with Catwoman? Everybody knows about that."

Barbara eloquently shrugged.

"That's it! That's the point!" Lois shrieked, jumping out of her chair. "You just don't get it, on so many levels. You don't care. If Superman ever did that to me – I'd be...I'd be...out of my mind. Insane with rage. You're not trapped by your feelings. You don't have as much emotionally invested in the relationship as the rest of us do."

She sank back into her chair. "We can't escape. If we stay, we're burdened with their secrets and their whacked-out lifestyles. If we go...well...I don't even want to think about that."

"Besides, you're a crime fighter. You're one of them – what are you doing here?"

"I'm not sure why I'm still here," MJ, a redheaded aspiring actress chimed in.

"Who asked you?" Pepper replied.

MJ's mysterious encounter with Spider-Man in a rainy alleyway had shaken her enough to make her seek this support group. She still remained unaware that her childhood friend, Peter Parker, was the man behind the mask. The other group members had suspicions based on MJ's accounts but they had to let her figure it out on her own.

Lois ignored MJ, needing to address Barbara first. "You're not madly in love with Bruce Wayne."

"Don't say his real name!" Barbara cringed as did others. Saying aloud secret identities was social taboo, even though the information was common knowledge among those gathered at the meeting.

Eyes downcast, Lois nodded a silent apology towards Barbara. In the heat of the moment, she'd lost her temper.

"These rooms are sacred. Whatever is said here will not leave these walls," Arthur reminded them while fingering his beard.

"Why am I still here?" MJ asked, more to herself.

Lois rolled her eyes. "Believe me, you'll figure it out soon enough."

"Why are you here?" Barbara diverted everyone's attention to the only male in the group.

"I'm new. Steve Trevor." He was a handsome man with a firm jawline, clad in an officer's uniform for the US Navy.

Arthur put up a hand and looked knowingly at the others, who parroted, "Hi Steve."

"I...er...I'm involved with a super."

"You're new to our group. Can you relate to anything that Lois is saying?"

"In some ways. Wonder Woman has always helped in a crisis yet she hasn't revealed her secret identity to me. It hurts me that she feels she can't trust me. It's not like I'd tell anyone. Honestly, I wouldn't," Steve answered.

"It's hard for them to tell." Glaring at Pepper Potts, Lois added, "For most of them, anyway. They're afraid. It's a burden they're putting on you. They know it. It never goes

away or gets any easier."

"I just want to be with her more. I never know when she's coming or going," Steve said.

"That sounds a little like Peter," MJ replied.

Pepper's mouth opened but Barbara and Lois shot her warning glares. MJ was starting to put the pieces together but they couldn't interfere. It wouldn't be fair to her.

"Sometimes he's great and other times he just doesn't show up when it's something really important. Like my opening night at 'The Importance of Being Earnest'."

"I don't know if I can live like this much longer," Steve said.

A knock on the door brought a hush to the discussion. Jimmy Olsen's head popped into the doorway. "Is this the meeting?"

Lois plunged to the floor, pretending to check the nonexistent shoe laces of her pumps while Arthur replied, "I think you're looking for the comic relief support group. It's down the hall."

"Thanks."

After he'd left and the door was securely shut, Arthur spoke with the group. "Now that you've had a chance to vent your feelings, you need to be honest. Could you have a relationship with a normal man?" Looking towards Steve, he added, for his benefit, "Or woman?"

More calm than she'd been before, Lois answered, "Believe me, I tried. At first it was great. No excuses. You could make plans and have a real chance of actually carrying them out. Then it got boring. Some of those men were too chicken to even do the normal stuff I do on my job. Stuff that Superman wouldn't have batted an eye at. And the ones that had guts weren't especially honest."

"Other women could never compare to Wonder Woman," Steve admitted.

"You do realize that they need you, don't you? You keep them grounded in reality," Arthur said, looking about the room.

"At a cost to our own lives!" Lois responded heatedly.

"C'mon, now. There are benefits too. Right, Lois?" Arthur reminded her.

Lois blushed. "Well, sure. It's great to be able to fly to Rio at a moment's notice, and not have to go commercial. Or to get chocolates from France or tulips from Holland."

"You've got better than that!" Pepper urged. "What about flying and, you know...sex?" She looked expectantly towards Lois. "You two have gotta be members of the mile high club."

"I don't think that's any of your business." Lois' cheeks grew darker.

"What about the cape?" Pepper leered. "A little role playing?"

Uncomfortable, Lois tried to divert the attention. "You're all involved with superheroes, you must have...stories." Looking about the room, she realized something. "Pepper Potts, you rat! Most of you are barely in a relationship! No fair!"

"Surely, Lois, you must realize part of my pleasure in attending this group is listening to you babble," Pepper purred.

"I'm the only one with a real relationship. You guys are pathetic. How can you be content with what you have?"

"Lois," Arthur warned, but it was too late. She was on a roll.

"Barbara, face it, you and Batman never had anything to begin with. There's no chemistry. No passion. Zero. Zip. Nada. You owe it to yourself to find someone that can share that with you. And you might want to update your hairstyle."

Barbara's hand reached to her sixties-style bob.

Turning to Pepper, Lois continued. "He'll never change. He never was a good guy to begin with."

"I know. But vanilla is boring."

"Steve – get the courage to approach her. Tell her how you feel. Be a man. I think she'd like that," Lois said.

"That seems like good advice."

Lois' eyes next fixed upon MJ. "Of everyone in this group, I think you and I have the most in common."

"Why do you think anything's ever going to happen between me and Spider-Man?" MJ sadly replied.

"You should see your face when you tell people about that kiss in the rain with Spider-Man when he was hanging upside down. It's a great story. Your whole face lights up. You...glow. Has any other man done that for you? Ever?"

"It doesn't matter. It's not real," MJ answered glumly. "It's never going to happen."

"You don't know that. Spider-Man seems to pop in and out of your life a lot. I don't think that's a coincidence. And that kiss? How can he stay away? It may take time, but have the courage to wait and be ready when it happens. Don't settle for ordinary. Don't be afraid to grab the brass ring. I'm really glad I did it."

"Lois, for all your complaining, we know you're devoted to Superman. What is it that you really want?" Arthur asked.

"For others to respect him."

"You mean his secret identity?"

Lois nodded. "Doctors have to leave in the middle of dinner. Firemen are called in the middle of the night. They have lousy schedules. Yet they're respected. They're heroes. My mother is convinced that my husband is a loser."

"But you can't tell, can you?" Pepper gloated. "Didn't think those glasses would be such an effective disguise. At least Batman and Spider-Man have the sense to wear a mask that covers their face."

Lois didn't rise to the bait. More seriously, she stated, "No, I can't tell. And I won't."

"You know why he does it," Arthur led.

"Yes. And I'm okay with it. Sometimes I just have to vent. Same time next week?"

"You know it."

THE END