

Drinks After Work

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Rated: PG

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Story Summary: From the creator of “Wherever You Will Go” ... In a world where Clark has stood her up for the last time... A mysterious phone call. An earth-shaking revelation. Beverages.

Story Size: 2,563 words (14Kb as text)

Author’s Note: So there was this one time... Queen of the Capes threw a plot bunny at me. And so I made her give me parameters, which turned into a fun game of Choose Your Own Fic Adventure... sort of. We also sent my muse a memo that it was to be a SHORT fic. (She never listens.) Later, when I asked AnnaBtG to BR for me, she asked if I was feeling ill because I’d actually written a short fic. LOL!

Queen of the Capes, this one’s dedicated to you! For #shirtgate and the other things that contain spoilers (you know what you did) and for giving my muse an actually small bunny to write when she was feeling listless after finishing the huge story. Enjoy! (And thanks for writing the summary for your own fic. Now you get to do it all the time!)

CarrieRene! Thanks for being the first to read this and give me feedback when I was sleep-deprived and needed an eye on it!! And thanks, as ever, to my partner in crime, lovetvfan, who also provided much-desired feedback! Love you both!

Anna and Queenie! You’re always so “mean” to me and provide me with just the right comments to make me pout about rewriting, but then I end up finding something more magical than I thought! You’re so awesome!!

Thanks to GooBoo, who gave this a quick GE for the archive!

“Let’s go for a drink after work,” Lois muttered mockingly to herself under her breath even though she was very, very clearly the only one in the newsroom. No danger of anyone overhearing her. Not even Perry was here at this late hour, and the night shift worked on the floor below.

Coming back to an empty newsroom to work on her stories alone suited her just fine, though, she thought as she settled in at her desk and turned on her computer for the second time today. She might as well be alone, with a boyf — a date... a... partner like... she didn’t even want to think his name. Did four dates even count as a relationship yet? Maybe... if he’d stuck around long enough on the last date for them to talk about it.

And tonight? Of all the times to pull a disappearing act? After inviting her out *as an apology* for leaving early during

their last date? She only wished she could chalk it up to absentmindedness. The man had too good a memory to ever be accused of that. He even bragged about his stellar memory.

So why was it, then, that she’d left work alone hours ago when he was supposed to have taken her out for drinks? Certainly, it couldn’t be because he’d gotten lost on the way back from the dry cleaners. Hadn’t he just gone to the dry cleaners two days ago? He couldn’t possibly have gone through that many suits in two days.

Images flitted through her mind of how many times he’d gotten his lunch or his coffee on his shirts or ties. Okay, maybe he did need the dry cleaner more often.

But the point was, he’d left her high and dry. Again. Only hours after he’d apologized for doing it last night. Last night!

Her computer screen stared brightly at her, a little too bright for her eyes in the dim lighting of the newsroom, and she glared back.

She didn’t want to admit to herself why it hurt so much. There was no point in admitting it. Nope. She’d worked plenty of nights alone in this newsroom, getting ahead, making sure she was at the top of her game, going the extra mile to prove that she was just as good — better, even — than any male journalist out there.

Lois Lane didn’t need a partner. Especially not a partner who couldn’t even be bothered to follow through on simple commitments or one who could hardly manage to stay through the whole workday. She didn’t need a relationship, either. Relationships only got in the way of success and awards and accolades and all the things that proved that she was the best, better than all the rest.

She was slipping lately, though. Not in her work, no. But in doing just fine alone. He’d distracted her, disarming her with that devastating smile of his and unwavering friendship. Why? Why was he wavering now, at the beginning of their relationship?

Had he changed his mind? Was he realizing that a relationship with Lois Lane was just too much work, not worth the effort? The way he kissed her — oh, the way he kissed her — should by all rights leave no room to misinterpret his intentions. Yet... here she was alone. Again.

Well, Clark Kent could keep his kisses and his lame excuses. She was done. Done.

They could be partners. They could be friends. But clearly, they weren’t meant to be anything more, and that was just fine with her.

