

A New Year's Revulsion

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Having the person you love by your side can make even the most revolting of places slightly more bearable.

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Disclaimer: I own nothing. I make nothing. All characters, plot points, and recognizable dialogue belong to DC comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise.

Author's Note: I take absolutely no responsibility for any vomit stains that may result from the setting of this story.

"Remind me again why we're doing this?" Lois grumbled as Clark parked their Jeep outside of the unassuming townhouse that was, thankfully, on the complete opposite side of Metropolis from their own cozy home.

Clark threw a swift, but tender, smile at her as he pulled forward to straighten the car out. "Because I swore to Jimmy that I wouldn't leave him to his fate."

"You could have run things by me, you know," she huffed.

Clark put the car into park and turned off the engine. "I did. And you said 'uh huh, honey, sure,' if I remember correctly."

Lois frowned. "You mentioned it while I was on the phone with Daddy."

Clark gave her his best, most innocent smile. "I told Jimmy I wouldn't make him wait for an answer. He was kind of under a deadline to let Rachael know."

"Committing to a New Year's Eve party is *not* a deadline," Lois retorted, swatting his arm playfully.

"It is when it's 6pm on December 30th," Clark replied with a chuckle, reaching over to cup her cheek with his hand.

Lois' shoulders slumped a little as she realized that he wasn't completely wrong. "Well...maybe," she conceded. "Still, if I'd realized we were going to be *here*..."

"We still made a promise to Jimmy," Clark sighed in resignation. "Of course, he thought the party was going to be at Rachael's apartment, not at her cousin's place."

"Remind me to kill Jimmy once we're back in the office," Lois quipped.

Clark reached over again and patted her shoulder. "It's not his fault that Rachael is Ralph's cousin."

Lois shook her head. "I guess not." She sighed heavily. "I guess we'd better just get this over with."

Clark nodded as they unbuckled their seatbelts, then exited the car and locked it. With a slightly slower stride than usual, they made their way across the sidewalk and up the steps leading to their much-loathed coworker's front door. Ralph threw open the door seconds after they knocked. His eyes were glazed and red; he was clearly already more than a little drunk.

"Heyyyyyy, guysssssss," he slurred as he swayed on his feet, just enough to be noticeable. "Come on in. Yerrrrr late."

Lois glanced at her watch. "Ralph, it's 8:15. We're early. You said 8:30."

Clark put a hand on her shoulder as a reminder to play nice. He felt her stiffen irritably under his touch. "Oh, hey, Jimmy!" he called over Ralph's shoulder. He gave the younger man a little wave and pressed the bottle of champagne they'd brought with

them into Ralph's hands.

"Hey, CK!" Jimmy called.

"Aww, thanks," Ralph gushed at the same moment, looking at the bottle. "I love you guys!"

"It's for midnight," Clark gently impressed upon Ralph. "You know, to celebrate."

"If we make it that long," Lois muttered under her breath.

Ralph moved aside to allow them entrance. He muttered something to himself about appetizers and shuffled off, presumably in the direction of the kitchen, taking the bottle with him. Clark put a hand on Lois' lower back as they moved deeper into the living room. It was remarkably like their own home, in terms of the layout, though the décor could not have been more different.

The furniture was old, and while not exactly shabby, far from in pristine condition. Which, Clark figured, wasn't the worst thing in the world. It wasn't exactly as though the springs were poking through the thin and worn couch cushions or anything. It was just that everything about the furniture reminded Clark of an old woman's house – the chairs and couch had garish floral patterns, the bookshelves were filled with knickknacks, the coffee table and TV stand were scuffed and scratched, the shag carpet appeared to have been laid down in the 60's. It matched Ralph's well known cheapskate status to a T.

This place was probably his grandmother's and he just never bothered to buy new furniture, Clark thought to himself. *Either that or he furnished the place through an estate sale or something.*

There was a cloying smell of incense in the air. Clark wrinkled his nose at the scent of sandalwood. He'd never liked the smell of it before and now that he was smelling it in Ralph's place, his dislike of it moved into the territory of loathing. He found himself cursing his heightened sense of smell.

