

Hot Chocolate or Double Shot Espresso?

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Summary: Lois Lane is catching up with her old college friend, Molly Flynn, over dinner. As the two friends enjoy their time together, does anybody care to know what or rather who the topic of their discussion might be?

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A/N: Summer always brings me happy memories. Case in point; meeting up with my friends at outdoor cafes on a Friday night in Manhattan. What did we chat about besides the latest movies and the Yankees? Handsome men in whom we were interested! So, I thought, why not apply that to Metropolis? Let's see what comes from it!

Thanks so much to a very patient BlueOwl for being my beta.

Two women were sitting in one of downtown Metropolis's most popular outdoor eateries, *Halcyon's Edge*. It had a warm and comfortable neighbor vibe. The perfect spot for serious professionals to have dinner, but without obnoxiously loud music and even louder conversations. The restaurant served exquisite dishes like grilled fish with jasmine rice and sautéed vegetables for vegetable lovers and the more traditional Cheeseburger and fries for those with simpler tastes.

One was a striking brunette who wore a no-nonsense, light-weight woolen charcoal-gray skirt suit with a lavender shell blouse. The suit clearly stated this was a business-woman who was all about being a professional. Her red-haired friend sported pressed designer blue jeans, a gorgeous hand-knitted white sweater created from Italian merino wool, and a luxurious, paisley-pattern burgundy shawl thrown nonchalantly over her slender shoulders. A completely different work outfit from her friend's, suited for the young and hip employee of a rising computer company.

It was a pleasant late Friday afternoon in early April. The last tendrils of winter lingered in the air, and the two women were catching up after not seeing each other for over a month. They were discussing a well-worn topic: the lack of datable men in the great city of Metropolis.

"Lucy has been on my case again about dating. She seems to think I should have a set list of guys to take me out every Friday night. Great, that's all I need, my younger sister acting like my mother!" Lois said, rolling her eyes.

"Oh come on! With all the handsome men you meet while hunting down stories, don't tell me *none* of them are interesting. Mind you, I'm talking *men*, not guys. Say, what happened to that doctor, Mitchell?" Molly replied while

spearing a chunk of fresh avocado dripping with lemon balsamic vinaigrette from her salad.

Lois winced at the memory upon hearing of her last boyfriend's name. "Too busy being a hypochondriac. He stood me up on the night of the White Orchid Ball because he had—get this—the sniffles!"

Molly's eyes grew wide. "Lex *Luthor's* White Orchid Ball? That's the year's hottest society event! Imagine getting the chance to rub shoulders with Metropolis's movers and shakers, and he skips it? See, Mitchell's a perfect example of a *guy*, not a man. He kinda reminds me of that wimpy coffee drink...a low-fat latte. It tastes okay at first but has no staying power."

Adding a little pepper to her tilapia, Lois said, "Hey, I like low-fat lattes! What I get at the *Java Perk* lasts me until lunch...sometimes. You're right about Mitchell. He looked great on the outside, but after a month or two I realized there's nothing of substance. Unless I wanted to have an in-depth discussion about a particularly loathsome disease he was studying."

Molly's fork stopped before spearing another piece of avocado. "Ewwh! So *not* dinner conversation!"

"Sorry. He is a microbiologist...not a doctor. Diseases, especially interesting ones, are his thing," Lois said with a shrug.

"Again, not dinner conversation!" She chewed thoughtfully on the avocado, swallowed, and then said, "Speaking of men. What about Clark?"

Remembering her last federal disaster of a relationship with a work colleague, Lois rolled her eyes and said, "He's my *work* partner, Molls. Not fishing in that particular pond ever again."

Molly Flynn's hands gestured in the air. The silver bracelets on her wrists made light chiming sounds and emphasized her next words. "Claude Debarre was a low-class snake. It's great Perry finally caught onto his tired behavior and booted him out of the newsroom and *off* the paper. Clark, on the other hand, is intelligent, a real gentleman and most important of all, he likes you. His eyes smolder...like...like hot chocolate when he looks at you!"

"Oh Molls! That's just his Midwest manners coming out. Clark likes everybody. I can't think of a single person in the bullpen that dislikes him. Except Ralph. He does think quickly on his feet, though. That man gets more Superman exclusives than me!"

As for the gentleman part, Lois thought for a moment about how he tricked her into searching in the Metropolis reclamation plant looking for Superman's spaceship. He had given her a real "life lesson" on how to be considerate of others. No reason for Molly to know anything about that specific misadventure! Lois leaned forward, now determined to change the subject. "What about that project manager on your accounting forensics team, Kyle Fortescue? Please tell me he's not as stuffy as the name implies."

