

## Leading Light

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Rating: P6

Summary: Some things warmed your body, and some things warmed your heart. For Rachel, both came together that night.

Disclaimer: Let's face it - if I owned Eleventh Hour, I would have made sure that they had never even thought of cancelling it. 18 episodes are by far not enough of that great show. Unfortunately, show belongs to Jerry Bruckheimer, Stephen Gallagher and CBS.

Soft moonlight illuminated the cozy bedroom of the suite they'd rented. Stars twinkled at the sky, and the silver celestial body was so bright that it could have been considered as a serious competitor to the sun, hadn't the burning star not been the reason for its brightness.

It was a calm, soothing atmosphere, made to allow a peaceful night's sleep and lovely dreams.

Yet sleep was the one thing that didn't want to come to Jacob Hood. The biophysician lay in his bed, pillow propped up against the headboard with his head resting on the fluffy cushion, and stared, wide awake, through the room's panorama window. The stars twinkled happily, and the moon smiled gently, but nothing of this calmed his mind enough to cease its work for at least one night.

Sighing, he got up and stepped outside into the cool night air. The suite he and his handler Rachel Young recently resided in was on one of the higher floors of the hotel, and its balcony overlooked the nameless town their newest case had brought them to. Only along the main roads some cars drove through the night, probably aiming for home and family. And sleep.

Jacob breathed in deeply. The air was fresh and clear, and some indistinct smell of baking, of vanilla and cinnamon and other sweet fragrances, met him now and then. Not far away was a factory that produced cookies and even at this late - or early, depending on the point of view - hour, baking was still in progress, as it seemed. Or maybe the years had simply made of the seducing scents a part of the air surrounding the town.

While Hood didn't sleep much, but also didn't need that much rest, Special Agent Young was, despite obviously not being entirely human, as she had already survived so much, nevertheless only another normal person who needed a few hours of sleep every night. But dreading and waiting for Hood to hit his panic button had made her sleep a light one. In the end, her mind was always awake to some extent, always ready to step in immediately if Hood was in danger.

And so she was immediately awake when light sounds from the balcony reached her ears and mind. Even through the closed window, she could hear it. Eyes still shut tight, as a part of her didn't want to leave this cozy cocoon of sleep, she reached for the gun on her nightstand. Only then she opened her eyes and got up. Slowly she approached the balcony door of her room while she attentively listened to any sounds - especially for some from the next room. But now everything was silent.

As quietly as possible she unlocked the door and after breathing in deeply, she opened it quickly, stepping out with her gun raised in front of her. To her surprise it was Hood who was looking at her, wide-eyed and shocked.

"Rachel?"

"Hood? What are you doing here?" While her still a bit sleepy mind could have dealt with an aggressor without any problems, reacting to the biophysician standing before her was an entirely different matter. Sighing, she lowered her weapon, secured it again and brought it back inside, before joining her partner on the balcony.

"Getting some fresh air," he answered her question when she came to stand beside him. "Look at the stars. We never see so many stars in Washington. There's too much light pollution there. But here..."

"It's beautiful," Rachel agreed, understanding what Hood was implying with his words.

"People have been watching the stars for so many centuries... All developments and enhancements, all knowledge, even mankind flying to space - nothing ever stopped people from being fascinated by all those little twinkling lights in the night sky." The woman next to him said nothing, but instead took in the picture above her; she had never paid much attention to the constellations and only now realized there were probably whole stories written in the sky, and not only philosophically speaking.

"We may have been in space and on the moon, but all those stars we see, they are too far to even reach. Maybe that is what fascinates people," she thought aloud, remembering the days when she was a child and always watched *Star Trek* with her dad. Back in the day, she often studied the stars at night, dreaming of being somewhere up there. But then she grew up - and the dreams of a girl were replaced by the reality of an adult life.

"Isn't it sad to think that the light we see is probably that of stars that are already dead?" Hood mumbled, more to himself, only to then turn to his partner and smile at her. "How much do you know about star constellations?"