Stacks of raunchy magazines were haphazardly thrown into baskets on the sides of the couch or strewn beneath the coffee table. Clark wondered if Ralph always left them there and had simply forgotten that he was having guests over, or if it had been an ill-executed attempt at hiding the smut. Or had their presence, Clark wondered with a shudder, been meant as a bizarre bragging point? He hoped not. After all, Ralph's *cousin* was visiting. To call having a family member see those kinds of filthy rags uncomfortable would surely be an understatement, wouldn't it?

But that wasn't even the worst of it.

Various nude and partially nude statues and figurines stood on various shelves and on tables and tucked into nooks and crannies. Clark recognized some of them from his travels, though others were strange to him. Most of them seemed to be nothing more than artistic representations of the female body, though there was a scattering of exaggerated male figures in the bunch. Thankfully, many of them were tastefully made, clearly created by artists who understood and revered the human form. A few, however, made his face turn bright red in a heated blush. It wasn't that he was a prude. He'd been in many poor areas of the world – for both his reporting duties and his Superman ones – and seen people so poor they had little to nothing to wear. But this? This was just flaunting the body for no reason other than to tickle Ralph's fantasies.

"Are you seeing this?" Lois asked, wide-eyed.

"Unfortunately," he confirmed. "And what's worse? I recognize some of them. They're fertility statues."

Lois turned a very noticeable shade of green. She put a hand up to her mouth, as though holding back the urge to vomit. "Ugh," she managed, her face contorting into a visage of pure horror. "The idea of Ralph and fertility..." She trailed off, not needing to voice the rest.

"I know," Clark agreed in a whisper.

She shuddered as his breath tickled her ear. "I *really* wish I'd booked that New Year's cruise in the harbor," she said. "And that

big, *private* suite.”

“Mmm,” Clark murmured, images of exactly what he and Lois could have been doing on their second married New Year’s Eve flashing vividly through his mind.

The sound of a throat being cleared grudgingly snapped Clark’s attention back to reality. A tall, slender, shapely woman with platinum blonde hair stood in the middle of the room, hand outstretched. Clark took her hand and shook it.

“Rachael, I presume,” he said with a smile. “It’s nice to meet you.” He gestured to himself and Lois. “I’m Clark and this is my wife, Lois.”

“Nice to meet you. Ralph talks about you two a lot,” Rachael said, gesturing to the couch.

Lois’ eyes popped open a little in surprise. “He does?” she stammered as she reluctantly sank onto the couch.

With Jimmy taking up the only other spot on the couch, Clark contented himself to one of the overstuffed armchairs with a feeling of dread in his stomach. His Kryptonian genes and natural immunity to Earth diseases be damned, he felt like sitting on Ralph’s furniture would require him to get a tetanus shot. He felt like his skin was crawling with some unseen affliction caught from Ralph’s home.

“Oh yeah,” Rachael continued, seemingly oblivious to Lois and Clark’s discomfort. Even Jimmy looked a bit creeped out to be in Ralph’s home. “He says you’re two of the only people who are nice to him. Well...you three, really,” she amended, giving Jimmy a smile. She took his hand and Clark noticed that she gave Jimmy a reassuring squeeze.

Jimmy blushed. “Rachael...let’s not discuss the office...” he began, but she continued on.

“Look, I’m not stupid. I know my cousin is a bit of a weirdo and a hell of a braggart. And I know he’s...not exactly...tactful. Or, shall we say...appropriate. I mean, look at his home, right?” Rachael said in hushed tones. “So I get it. I get why people at the office might...avoid him. He’s a royal pain in the butt sometimes. I’m just thankful that not everyone is, well, unwilling to even give him the time of day.”

She sighed. “I know, I know. Why am I here if I’m saying these things, right? Ralph and I used to be really close when we were kids. My mom married his uncle when Ralph was six and I was just shy of five. It’s a big family and Ralph...he always got kind of overlooked, and I think a lot of his attention grabbing habits are just that – him trying to make up for a childhood of being kind of shoved to the side.”

“I...that is...” Lois stammered, but she was saved from having to complete her thought as Ralph bustled into the room with a tray of tomatoes and mozzarella cheese in one hand and a tray of sliced Italian hero sandwiches in the other.

“There’s more,” he gleefully announced, clearly proud of himself, and he bustled right back out of the room, only to reemerge moments later with a platter of fruits and vegetables.