Stabbing angrily at the keyboard, she punched in her password and pulled up her latest notes file, though she was having trouble focusing on the words. She just needed to concentrate.

The shrill ringing of her phone startled her and set her heart racing. Equal parts pissed and scared, she answered the phone with a brusque, “Lois Lane.”

There was a sharp inhale on the other end of the line, a slight crackling from a poor connection, and then the sound of a deep breath whooshing out. Great. A breather.

“Expecting my voicemail, big guy?”

“I... yeah...” the decidedly male voice answered, the

connection still slightly fuzzy and distorted, and then there was another shuddering breath.

“What is it about you creeps and the sound of my voice?”

“I-I’m sorry...”

... they never apologized. They never stayed on the line long enough for her to get a full rant in... and that voice... even through the bad connection...

The apology she’d heard a thousand times was clear as day. “Clark?!”

“Yeah...” That was all he could be bothered to say, his voice faint, but it was impossible to tell if the phone line was to blame for that or not.

What... why...? He was calling her work voicemail. At night. Was it possible to be devastated and furious all at once? “Can’t even apologize to my face anymore, Clark? Were you not even going to come into work in the morning? Just going to —”

“I’m sorry... I shouldn’t have... it was a bad idea...”

She was about to lay into him, but there was something about the sound of his voice...

“Clark? Where are you?”

“I...” A heavy sigh. “... needed to hear your voice...”

And then there was a sound like thunder, people screaming, and a man shouting in Chinese in the background just before the line went dead.

“Clark?!” She hit the phone’s switch hook again and again but only got the empty drone of the dial tone.

A beep from her computer signaled a new wire coming in from the AP. Heart still racing from Clark’s call and its abrupt end, Lois turned her head toward the screen. She barely registered the words, scanning more out of habit than being able to process anything right now — something about the French government making an announcement, a plane crash in India, and at least five wires about a 6.3 earthquake and its aftershocks in Beijing and the devastation it was causing.

The urgent, insistent tone of the phone line letting her know it was off the hook brought her attention back to the receiver still in her hand. She dropped it hastily back onto the base and the noise stopped.

Another beep — another wire about yet another aftershock hitting Beijing just minutes ago. It hadn’t been minutes, had it? There had been several aftershocks, though, so maybe that one hadn’t hit the wire yet.

What... where had that thought even come from? It wasn’t like Clark had called her from China in the middle of an earthquake. Because that made absolutely zero sense. His dry cleaner was Chinese, right? That made more sense.

Tentatively, her heart still racing and her breath caught in her throat, Lois moved her hand towards her mouse, and even more cautiously, she clicked on the latest wire to expand it... somehow already knowing what she’d find there.

But that made sense. Of course, Superman would be in Beijing helping with the earthquake rescue efforts.

Clark in Beijing didn’t make sense.

She swallowed heavily.

Superman had been there since 3:37am Beijing time, shortly after the quake had struck. That made sense.

Superman rescuing people halfway across the globe. Happened all the time.

Clark picking up his dry cleaning made sense. Happened all the time — twice this week, in fact. Clark neglecting to come back to work afterwards made sense. Clark flaking on their drinks-not-a-date date even, sadly, made sense.

Clark in Beijing didn’t make sense.

So why did her brain insist on repeating such a nonsensical idea?

Superman had been there for seven hours already. Seven hours of death and destruction and debris and devastation.

... *I’m sorry...*

Clark in Beijing didn’t make sense.

Her heart wrenched. Clark couldn’t handle hours on end of death and destruction and debris and devastation.

... *needed to hear your voice...*

Superman didn’t take breaks on rescues to make phone calls. If she’d heard his voice, it would have sounded tired... weary...

... *needed to hear your voice...*

Lois hit the power button on her computer and stood abruptly, grabbing her purse and already heading out of the newsroom before the screen went fully dark.

She was at Clark’s apartment faster than she would have guessed possible, even though it was likely he was still in Beijing. Grabbing the spare key from its hiding spot, she let herself in and locked the door behind her.

And then she... wasn’t sure what to do.