"Not much... Well, more like nothing, to be honest," she replied, a bit hesitantly. Even though she had watched the stars when she had been younger, she for some reason had never bothered to learn more about them than the little they were taught at school. Hood's smile widened.

"How about a little lesson?" She would rather have gone back to sleep; but he looked so excited, and she just couldn't resist him and his enthusiasm. Not that she wanted to think about what that meant; she certainly wouldn't analyze her feelings for Jacob Hood.

Slowly, she nodded and immediately, he was close beside her, leaning into her and pointing with an outstretched arm up to the sky.

"First of all, I think you might know it, the brightest star over there..."

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He must have had introduced her to about two dozens of stars and constellations *and* their history when she suddenly shivered. Hood stopped in the middle of his sentence and looked at her, concern evident in his eyes.

"Are you cold? I don't want you to catch a cold only because I keep you up and outside." Rachel smiled, touched by his permanent concern for her, whose duty it was to look out for *him*.

"No, I'm fine, but maybe I should get my--" She never finished the sentence; too shocked when Jacob stepped behind her and wrapped his arms around her. She had to suppress a contented sigh as she savored the warmth of his body against hers.

Only after a little while she realized that Jacob didn't go on talking, but remained silent. Rachel felt his warm hands on her body and his head next to hers, and she felt the slow rise and fall of his chest. They were just standing there, looking up to the sky.

Long minutes passed, and even though she tried, Rachel couldn't find a reason why she should leave; except, maybe, to return to sleep. Granted, it wasn't as if she put much effort into the task of finding an excuse. She wouldn't have admitted it out loud, but this was one of the happiest and most wonderful moments she had experienced in what felt like years. It was incredibly heartwarming - literally. Jacob's embrace felt so right that just for a few seconds, she even got the little reprimanding voice in her head to shut up. The voice that told her that what she was just indulging in was completely unprofessional and inappropriate. But honestly, who cared? Who was there to remind her she was expected to keep some professional distance between her and Jacob - other than mentioned voice? Certainly there were reasons for them to better stay away from too-personal territories, and she knew them all. Some of them she knew too well. On the other hand, wasn't it human nature to turn to each other when two people spent as much time together as she and Jacob did, and when same people were facing dire situations together on a regular basis?

"Are you warmer now?" His words vibrated against her ear, and Rachel shivered again - but for entirely different reasons - and Hood tightened his embrace. "Maybe we should get back inside," he then continued, his breath heating her skin as he spoke. There was nothing suggestive or seducing in his voice; he was the same as always, friendly and concerned and a complete gentleman - and that bit absent-minded. Rachel felt the strong urge to groan at this annoying trait of his - this naïve kindness he oftentimes displayed, never realizing what he did to the women around him. And her, unfortunately.

"Yeah, maybe we should," she finally answered him, and he loosened his arms around her. Immediately she felt cold - in more than one way. She tiptoed to her door Jacob was holding open for her, and slipped inside.

Her back was still turned to him when she heard him say "Good night, Rachel." and close the door to the balcony. She whirled around, returning the good night wish just before the door was shut, and watched him give her a smile while walking away. Seconds later, the balcony door of his room closed as well, signaling her that he was in his room.

Sitting down on her bed, she shrugged off her shoes and lay back. But her mind was working overtime. Instead of closing her eyes and falling asleep, as logic and the tiredness she felt dictated, she stared at the ceiling and let thoughts, a thousand different ones at once, race through her head. She didn't even bother to make sense of them, to sort them or contemplate them. They were there, and she accepted them, hoping that if she let them their freedom for now they'd soon let her get her much-needed sleep.

And in the morning, everything would be as always.

She was hoping in vain.

It must have been half an hour later when she decided that this wouldn't work.

