

The Ears Have It

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Rated: PG-13 for mild language, vaguely impure thoughts, and a lot of unsubstantiated insults aimed at Mayson Drake.

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Summary: Superman's blindness results in an "illuminating" talk with Lois.

A missing scene/rewrite from "The Eyes Have It." I was wondering one day why Clark suddenly found the courage to ask Lois out in "The Phoenix."

My heartfelt thanks to Emily for being so awesome and, most especially, for services cheerfully rendered. :)

I've had a lot of bad days, but nothing has ever been as bewildering and frightening as my current situation. I'm sitting on Lois' couch with my shoulders hunched and my head in my hands when I hear her approaching. I instinctively look up, my eyes sightlessly searching, when she stops a few feet away from me.

"Superman, can I get you anything?"

I shake my head. "No, thank you."

I'm feeling self-conscious, so I pull my cape closed around me like a blanket. Given the chance to do it over again, I'd still save Lois even if it lost me my sight. And yet I can't stop thinking *what if?* What if I had flown away sooner? What if I had scooped her up and left without confronting her attackers? What if I hadn't been arrogant enough to believe that nothing – especially a beam of light – could hurt me? I'm so lost in thought that I jump when something brushes softly against my shoulder.

"Sorry!" Lois pulls her hand away and I instantly miss her touch. I wish she'd do it again; give me that little piece of familiarity in the unrelenting darkness that has swallowed me whole. If it wasn't for the soothing and steady beat of her heart, I think I'd be in full panic mode right now.

"Are you sure there isn't someone you need to call? Maybe there's someone waiting at home for you?"

A smile tugs at the corner of my mouth – she never stops investigating, no matter the circumstances. "I live alone, Lois."

"Oh," she says, and I can hear the faintest tone of satisfaction in her voice. "Well, I guess not, then."

Lois takes a seat next to me on the couch. I can feel her staring at me, taking advantage of the situation to study me when she thinks I won't know. I guess I owe her as much for all the times I've gawked at her without permission. Watching Lois in the break area is the highlight of my mornings. I love the fall of hair across her face when she turns her head and the graceful motion of her hands as she prepares her coffee. I especially love it when she has to get something off the top shelf. She'll go on tiptoe, elongating the already sleek lines of her calves, while all I can do is sit at my desk and watch in awestruck wonder.

"Snell's law gives the relationship between angles of incidence and refraction for a wave impinging on an interface between two media with different indices of refraction," she states matter-of-factly.

"Uh..." I'm not sure what to say. Lois has been spouting esoteric non sequiturs ever since her apartment was broken into.

"Sorry," she mutters. "I'm not sure where that came from."

There's a pause and I think we're both trying to come to grips with the oddness of our current situation. "Would you like me to

turn on the television?" Lois offers. "Or a radio?"

I shake my head. "You don't have to entertain me. Just do whatever you'd normally do."

She lets out a self-deprecating chuff of air. "Yeah. Right."

"What would you be doing if I wasn't here?" I ask, curious to hear her answer.

"I don't know," she says after several seconds of thought. "Laundry, maybe."

"On a Friday night?" I don't believe her for a second. "It's going to ruin my image of Lois Lane if you're serious."

Lois shifts, and I think she's turned to face me more fully. "You have an image of me? Do tell."

My grip on the edges of my cape relaxes as I warm up to this game. "I could see you doing laundry on a Sunday afternoon. Or maybe a Wednesday night. But not on a Friday. I suspect on Friday nights you're busy breaking into buildings or infiltrating a motorcycle gang."

She favors me with one of her full-throated laughs, the kind she only gives out when she's genuinely amused. "Why would I spend my Friday nights breaking into buildings?"

"Because that gives you most of the weekend to dig up whatever it is you're looking for. I bet you spend Saturday nights collating your information, and Sunday typing it up."

"Not all day Sunday," she corrects tartly as her knee makes contact with mine. "I take a break on Sunday afternoons to do my laundry."

