

The List

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Rated G

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Summary: Lois and Clark spend an evening watching television that makes Lois reflect on Clark's feelings for her.

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Author's Note: In this story, Lois and Clark are watching an episode of Friends — "The One with the List." As this story takes place sometime before "Lucky Leon" which aired in March of 1995 and the Friends episode aired in November of 1995, I've played with the air dates a little bit and moved the Friends episode one year earlier to November of 1994. I'd place this story in early March, so shortly before "Lucky Leon." This works well with both the content of the story and my memory of how television sweeps work (in the US) — February used to be a sweeps month (not sure if things still work this way) — a month when television watching is recorded to determine ratings, so new episodes would be shown in February and in early March reruns would be played (Lois and Clark are watching a rerun of "The One with the List" in this story).

No real knowledge of Friends or the episode "The One with the List" is required for this story, but in case it clarifies things, here is a brief synopsis of the storyline. Recently, Ross, who is in his mid-twenties, has found out that Rachel (about Ross' age) has feelings for him. Ross has had a crush on Rachel since they were in high school (maybe earlier? I can't recall), but has recently realized she'll never feel the same way and started dating Julie. While Julie is nice and has more in common with him than Rachel, he is unsure what to do given his long standing feelings for Rachel. So Chandler suggests he makes of list of the pros and cons of each woman. They start with the cons (as Chandler thinks this will be more fun) and never make it any further. The list ends up with a several negatives for Rachel (she's spoiled, doesn't have a great job, etc.) and only one for Julie, which is that she's not Rachel, and thus in the end Ross chooses Rachel. But moments after he tells Rachel that he has broken up with Julie, Rachel finds the list and is so upset that Ross has put together a list of all the worst things she ever thinks about herself and thinks of these as reasons not to date her, she tells him she's no longer interested.

There is a brief mention here of a different storyline and while you don't need to know what it's about I don't think, for those people for whom not knowing would ruin the story: Monica, an unemployed chef, has just taken a job for a food company that hopes to launch a replacement for chocolate — mocolate. (It's never clear what the benefit of mocolate is over chocolate.) She has been hired to create several Thanksgiving themed recipes using mocolate in an effort to make Thanksgiving the mocolate holiday. Mocolate tastes bad and does some strange things (like bubble in your mouth) making this a difficult task. In the end, Monica does this only by creating recipes with only trace amounts of mocolate, which she's told is okay since the FDA does not approve mocolate's launch.

While I do make brief references to other television programs and I constrained myself to those that did air during 1995, I didn't confine myself to the actual television schedule — in that they are supposed to be alternatives to watching Friends, but they did

not all air at the same time (at least according to the schedule I found on Wikipedia). But then again, during a week in which reruns are aired, the normal television schedule isn't always adhered to anyway.

There is a reference to Murphy Brown in this story, but I think I've included everything needed in the story. (Having only seen a couple of episodes of that program, most of what is included came from reading the first paragraph of the Wikipedia article on it, so there can't have been too much information needed.)

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Thanks to LabRat for GEing this for me.

I look at the space between us on the couch and suppress a sigh. Months ago, when this episode first aired, that space wouldn't have existed. I would have been pressed up against Clark's side, his arm around me to keep me warm, as we watched television. But not any more. Now an entire couch cushion is between us and while it looks empty, I know it's not. *She* sits there — between us, like a brick wall.

Not that it's really her fault. I'd like to blame her, but I can't. Aside from being a bit pushy, she's done nothing wrong. It's me. I took too long to admit my feelings for Clark. She saw it before me, which is embarrassing since I've known him so much longer. But somehow I had missed how sweet, generous, and kind Clark Kent is. By the time I realized it, by the time it occurred to me that I had given the wrong answer that day on the park bench, Mayson was already a presence in our lives. And while Clark hasn't really fallen into her arms or something, just her presence has made me reticent to say anything.