Her friend's green eyes lit up, and the hint of a smile tugged on her lips. "Aw, Kyle's fun. He mentioned a bunch of us from the office should go out to lunch or maybe catch a movie. Sadly, he's made it perfectly clear to one of the administrative assistants who had a mad crush on him, that he's not interested in a serious relationship."

"Oh? Why not?" Lois asked.

"Apparently, the man loves to travel. Working for Continental Crossings is a temporary gig. He's saving money to buy a sailboat and circumnavigate the world. Something like that Michael Douglas movie, *Jewel of the Nile*...or was it *Romancing the Stone*?"

Lois nodded thoughtfully and said, "*Jewel of the Nile*. Wow. At least he's not boring. Maybe just go on a few group dates for the fun of it? I heard *The Pelican Brief* was really good."

Wrinkling her nose in distaste, Molly said, "Ever the reporter! I'd rather see the comedy, *Grumpy Old Men*."

Lois said in a low tone, "What about *The Age of Innocence*? Daniel Day Lewis gives a fabulous performance. Now there is a man that smolders..."

Molly's face lit up, and she nodded enthusiastically. "Lane, that's an excellent suggestion. Maybe you're right. What harm can come from a bunch of us from the office going out together? Talk about team building! If things really go well, who knows what might happen? Hmmm, I have been thinking about ditching Metropolis for a bit and

seeing the world. Maybe Kyle might take me on as a first mate?"

Lois snickered, "Ha! Molly Flynn sailing on the high seas? Who got severe motion sickness on a speed boat when we were in Miami during spring break? Now you're talking about sailing around the world! Unlikely!"

Spotches of red lit up Molly's cheeks, and she groaned. "Isn't that what life jackets and motion sickness medicine is for? Now, back to Clark. I saw how you looked at him the last time I was in the bullpen."

Lois took a sip of her white wine. The easy banter of other customers surrounding them slowly faded into the background. The tug of attraction she felt toward her handsome partner had been growing steadily over the past few months. A tug she was working hard to stick on the back burner, like an old story in the *Daily Planet's* dead files. Talking about possible men to date was fun, but these days, she wanted to concentrate on her career. She had her sights on getting another Kerth award. She couldn't do that and pursue a serious relationship at the same time.

To be honest, the time she had spent dating Mitchell Gaines had been more work than he was worth. He had canceled dates at the last minute too many times. Not because of work or a family emergency, but because of some made up "illness". The White Orchid Ball had been the last straw, and Clark had attended the sumptuous event in Mitchell's place. Truth be told, they had had a good time. The "Hack from Nowhere" had proven to be a surprisingly good dancer. After that evening, Mitchell had quickly become a faded memory, and Clark had been quickly promoted to her "plus one" for *Daily Planet* events and assignments.

The problem was the *other* man whom she often thought about. Superman. Obviously, she couldn't tell her friend that, so instead, she replied, "Frankly, Molly, I don't know. Clark's one of a kind...a real Boy Scout. If it weren't for him contacting Superman so he could stop Ryan from using that killer satellite, we wouldn't be here right now enjoying dinner."

With a shudder, Molly said, "Yeah, my ex-fiance's coming back from the dead and taking over a military complex for his own financial gain was a shock. I still can't believe he had General Marshall killed and orchestrated a city-wide blackout to further his plans. Absolutely nuts! If you and Clark hadn't arrived when you did and contacted Superman, we would have been killed if that laser had struck the base."

"Yeah, thankfully Superman stopped Ryan and Colonel Fane from escaping," Lois agreed, unable to stop herself from also adding, "He's simply amazing."

Molly noted the dreamy expression on her friend's face, sat up, and spoke. "Lois, the Man of Steel is a man. He's a yummy Super Double Shot Espresso of a man. Nonetheless, Clark Kent is more 'down to earth' and dare I say... available?"

"What wrong with Superman?" Lois asked warily.

Molly hunched her shoulders in an exaggerated shrug and said, "Nothing. But, like Kyle, he has a separate agenda. One which does *not* include having a relationship beyond 'dates' with socialites for worthy charities. He's busy stopping bullets, catching airplanes in midflight and saving a certain lady reporter from the jaws of death."

"'Jaws of death'? After all these years you still can't put that one semester of theatre behind you. And I'll have you know I've gotten out of plenty of tight spots long before he showed up!" Lois retorted without heat as she chuckled.

Molly wiggled her eyebrows and said with a smirk. "Uhh. That's not what those *Daily Planet* headlines say! Okay then, since Lois Lane is a hot-shot investigative reporter, any idea what Superman does when he's *not* flying around Metropolis in tights?"