"I knew it," I say with a grin. For a moment, I can almost forget that I'm blind, and that I'm wearing the cape.

"I guess you know me better than I thought," she teases. "But you're wrong about my plans for tonight. I had no illicit activities planned. What about you? If you weren't stuck here with me, what would you be doing?"

Avoiding Mayson, I think. Apparently she interprets my silence as reticence, because her knee pulls away from mine. "Surely you don't spend all your time flying around the city and waiting for stuff to go wrong?"

"I don't," I admit and fight the urge to start squirming. Flirting with Lois tops my list of favorite things to do, but I shouldn't really flirt with her when I'm Superman. Still, I can't help but move my leg slightly so that our knees are touching again. I suddenly, desperately, need that connection with her.

"So what else do you do, besides fly around?" Lois persists. "Do you read?"

I nod. "Sure."

"What do you read?"

"Anything and everything. I love reading."

She lets out an exasperated sigh, although her knee presses a little more tightly to mine. "Superman, don't take this the wrong way, but you're terrible at answering questions."

"Maybe you're not any good at asking them," I tease.

She makes a sound that tells me she believes I couldn't be more wrong. "I guess you aren't going to tell me anything too personal."

I nod. "I hope you can understand why."

"Sure, you have a mystique. Besides, it would totally ruin it for me if it turned out you liked reading Sweet Valley High."

I'm caught off guard and can't help but laugh. Then I sit up straighter to compensate for being so unguarded and my leg loses contact with hers.

"Can I ask you something else? Something that isn't about you personally?" There's the faintest hint of nervousness in her voice as she asks.

"Sure."

"You and Clark are friends, right?"

Once again, I have to fight the urge to squirm. "That's a personal question, but, yes."

"Does he, uh, you know, ever talk to you about women?"

“Women?” I hedge, afraid of where this question might be leading.

“For instance,” Lois continues and her knee bumps into mine again in her eagerness, “has he ever mentioned Mayson Drake?”

“Mayson Drake?” I echo, trying to buy some time to think. This is not the line of questioning I expected.

“I know you know her. That blonde barracuda who works for the DA’s office? I never thought Clark was that naïve or desperate, but she just keeps coming around and I think he might actually be gullible enough to go out with her again.”

I have no idea what to say in the face of this kind of vehemence.

“She’s just using him!” Lois rises from the couch and I can picture her waving her hands in irritation.

“Using him?” I can’t quite hide the skepticism in my tone. “I hardly think—”

“Are you telling me that you don’t see a problem when an unsophisticated guy from a small town gets deeply involved with a rapacious, fast-talking slut? You can practically hear the tick-tock of her biological clock when she walks in the room. She’s obviously bent on seducing Clark so that she can trap him into doing the honorable thing and marrying her after the inevitable happens.”

“I—” Now I really have no idea what to say. Mayson is many things, but I would never describe her as a rapacious, fast-talking slut bent on carrying my love child. I shake my head. “I’m pretty sure Clark isn’t interested in her like that.”

“Hmmp.” Lois is definitely not convinced.

“I promise you, Clark is not all that interested in dating Mayson.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I, uh, I just am.”

“So he’s not in love with her?”

I shake my emphatically. “Not even remotely.”

Lois takes a seat next to me again – and this time she’s sitting much closer. Now it’s not just our knees that are making contact. The whole length of her thigh is pressed to mine.

“So... Is he in love with somebody else?” She tries to make her tone light, but I can hear the effort she’s making.

I shake my head again. “We don’t actually talk about his love life.”

She makes an exasperated sigh. “Then how do you know he’s not in love with Mayson?”

“Because...” I flounder for a reason. “Because he never really talks about her at all.”

In the silence that follows, I can sense that she’s somewhat pleased with my answer. I even start to relax a little, thinking that maybe the subject is going to be dropped. And then she asks, “Does he ever talk about me?”

According to my mom, I talk about Lois all the time. “About you?”

“Yes. Does Clark ever talk about me?”