Lois excused herself to use the restroom and Ralph gave her directions.

“The one down here is broken. I’m having the toilet replaced in a couple of days. Just go upstairs. It’s the third door on the left.”

“Thanks,” she said graciously and whisked herself away.

Five minutes later she reappeared looking shaken. Ralph was in the midst of boasting about an article he hadn’t actually written but had desperately tried to take credit for – “after all, it was *my* source who outted the school superintendent!” – and Clark found it easy to take Lois to one side.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, looking her over, concerned.

“I...passed Ralph’s bedroom. The door was wide open. The paraphernalia that was strewn about...the...the swing hanging from the...” She gulped and would say no more. She didn’t have to. The pallor of her face told Clark exactly the kind of things she’d glimpsed.

“I’m sorry,” he said, giving her a hug. He felt her arms tighten around him as well, but only for a moment before Jimmy called them over to ask them something.

The evening passed as slowly and awkwardly as Clark had anticipated it would. At least Rachael was good company. As brash and annoying and inappropriate as Ralph was on any given day, she was the exact opposite. Charming and quick-witted, friendly and tactful, she made the evening bearable simply by being the life of the party and by expertly redirecting her cousin off many an inappropriate topic. Ralph, on the other hand, grew louder and more obnoxious as the evening pressed on and he sank deeper and deeper into his cups.

Jimmy and Rachael seemed to relax a bit as the wine, hard liquor, and beer flowed. Even Clark allowed himself a full glass of the rich red wine Ralph had provided, since it wouldn’t affect him at all. He had to admit, whatever other faults Ralph might have and however cheap the man usually was, he had decent taste in wine. After the first few experimental sips of his drink, he offered to pour Lois one. She shook her head.

“No thanks.”

Clark leaned in to speak in her ear. “It’s actually good. And you don’t have to worry about staying completely sober. You’ve got me to make sure Ralph stays in his place. I mean, if I could get a little buzzed to make the night a little easier, I would.”

She smiled and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “I know. But really, I’m fine. Just more than ready to go home. What time is it anyway?” She craned her neck around, looking for a clock, perhaps forgetting for a moment that she was wearing a watch.

Clark checked his own. “A quarter to eleven.”

Lois wrinkled her nose in disbelief and disgust. “That’s *it*? It feels like we’ve been here for *years*.”

He chuckled. “I know.” He set his glass down on the dining room table, where Ralph had set up the drinks. “I’m really proud of you, you know, for making the best of tonight.”

She smiled at him. “Yeah, well...like you said, Jimmy’s our friend. If it means sucking things up for a night and dealing with Ralph so Jimmy isn’t stuck alone with him...”

Clark laughed. “Let me guess. He owes us though.”

Lois’ eyes twinkled in amusement. “Big time.” She looked over her shoulder to where Jimmy and Rachael had merged into a tangled mass of arms and legs as they made out like two overly hormonal teenagers. Ralph had disappeared. She bit back a laugh and turned back to Clark. “He’s really happy, isn’t he?”

“Seems so,” Clark replied with a wide grin.

“She’s a really nice girl,” Lois commented after another moment of watching the two new lovebirds. “Still...is it bad that I wish she wasn’t related to Ralph?”

Clark chuckled. “I’ve...had a similar thought,” he confessed.

Lois reached up and draped her arms over his shoulders. She looked deep into his eyes. Clark wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her closer. She closed her eyes and angled her head toward his, puckering her lips. Clark gave a soft moan of pleasure, then closed the distance between them. Their lips met with a hunger that silently screamed of their desire to get home and celebrate the New Year alone. When they parted, Clark’s eyes flitted open and he rested his forehead against hers.

“I love you,” he whispered hoarsely.

“I love you too.”

Clark smiled. “For the life of me, I’ll never understand how I got so lucky as to be your husband.”

Lois smiled and laid her head against his chest, and Clark felt his heart rate increase. Being with Lois – touching her, kissing her, even just looking at her – made him feel more alive and human than he ever had in his whole life. More than the sun, loving her and being loved by her, fueled him and kept him alive. She let out a soft moan as he kissed the top of her head.

"I could stay like this forever," he told her as he continued to embrace her.

"Me too. Just...maybe not at Ralph's," she quipped.