Lois sat still for a moment, thinking deeply. "That's a mystery worth investigating, because I honestly don't know."

Molly's eyes glistened with quiet triumph. It wasn't every day to experience a baffled Lois moment, but here she was. "Come on, old college chum, you can't pull the wool over my eyes. I *know* there's serious interest in Clark *and* Superman. But you can't have it both ways. So who is it going to be? A kiss of Hot Chocolate or Super Double Shot Espresso?"

Lois leaned back in her chair, thought for a moment, and with an odd expression on her face, replied. "That's something to think about."

"Of course it is," Molly said with a thoughtful nod.

The two friends continued their conversation through the rest of the dinner and while eating dessert. Molly decided she was going to encourage a group of her co-workers to spend time together outside of the office. Maybe play darts at the *Peck and Plume* or attend a movie. Seeing Molly so energized by the idea had Lois pleased. She only hoped Kyle, who would not be around for long, didn't turn into another disappointment, like Mitchell.

Upon leaving the restaurant, Lois and Molly promised to get together again at the end of the month. During her drive through Metropolis's meandering Friday night traffic, Molly's words echoed in Lois's mind, "*You can't have both.*" Something about that kept nagging at the back of her

brain. Wait... Didn't Molly also mention something about a... a kiss? Why use that particular word while talking about caffeinated drinks? As she opened the multiple locks to her apartment, images appeared in her brain that stirred up deep emotions that had previously been tucked away like a treasure.

Like a film flashback, the scene between herself and Clark while on assignment in the Luxor Hotel's Honey-moon Suite came to mind. As she was looking through the large black surveillance camera watching Congressman Ian Harrington talk with Thaddues Roake, Clark had somehow heard Ingeborg the maid coming into the suite announcing she had fresh towels. Quicker than Lois had thought possible, Clark had gathered up the surveillance equipment, thrown it on the perfectly made bed, and then savagely yanked the covers over everything. Only seconds after that, Lois had been on the bed, feeling a tripod leg sticking in her back and Clark was kissing her, which had come as a shock to both Lois and the embarrassed maid!

Shocking as it may have been, but it had also been a sweet, little surprise. The tender touch of his lips against hers had been electric, searing and elicited an array of erogenous sensations she hadn't expected. Still, the warmth, excitement, and sheer heart-flipping butterflies in her stomach had made the whole memory delightfully unforgettable.

For days afterwards, she would sneak quick peeks over to Clark's desk when he was deep into drafting an article, and her traitorous thoughts had slipped to the wrong places. Oh, such thoughts were not good, not smart, and most of all, *not* for Lois Lane, investigative reporter for the *Daily Planet*.

The next scene that came to mind was the goodbye kiss she had shared with Superman before he flew off to destroy the Nightfall asteroid. That particular memory was stirring in a unique way. Unfortunately, what should have been a private moment took place in front of several members of the Fourth Estate. Most of whom were clamoring to get a compelling photo of the hero as he prepared for his perilous mission into outer space.

Between all the cameras going off and people talking, it knocked all the intimacy out of the moment. Imagine those reporters surprised looks upon seeing a prominent member of their ranks kissing the superhero goodbye. Nonetheless, Lois remembered that neither of them had hesitated as their lips had pressed together softly. The kiss was brief and held passion, mixed with sadness and a touch of fear. The sensations they had aroused were strangely familiar, as if Lois Lane had finally come home.

She put trembling fingers on her lips, and they began to tingle at the thought of those two very important memories.

Two separate events, wildly different from each other, yet comparable. Memories she had not thought to associate until now came to the forefront, a mélange of emotions, his tender touch. The kisses were with the same man. Clark Kent, her partner, and a farmer's son from Kansas...might possibly be...the Man of Steel?

As Lois changed out of her work attire and into a pair of sweats and white T-shirt, the revelation made her body shiver. But what other logical answer, as crazy as it sounds, could there be? There was only one way to get to the truth. She needed to talk to Clark. But...but what if he wasn't home? What if he was on a, what did Superman call it? A rescue?

It didn't matter about her worries; she had to try. Lois walked over to the phone and picked up the receiver. With her heart beating so hard, it made her chest hurt, she dialed Clark's number and suddenly heard the familiar, reassuring rumble of her partner's voice. She tried to speak, but somehow, the words refused to come out.

"Hello?"

"Clark?" Her voice cracked.

Notes of concern laced his words, "Lois...are you okay? What's wrong?"

She closed her eyes, hoping and praying that she wasn't about to make a complete fool of herself and lose the best friend she ever had, "I...I know it's late, but could you come over for...hot chocolate or maybe an espresso? It's important. We...we have a lot to talk about..."

The End