Sit and wait. That was really all she could do, wasn’t it? She settled herself into the comfort of his couch, pulling the blanket that sat across the back down to cover her legs. She tried distracting herself with the book he’d left on the side table, but her mind wouldn’t stop imagining things. Her partner holding up collapsed buildings. Her best friend sifting through rubble...

She swallowed back the tears.

Clark searching endlessly for survivors, refusing to stop until there were no more.

The aching in her heart reminded her just how many times she’d wondered — known — that he needed someone, that not even a super man could handle... everything. That sense, deep down, that he’d needed a friend but rarely dared to ask. Only a handful of times had he confirmed her suspicions, seeking out her company, her friendship while wearing the suit.

And all this time... all the late night movies on this very couch. The way he’d seemed heavy-hearted some nights but never said why because all the sadness seemed to vanish when he smiled at her. But maybe it’d been her smiling first? It couldn’t be that simple, could it?

She must have fallen asleep at some point, because the sound of his boots hitting the floor woke her up. In an instant, she remembered where she was, and her head snapped up to look at him in front of his window.

The suit, his face, everything was dirty, covered in filth and debris and... she didn’t want to think about what else.

He was staring at her, and he looked too anguished and exhausted to be surprised, but all the same, he hadn’t moved an inch. Then, as if all his defenses were crumbling

at once, his eyebrows knit together tightly and she heard a strangled sob.

She was across the room in an instant, gathering him into her arms even as he crumpled to the floor.

“Clark,” she whispered as she hugged him tightly, wholly unsure of how to put him back together again.

“... needed your voice...” he mumbled into her shoulder. “... need you...”

Lois bit back a gasp. Hearing it again, hearing it more clearly... the catch in his voice. The way he was holding her as if he needed her to keep breathing...

How did he do this? How did Clark do this? How was this Clark?

Clark wasn't supposed to rush to the scene of an earthquake. He was supposed to have too many dentist appointments and go to the dry cleaners too often. He wasn't supposed to face life and death situations every day. He was supposed to edit her copy and bring her coffee and hold her until she fell asleep on his couch in his arms.

Clark Kent was supposed to be an ordinary man, and Superman was supposed to be out of reach. They weren't supposed to be the same man.

He pulled back slightly and took a deep breath. The dirt and the grime marred his features, but his eyes... he looked at her with such intensity, it stole her breath away. For all the emotions playing out across his face, she couldn't guess at everything he was feeling, what he was thinking, but she saw a measure of trepidation in his eyes that squeezed at her heart.

“Why didn't you tell me?” she whispered, even though she already knew the answer.

She watched his breath hitch, and he brought a hand up, about to cup her cheek until he realized his hand was streaked with dirt and soot. Impulsively, before he could pull his hand back, she grabbed it and held it up against her face, pressing her cheek into his palm and closing her eyes a moment to feel his touch.

When she opened her eyes again, his gaze was no less intense. “I was going to, but... I was scared to lose you,” he said, his voice thick with emotion. “I don't know how to do this without you.”

His eyes were searching hers, and she could tell he was hoping, waiting for her acceptance. She knew now exactly how vulnerable he was and what he needed.

Leaning forward slightly, she pressed a gentle kiss to his lips, and then she stood, pulling him gently along with her. “Go on. Get cleaned up and changed. I'll be here.”

He nodded, seeming only slightly settled. The weight of the last twelve hours wore heavily, still on his shoulders as he made his way to the bathroom.

She took several deep breaths to calm and center herself and then set to work. While he showered, she chose a bottle of wine from his selection and poured them each a glass and set them on the coffee table. She popped a movie in the VCR and settled back on the couch, grabbing the remote and her glass of wine and propping her feet up on the table.

Clark came back out wearing a pair of sweats and a t-shirt. No glasses, she noted. He looked confused as he took in the sight of her on his couch.

“You said drinks after work, right?” She tipped her head

at the spot next to her on the couch.

And somehow, all his hurt and sadness seemed to vanish when he smiled at her.

THE END