“Uh... I know he respects you. He thinks you’re very talented.”

Lois lets out a disgusted growl. “He respects me? Great.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing,” she answers glumly. “Who doesn’t want to hear that they’re respected? It’s just—” She pauses, and then continues in a more wistful tone, “Clark’s my best friend.”

“I’m positive he feels the same way about you.”

I can feel her fidgeting as she takes a deep breath. “Women throw themselves at him all the time, you know.”

“They do?” Sure, I’ve had the odd flirtation, but I can only think of a few times when any feminine attention directed my way has been blatant. Of the two of us, Lois is the one who routinely turns heads.

“Trust me, Clark is very attractive.” Lois’ tone is dry. “And

he’s totally clueless about it, which just makes him that much more attractive. In the two years that I’ve known him, hardly a day has gone by that some woman hasn’t flirted with him. Clark never even seems to notice that they’re coming on to him. He just gives them this polite smile like it never even happened.”

Because it never happens, I think. It’s a revelation to hear Lois Lane sounding so jealous. Over *me*. Not Superman, but Clark. You’d think every woman I meet flirts with me, if you believed her version of events.

“Maybe he doesn’t know how to flirt?” I suggest.

“Oh my God, you couldn’t be more wrong! He can definitely flirt.” I hear her swallow, and then her voice turns softer. “He does flirt with some of them. He flirts with Mayson.”

I’m about to deny that, but Lois isn’t done yet. “I know, I know. You don’t think he likes her like that. But have you seen them together? I have. And it’s not pretty.”

I can’t resist stating the obvious. “You’re jealous.”

I’m expecting a denial, but instead she whispers, “I hate it when he smiles at her.”

I’m shocked into silence.

She clears her throat softly and continues, “He used to smile at me like that. I guess it’s true what they say – you don’t know what you’ve lost until it’s gone.”

“You haven’t lost Clark.”

“You’re right. I mean, I would have had to be something more than a friend to have really lost him.”

“Clark’s under the impression that you only like him as a friend.”

She doesn’t answer. I wish I could see her, so I could have a hint as to what she’s thinking.

“He’s my best friend,” she says softly. “And, most days, that’s enough. But sometimes...” Her voice trails off and the apartment becomes so quiet that all I can hear is both our heartbeats.

The silence – and my curiosity – stretch on and on until they become exquisite enough to make me prompt, “Sometimes?”

“Sometimes...” She lets out a nervous laugh. “I don’t know. Maybe you could hint to him, you know, that someone besides Mayson would like to go out with him.”

“Why don’t you ask him out?”

“Because then I’d be just as forward as she is!” Lois sounds horrified at the idea. “I want him to date me because it was his idea and not because I chased him. Why can’t he flatter me, like he does Mayson?”

“He flatters her?” For the life of me, I can’t think of a single time I’ve flattered Mayson.

“And he’s kissed her.”

Lois saw that? Then again, she did show up pretty soon afterwards. I didn’t realize until just now that she actually saw us. I can’t help shaking my head. “I think Mayson kissed him, not the other way around.”

“He wasn’t exactly fighting her off,” Lois says wryly. Her elbow nudges mine. “Look, I know you’re always trying to find the good in people, but you’re going to have to take a pass on me liking Mayson Drake. Besides, she hates me every bit as much as I hate her.”

I’m utterly baffled now. “Why would Mayson hate you?”

“You’re kidding, right? She likes Clark, and I spend most of the day around him. She hates me for the same reason I hate her. Except he’s required to be with me, and chooses to be with her.”

“He hasn’t chosen to be with her, Lois. You said yourself she’s persistent.”

“She’s like a human rash! God, I can’t believe he kissed her.”

“He didn’t kiss her—”

“Whatever. You haven’t seen them together. You haven’t seen him smile at her and you haven’t seen—” She suddenly goes perfectly still next to me and then, in a much calmer tone of

voice, intones, “The Planck area, which is equal to the square of the Planck length, plays a role in black hole entropy.” Lois lets out a sigh. “I wish I’d quit doing that.”