I guess I'm afraid of competing with her. Mayson is pretty and she is blonde (Clark prefers blondes). More than that, though, since Clark isn't the type of guy who would choose girlfriends based on looks, Mayson is smart and strong, and she is nice. Even not liking her, and I don't, I know these things are true. Add all this to the fact that she had seen immediately what a great guy he is, and I don't see how abrasive, brunette, Lois Lane, the woman who had flat out rejected his offer of love once before, could really compete with Mayson.

So, I haven't said anything.

When I first saw this episode of Friends, in my apartment, alone, I had liked it. Maybe it was because I didn't much like Ross or Rachel — they were both too whiny and gutless (even if I, too, am too gutless for go after Clark, at least I don't whine about it), so I was happy for a reason for them not to be together. Maybe because, aside from the whole Ross and Rachel drama, it is a pretty funny episode.

Whatever the reason, I liked it. As a result, the episode had stayed with me. I thought about it at odd times — if Clark were to put together a list, what would he say about me? I have trouble imagining it, though. While I am too scared to tell him my feelings, sure he would rather be with Mayson, I can't imagine him saying anything mean about me.

I mean, really, the whole list idea is sort of funny — if Clark were to put together a list, and I can't really imagine him doing so, he'd only do the pros. He doesn't have a mean bone in his body — I imagine the idea of writing a list of cons would make the poor guy break out in a sweat.

Clark laughs at something on the show, and I realize I've missed half the episode. "Are you okay?" he asks, noticing that my mind has wandered. "You usually love Friends."

I smile to reassure him. "I'm fine," I lie. "I've seen this

episode before.”

“Oh,” he looks confused for a moment. “Do you want to watch something else? I thought you wanted to see this, but we can watch something else. Do you want to watch the news? Or...” He grabs the TV listings section of Sunday’s Daily Planet. “...we could watch the X-Files? Or Murphy Brown?” He grins at me. “You remind me a bit of Murphy Brown.”

“Thanks,” I say sarcastically. Not that I really think he’s wrong — like me, Murphy Brown is a strong woman who stands up for what she believes in. She is even an investigative reporter, although she works in television, not print. But she is in her forties and, aside from her son, alone — probably a result of her abrasive personality. Does Clark think I’ll end up the same way? Don’t I have a soft side that will come out in spades if I ever meet the right guy?

“Hey,” Clark says, looking even more concerned now as he puts the television listings down. “What’s wrong with thinking you have something in common with Murphy Brown?”

“She’s alone,” I point out.

“I didn’t say you *were* Murphy Brown,” Clark replies. “Just that you remind me of her. You have the same desire for truth and justice that she does. It was a good thing, Lois,” he tries to reassure me.

“And we’re both obnoxious,” I remind him, ignoring his plea that this is a good thing, and hating the whine I can hear in my voice.

Clark gives a slight grimace. “Okay, so she’s a bit obnoxious, but she’s a TV character and it’s played for laughs. You’re not like that.”

I give him a pointed look. “I’m not?”

Clark sighs. “Do I think there would be a picture of you under the phrase ‘sugar and spice and everything nice?’” Clark asks. “No. But that’s not because you’re obnoxious, but because you’re real. All sugar and spice would be boring.”

“Would you ever do that?” I ask, gesturing to the television, before I have the chance to censor myself. I need to change the subject so I don’t admit how much I like hearing his words.

“Do what?” Clark asks, turning towards his television to determine what I am talking about.

“Make a list,” I mumble.

“As a way to decide whom to date?” Clark asks, incredulous.

“Yeah,” I say, still mumbling, but a slight challenge to my voice now.

Clark laughs. “I’ll let you know if I ever have a reason to do so,” he smiles. “Not that I can imagine doing it, but I’ve never had to worry about two women fighting over me before, and I can’t imagine I ever will.”

“You don’t give yourself enough credit, Clark,” I tell him, surprising myself with my gall. “Mayson’s a great girl, and she likes you. Why wouldn’t someone else feel the same way?” I refrain from reminding him that I had said yes when he had asked me on a date a few weeks ago. Since those plans fell through and he hasn’t ever asked again, I have been scared to remind him, sure that he has decided he’d rather be with Mayson. I’d rather make that guess than find out for sure.