There were things that were long due to be addressed, and in nights like this, moments like these, those things weighed heavier than ever. Ever since she had gotten injured and kidnapped by that desperate and somewhat crazy woman four months earlier, things between them had changed. Rachel knew that Hood was concerned about her just as much as she was about him; but for probably the first time, he had had reason also. After all, she could have died.

She sat up and immediately spotted the light shining through the narrow space between the separating door and its threshold.

Sometimes she wondered if he ever slept at all.

Rachel knew that giving up on sleep for the night wasn't the wisest decision - but it seemed to be the only one her body allowed her for now. Perhaps going for a run would have helped; as it would have violated her duty to protect Jacob. With the frequency he attracted all kinds of nutcases, she felt best staying as close to him as possible.

As she swung her legs over the edge of the bed, slipped her feet into her shoes, and grabbed her bathrobe to put on, she fought down a wave of doubts and questions demanding her to rethink whatever she was about to do now. It was the part of her dedicated to duty and following rules and regulations.

She ignored it.

There were moments in one's life where one had to act instead of think.

Thus she walked the short distance over to the door that connected hers and Hoods rooms. A door that was often part of their hotel rooms; a door that was never locked. Something that was pure convenience on one part - but also a sign of the trust they shared on the other.

Would she now betray that trust by doing what she was about to do? Neither she nor, on extent, he, did have much time to reconsider before her otherwise rarely present spontaneity made a decision. Giving him only a short warning in form of a knock, she quickly opened the door between the adjoining rooms and rushed through.

His expression was confused, to say at least. Obviously he expected that something had happened, something demanding their immediate departure. So automatically, he turned to his equipment and began packing as fast as possible, hoping there still was enough time and this wasn't some kind of emergency, danger or a threat forcing them to leave.

When Rachel remained silent, however, even after several seconds, he abandoned his equipment and faced her, seeing his own confusion from moments earlier when she had come into his room mirrored in her expression.

"What are you doing?" she wanted to know, frowning at him and his almost hectic packing.

"I..." Now it was his turn to frown, his brows furrowing together. He opened his mouth, then closed it again. His answer he eventually formulated was a simple question she nevertheless had no answer to: "What *should* I do?"

And all of a sudden, the situation turned painfully awkward. What did she expect him to do? What had she expected to happen when she stormed through that door? That he waited behind it and pulled her into his arms without hesitation to kiss her senseless? This was still Jacob Hood!

The young woman took a deep breath, willing herself - her mind - to calm down. She had acted on impulse, entirely untypical for her. She had been thinking that maybe... thinking that... no, actually, she hadn't been thinking at all. If anything, she was frustrated. And lonely. She traveled through the country with her very own, personal nerdy scientist, barely saw her home and what was left of her friends anymore.

She really liked Hood, she had gotten used to him, his self, his thinking. His company. He was charming and even funny sometimes, and she didn't feel like a piece of meat as she often did with other men. In fact, he was a wonderful company, and she didn't want to miss him anymore in her life. Even though it meant travelling around and having no private life. Like, at all.

The part of her that was seeking physical closeness, however, was getting stronger with every day, and naturally her desires aimed themselves at the next available man she'd actually consider for... *whatever*. And that was Jacob Hood. He was intelligent, friendly, even flirty in his very own, very special way; he was good-looking and he was a decent man she never doubted she could trust at any time. Their connection had grown stronger yet in these past months, so her subconsciously seeking him out to give her the comfort she was missing seemed even more logical.

So he was oblivious to his effect on women - certainly he wasn't the only one out there. But if Rachel was honest to herself, he was the only man with that attitude to have ever attracted her. Usually she went for men who noticed women and expressed their interest. Slow dating and butterflies-including romances were great, but nothing for a woman with her job and life. When she was looking, then she looked for confidence, for strength and someone who knew what he wanted.

And yet here she was, standing across from him in his hotel room, only his bed - his *bed* - between them as they stared at each other with similar bewilderment.

"Do you never think it's strange..." she began, but trailed off when she realized that she had no idea how to go on. Leave it to usually ever absent-minded Hood to bite when she, for once, didn't need him to.