I reach over and find her hand, then give it a soft squeeze. “I’m sure it’s a temporary thing.”

“It’s nothing compared to what you’re going through.”

I force a smile. “That’s temporary, too. It’s all going to work out fine.”

“You don’t have to be so relentlessly positive all the time, you know. I promise I won’t tell anyone that you had a pessimistic moment.”

This time my smile is genuine. “Someday I may take you up on that.”

“But not tonight?”

“No. Tonight I have to believe that everything is going to work out okay. Things will look better in the morning.”

There’s a long pause and I start to let go of her hand, afraid that maybe I’ve crossed a line, when Lois laces her fingers with mine. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For being you. For being so relentlessly cheerful, no matter what.” Her fingers tighten on mine. “Sometimes you remind me of Clark.”

My blood seems to go cold. “I do?”

“You’re both glass half full kind of guys.” She sighs and releases my hand. “So here’s what we’re going to do. Tomorrow we’re going to figure out what’s going on with your eyes. And once that’s settled, you’re going to tell Clark to suck it up and ask me out. Okay?”

“Okay.”

She stands up, but I don’t hear her walking away. “I, uh, I guess you’re either going to have to tell me where you live or else sleep here tonight.”

“Would my staying here be too much of an imposition? You could take me to Clark’s—”

“It’s not an imposition!” she rushes to reassure me. “I’m glad I can finally do something to repay all the times you’ve helped me. So, uh, you’re taller than I am. Would you like the bed?”

As tempting as that sounds, I have to turn the offer down. “I couldn’t take your bed, Lois. The couch will be fine.”

“Wait here. I’ll be right back.”

I listen as she moves across her apartment towards the bedroom. I can hear a closet door open and some shuffling noises. Her footsteps soften after she takes off her shoes, but I can still hear her footfalls as she walks back to me. She takes my wrist and moves my hand to sit on top of the bedding she’s set next to me.

“There’s a pillow and a blanket for you. Can I get you anything else?”

“No, thank you.”

There’s a pause and I can sense that she’s reluctant to leave. I don’t know if it’s because she’s worried I’m going to do more damage to her apartment, or if it’s the novelty of having Superman sleeping on her couch. Honestly, I’m not sure I’m going to get any sleep tonight anyway. In spite of what she thinks are my ‘glass half full’ tendencies, I’m scared to death that this blindness might be permanent. Truthfully, right now being near her is probably the only thing in the world stopping me from sinking into utter despair.

“Normal light vibrates equally in all directions perpendicular to its path of propagation.”

After we both have puzzled over that one for a few seconds, Lois giggles. “You know, it wouldn’t be nearly as bad if I actually understood what I was saying.” Her hand touches my elbow. “If you need anything, during the night, don’t hesitate to ask.”

A wave of warmth, starting where her hand is, spreads through me. It’s odd, but when I’m around her, and especially

when I’m wearing the cape, I feel stronger. And now, with her gentle touch and her offer to help, I suddenly feel capable again. I didn’t fully believe it earlier, but now I’m certain that we really are going to figure out what’s happened – together.

“Thank you,” I manage to whisper, still reeling from the sense of power that she’s imbued in me.

“Anytime.” Her hand pats my arm and moves away.

Even though my world is already dark, I close my eyes as I listen to her walk away. It’s all I can do not to call out to her and confess, once and for all, how much I need her. I want her to know just how much of Superman’s strength and goodness are because of her influence and her belief in me.

Right now seems like a lousy time to start confessing. I can’t do it blind. I have to be able to see her face. Most of all, we need to be on more equal footing. I can’t be in the cape. I need to be me, Clark, telling my best friend the secret that will either bind us together or tear us apart.

Just once, though, before I potentially ruin everything, I want the chance to simply be the guy she’s dating. I want just one night where I can smile at her, and flatter her, and maybe even kiss her.

Our future together has to start somewhere.

I’m going to ask her out.

THE END