Clark’s responding laugh fills the room. “‘Mayson is a great girl’? What did you do with Lois Lane?”

“Okay,” I admit with a smile. “She’s not my favorite person. That doesn’t mean I can’t see that she has a lot going for her.”

“Still,” Clark replies, “you don’t need a list when only one person’s attracted to you.”

“What if someone else was?” I ask, trying to keep my tone light.

“You know of someone?” Clark asks. His voice, like mine, is light, but I can see the question in his eyes.

“No,” I say, maybe a little too quickly. “This is a hypothetical question. So, what would be on Miss Drake’s list? The fact that

her hair color comes from a bottle?” I ask with a laugh, hoping to keep the conversation on this light, joking, clearly hypothetical note.

“Lois,” Clark replies, with a slight note of warning in his voice.

“The fact that she’s pushy?” I add, ignoring his warning. “The annoying way she clings to you?”

“Lois,” Clark warns me again, but this time I can hear the underlying laughter in his words.

“Come on, Clark,” I goad him. Just one bad thing — I want to hear him make one disparaging remark about her. I know it’s asking a lot for Clark, but I think I’d feel so much better if he admits she isn’t perfect. “Just name one thing, Clark.”

Clark shakes his head, still smiling at me. “I’m not playing this game, Lois. It’s not nice.”

I roll my eyes at him. “Do you have to be nice all the time?”

“Lois,” Clark says, his tone serious now, “I don’t need a list. Even if there was someone else for me to choose from, which there isn’t, I’m not interested in Mayson.”

“You’re not?” This admission knocks my joking tone away. He isn’t interested in Mayson?

“No,” Clark tells me. “I just... Well, I’ve never been very good at telling someone so. I don’t want to hurt her feelings. I like Mayson; I just don’t want to date her.”

“Oh,” I say, not sure where to go from here without the joy I feel escaping into my voice. And there is no reason for it to. Just because Clark isn’t interested in Mayson doesn’t mean he is interested in me. I am still the girl who shot him down six months ago. That would be enough to kill any crush.

I turn back to the television, trying to indicate that the conversation is over. I see Clark looking at me closely before he gives up and turns towards the television also.

We watch in silence for a few moments, punctuated with a few giggles while Monica shows her recipe ideas to the chocolate guy before the episode goes to a commercial break.

“What about you?” Clark asks, his voice soft.

“Hmmm?”

“Would you ever put together a list?” he asks.

“I didn’t realize I had a need to,” I reply, trying once again to keep my voice light. The soft, serious tone to his voice is making me nervous.

“Well, maybe you don’t,” Clark says. “But you have in the past.”

“I have?” I ask. This is news to me.

“How about last year? Superman and Lex?” he says, sticking to his serious tone as he turns back to look at me.

“No contest,” I tell him. “Superman wasn’t interested. He made that pretty clear.” For some reason, this makes Clark blush.

“But before that,” Clark says. “Clearly you hadn’t known that was the case. I mean when you asked me to tell him that you wanted to talk to him...” he trails off and I wish I could find a way to change the subject. I hate even thinking of that moment — of how self-absorbed I’d been to ask Clark to do that right on the heels of his admission. “You must have thought there was a chance.”

“Not really,” I admit. “I think I was just looking for a reason not to say yes to Lex.”

“But?” Clark looks confused. “If you were just looking for a reason to say no, why... I mean, when I...”

I can feel myself blush when Clark trails off. Okay, score two for self-absorbed. While my answer is truthful, I hadn’t considered how it would sound. But how to tell him how stupid I’d been back then without letting him in on my current thoughts?

“Forget it...” Clark mumbles, turning once again to the television, and staring at a Bounty paper towel commercial as if it is the most fascinating thing in the world.

“I didn’t mean that the way it sounded, Clark,” I say, wanting

desperately to wipe the look off his face. I guess it doesn't matter how he feels now — it isn't any fun to hear me say I had never even considered his admission of love as a reason to say no to Lex.