He laughed. "Definitely not.

"Maybe we should make up an excuse to leave early?" Lois suggested.

But before Clark could answer, Ralph stumbled into the room, now so drunk that he could barely stand. And, apparently, so beyond the point of rational thought that he had stripped down to his briefs, which were about two sizes too small and leopard print. Lois gagged and Clark almost wished he would lose his vision in that moment.

"Who's up for a Twisser of a game?" he slurred, waving a battered Twister box in one hand, while slopping beer down his bare – and hairy – chest.

"Oh, uh, you know what? I have work tomorrow, I almost forgot," Rachael called out, hurrying to the coat rack to grab her coat. "I'll call you during the week." She grabbed Jimmy's hand meaningfully and shot Lois and Clark an apologetic look.

"Yeah...us too," Clark lied. Lois looked to be at a loss for words. "See you in the office, Ralph."

"Uh...so...happy New Year?" Jimmy stammered, fumbling with the front door knob.

"Absolutely," Lois rushed to add, pulling on her coat. "Happy New Year."

Clark had seen slower stampedes in Africa as the four of them rushed to the door, each of them vying to be the first one out. The frigid night air was like a slap in the face as they each slipped out of the house and hurried down the steps. For a moment, Clark was sure Ralph would follow them and attempt to lure them back inside, but either the man was too drunk to get across the room or he knew he'd severely messed up and wanted to save face. The door remained shut against the night.

"So...we can go back to my place to watch the ball drop," Jimmy suggested, checking his watch. We should have enough time to get there."

"I'd like that," Rachael immediately answered, melting into his side a little as the frozen wind whipped up.

Lois exchanged a look with Clark. "I think we'll just head home, if it's all the same to you. After that display in there, I feel..."

"Dirty, yeah, I know," Rachael finished for her, nodding in understanding. "It was really nice meeting you. Maybe we can grab dinner together some night, *without* my idiot cousin."

Clark's smile matched Lois'. "We'd love to."

They each said their goodbyes, then Jimmy and Rachael sauntered down the sidewalk to where Lois and Clark had seen Jimmy's car parked earlier that evening. Clark stood for a moment, watching the two leave, and he shrugged his shoulders in contentment. He sighed a little as Lois snuggled up into his side, his breath misting into a plume of white smoke in the sub-freezing temperature. Lois sighed too.

"You think she'll be good for him?" she asked softly.

"I hope so. Jimmy deserves what we have," Clark responded in a matching tone. He sighed again as Lois shivered. "Let's go home."

"There's nothing I'd like better," she agreed.

Clark took the car keys from his coat pocket and unlocked the Jeep. He opened Lois' door for her, then quickly jogged around to the driver's side and slid into the vehicle. Before he could even close the door, he was jabbing the key into the ignition and turning the car on. Then he shut the door and turned to Lois as they waited for the heat to start seeping from the vents.

"I know Rachael was glad we don't exactly ignore Ralph and all," he began, "but I think I'm going to make it my New Year's resolution to spend as little time near him as possible."

Lois laughed. "Sweetie, we *already* do that. Tonight

notwithstanding."

Clark threw his head back and closed his eyes, groaning. With one hand he removed his glasses and with the other he pinched the bridge of his nose. "God, I really wish I could forget the things I saw tonight."

Lois grimaced. "Me too." She hesitated for a moment and then added, "Clark?"

He opened his eyes and replaced his glasses, twisting in his seat to see her better. "Yeah?"

"I have a New Year's resolution too." She was smiling at him in an almost sly manner.

"Oh?" He knew his eyebrows had shot up nearly to his hairline.

She nodded, still giving him that same mischievous grin.

"You want to know what it is?"

"Of course," he replied, giving her a smile.

"My resolution is to make you a father before the New Year is over."

Clark chuckled. "That's a pretty specific resolution. Especially given Dr. Klein's – and your father's..."

"And I resolve to make it happen by the end of September," Lois continued, cutting him off.

"That's impossible!" Clark spluttered, his mind whirring at the preciseness of Lois' predictions. "You'd have to already be..."

Lois' grin brightened and she wiggled her eyebrows a little. "Happy New Year, Clark," she said as she grabbed his hand and placed it over her stomach.

THE END