"What?"

"Never mind. I should just..." She had already half-turned back towards the door separating their hotel rooms and was about to flee this terribly embarrassing situation. Problem was - he may not have possessed the emotional perceptiveness to understand *what* was going on, but surely was he intelligent enough to know *that* something was off.

"Rachel, what happened?" It was the tone in his voice that made her stop. His sincere concern; his way of showing how much he cared for her. And he did. She may have been his handler, paid to spend her time with him, be at his side, protect him; but she was also his friend. And if she got nothing else from him - his friendship was something she treasured, because contrary to so many other things, so many other relationships in her life, it felt real.

Sighing, she faced him again, walked towards him and sat down on the foot of his bed.

"Those moments, earlier on the balcony..." she began as he sat down right next to her. "That was nice." Oh, well done, Rachel. Very eloquent.

"It was indeed," he agreed and she thought she felt him lean in a little closer so that their shoulders almost touched.

"I miss this," she eventually confessed after several seconds, and felt more than she saw his questioning look he aimed at her.

"What do you mean?"

"Such quiet moments. The... companionship of it." Her voice became quieter, lower, with every word, until it was merely a whisper. "The embraces, the closeness." He remained silent, except for a thoughtful huff.

Their shoulders were now actually touching.

Minutes passed; then she decided that maybe her foray may have been a bit too optimistic and hopeful, so she got up and turned towards the door to her room. She heard him stand as well, but didn't face him again until he said her name once more.

And when she looked at him, she saw that idea sparking in his mind through his eyes right before his mouth formed the words. There was a distinctive eye moment; there was him looking at the bed several times, and it had her narrow her own eyes just the slightest bit, suspicious of what was to come.

"Lie with me?" Rachel all but avoided her jaw dropping when his question sank in. Without giving her the chance to digest his words, he immediately backpedaled when he saw her hesitation. "Not to... I wasn't asking for you... us... I..."

"Jacob!" she stopped his rambling and thus this whole trainwreck of a conversation, "It's all right." Then she took a deep breath. "I will."

And this was it. This was the moment... neither knew what to do next. They both stood there, indecisive, maybe a little scared, and stared in turns around the room and at each other. In the end it was, and that may just have surprised them both, Jacob who lay down first. He got comfortable on his right side, one hand under his head, the other resting on his hip. Then he looked at her questioningly.

It was now or never, she supposed. After all, she wanted that, didn't she? She had been contemplating her loneliness and how much she missed being with someone, experiencing the comfort of physical closeness. And maybe emotional one, too. On top of all that, she had revealed these thoughts and needs to Jacob. She should have known that being the man he was, the *scientist*, he would try and find a solution. Find a way to help her. Offering the comfort she was seeking was the most logical way of action.

If she thought about it, his reaction was incredibly sweet; it was, in a way, more than anyone had ever done for her.

Sitting down on the bed again, she shook off her slippers, and for a moment considered doing the same with her bathrobe, but then decided against it. This was an arrangement for comfort; an additional layer of clothing between them wouldn't hurt.

The moment she came to lie next to him, her back to his front so he could spoon up behind her, his arm snuck around her waist. His hand he held in a loose fist, almost as if he wanted to show her that he was not going to touch her with his open palm unless she allowed it.

So her own hand glided along his arm until she found the first, and nudged his fingers to open so she could entwine hers with them.

She heard him mumble something, but couldn't quite make out the words, so she turned her head until she was facing the ceiling and her ear was just right next to his mouth.

"What did you say?" she asked quietly.

"Good night, Rachel," he said, equally quiet, and the next thing she felt were his lips on her cheek, lingering for a second or two before he pulled back again to add, "Sweet dreams."

A smile bloomed on her face when she replied, "And to you, Jacob." Turning her head back to burrow into the pillow, she slowly drifted off to sleep as she listened to his breath evening out.

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