"It's okay, Lois," he says. "I understand. You couldn't say no to Luthor for an ordinary guy."

Even from the side, I can see that he does understand. Or thinks he does. The truth is I doubt he could, since I barely understand it myself.

"You're far from ordinary, Clark," I say instead.

Clark gives a shallow laugh in response as if to end the conversation. It's even good enough that I imagine it would fool someone else into thinking he thought I was joking and had imagined the entire conversation was one big joke. But not me. I know him too well. He's hurting. I shake my head at my insensitivity. How could I have said that? And did I really think that one nice thing was going to erase my earlier words? But something about the way Clark continues to stare at the television makes me think I should just cut my losses this time.

A moment later, though, I laugh. "Can you imagine?" I ask him. "If I *had* put together a list? Under Lex it would have said 'A little too charming. Is a bit creepy. May be sleeping with his personal assistant. Biggest crime boss in the history of Metropolis.'" I dissolve into giggles, and to my relief, Clark joins in.

The episode ends a few moments later and Clark shuts off the television. "Tea?" he asks me as he gets up.

"Sure," I say sitting back on the couch.

"Clark?" I call into the kitchen, barely believing I'm doing this. Why can't I leave well enough alone? Why do I have this incessant need to know?

"Yeah?"

"If, completely hypothetically of course, you were to write a list about..." I take a deep breath, half hoping the earth will open up and swallow me whole before I finish my question. "...me, what would you say?"

Clark's head appears at the entranceway between the living room and the kitchen, and while I can't be sure what he is thinking, I hasten to add again, "Hypothetically, of course."

Clark smiles, and I wish I could see his eyes from where I'm sitting. "Unwilling to let me lead our byline," he says, and I have to smile in response to that. "Gets herself into trouble so much, she's a danger to my health."

"Hey!" I say, laughing. "How am I a danger to *your* health? I don't usually take you with me." I push the memory of the gambling club to the back of my mind.

The smile disappears from Clark's face. "I worry about you," he says simply. "That something will happen to you and I won't be around to protect you."

I want to tell him that I can take care of myself, but the truth is that I am touched by this admission. I *can* take care of myself, but I like the idea that Clark wants to protect me.

"I know you have Superman to do that," Clark adds, looking nervous, "but sometimes..."

"I guess I can never have too many protectors," I say with a smile. "I do get myself into a lot of trouble."

Clark smiles, the unease leaving his eyes as he goes back into the kitchen. He comes out again a few minutes later with two cups of tea.

"So, what else?" I ask as I take one of the cups.

"What else what?" Clark asks and I get the feeling he knows what I'm talking about, but is trying to change the subject.

"What else would be on your list about me?"

"Has the persistence of a pitbull?" Clark suggests.

"Very funny," I grouse.

"What about you? What would be on a list about me?" Clark asks, then smiles. "Although, let me start — 'naïve, has a

tendency to run off, kind of a goody-two-shoes..."

"Kind of?" I interrupt and Clark laughs. "And don't change the subject. We were still talking about your list for me."

"Can we move to the pros?" he asks.

"Ross never did any pros," I point out. Of course, I want to hear the pros, but I also want to know honest answers to the cons. What is the reason that Clark has never asked me out again after our almost first date? I had been sure it had to do with Mayson, but if it isn't, and now it sounded like it isn't, than what is it?

"I don't have any other cons," Clark says, looking distinctly embarrassed.

"Most of the ones you made earlier were said in jest," I point out.

"I know," Clark says quietly, his eyes dropping to the couch.

"So then..." I trail off. I almost slipped and actually asked the question straight out. For a moment I fear that he is going to call me on it — ask what I had been about to say, but still looking uncomfortable, he doesn't. Instead, he leans over and turns the television back on.

"Seinfeld?" he asks, motioning to the television.

"Sure," I nod. I wonder if I'll ever have the nerve to ask him why he hasn't asked me out again. I wonder if maybe he will ask me out again. And then I decide to scoot closer to Clark and wonder about Jerry Seinfeld's fake life rather than my real one. At least for tonight.

THE END