

Playing to Win

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Rated: PG

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Summary: Being cooped up in the Lexor while on an undercover assignment leads to some friendly competition and a kiss. But was that kiss real, or was it a ruse? They've been playing this game almost since the moment they met. And now Lois is playing to win the game.

Story Size: 3,673 words (20Kb as text)

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Author's Note: You can totally blame Val's "Just a Ruse" for this idea. Thanks, Val!

This story takes place while Lois and Clark are undercover in the Lexor during "Honeymoon in Metropolis."

Chumpy.

It was *totally* a word. Maybe she couldn't verify it right this minute, not with that poor excuse for a dictionary that Clark had produced. But somehow, some way, once they wrapped up this undercover assignment, she would prove that it was a legitimate word. Who did he think he was, anyway, challenging her word? Even out of the office he was editing her copy! And the worst part of it was, he wasn't even doing it to try and beat her at the game. Oh no, not Clark.

What *was* it with him?

He could tease her and banter with her and edit her copy, but it was *never* in the context of trying to win or to best her in some way.

He genuinely didn't seem to care if he "won" anything against her. Not in an argument. Not in getting a story first. Not even at a board game. In fact, he'd even gently ribbed her about her own drive to win and had even seemed to be perplexed by it. He'd chuckled and given her that devilish smile of his and teased her, declaring her to be the "most competitive person I've ever met." Which, of course, had only fanned the flames of Mad Dog Lane's need to not only win the game, but to absolutely crush his score. She still wished she'd managed to do that. It would have served him right. But as it was, she'd only managed to squeak ahead by a paltry twenty-seven points.

Next time, she vowed, as she fiddled with the tripod she and Clark were setting up to spy on their targets overnight while they got some much-needed rest. *At any rate, a win is a win. Right?*

She was about to express her frustration with the tripod and voice her regret that they hadn't found a way to keep Jimmy around long enough to set it up for them without arousing anyone's suspicions, when suddenly the apparatus vanished from her hands. She barely got out a "Hey!" as Clark flung the scope and tripod onto the bed. She felt almost frozen in place as he tossed the blankets over their equipment with a flick of his wrist.

"Are you insane?" she demanded, making ready to stormily grab the items back from the large, plush, honeymoon suite bed.

Clark's only answer was to lift her bodily and fling *her* onto the bed too. Instantly, she attempted to push herself back up. Whatever Clark was up to, she was far from amused.

"Clark! This is not funny!" she managed to get out, just before his full weight was on her as he leaned over. Gently, he pinned her arms so that she couldn't swat and bat at him to leave her alone. But she could still give him a piece of her mind, and she absolutely intended to.

In the next second, however, all arguments – and thoughts, for that matter – were utterly obliterated as his lips came crashing down on hers. Fire raced in her veins. Her heart went into overdrive, smashing against her ribcage as her pulse skyrocketed. Fireworks exploded in her brain. Deep within her core, something stirred. Something she hadn't felt in a long time. *Desire*.

Regardless of a few rather graphic dreams she'd had of him right after their adventure with Miranda's pheromone spray, her need was more than just the animalistic lust that everyone experienced from time to time. It was desire on a soul-deep level. As firmly as she'd tried to deny it over the past months working with Clark, she *was* attracted to him. Yes, he was tall and seemingly perpetually tanned and handsome – *very handsome*, as her hyperactive hormones bluntly reminded her – but it was more than that. Clark was also gentle and decent and genuine. He was the best person she'd ever known. For the first time in her life, Lois knew what it was like to love someone in a forever kind of way, even if that love was just that of friendship. He was someone she needed in her life because with him, she felt like the missing pieces of her soul had finally been found.

All stiffness from her confusion at his initial motion of tossing her onto the bed melted away. She relaxed into his embrace and gave herself over fully to his kiss. She could feel the passion and the love in the way his lips caressed hers and the tentative, exploratory feel of his tongue against hers as her lips parted just enough to give him access. Time stopped. The world around her disappeared. It was as if only the two of them existed, floating alone in a bubble out in the vast cosmos.

She found herself not even caring what had possessed Clark to cross the threshold of "best friend" into... whatever this new level of their relationship was.

His pelvis was perfectly aligned with hers, and she was acutely aware of how intimate a position they were in. She felt a growing heat and wondered – if only in abstract terms – what it would be like if she and Clark were to explore this new dimension of their relationship. He certainly would not be the first coworker that she invited into her bed, even if she'd long ago sworn off ever getting intimate with someone from the office again. What would it be like with Clark? Surely, he would never take advantage of her. Using her to sate his own desires and then stealing her story would never in a million years occur to Clark. He was too goodhearted to do anything so crass.

"Clark," she tried to moan into his mouth, but before she could form even the slightest sound, she felt his embrace around her tighten imperceptibly and his tongue flick against her upper lip. She sighed instead.

"Towels? Yah?" she vaguely heard the nosy hotel maid say from what sounded like a million miles away. But the interruption had broken the spell, and Lois found herself surfacing from the almost hypnotic trance that she'd surrendered herself to while kissing Clark. "Oops! Sorry," the maid hastily added as she must have caught sight of the "husband and wife" locked in the throes of passion. Lois heard the woman's swift retreat from the room.

After a heartbeat, Clark ended the kiss and stood awkwardly before her. For a long moment, Lois felt herself flushed and breathless and utterly speechless. The pleasantly tingling sensation still zipped through her every neuron, and she felt too shaky to stand right away. Still, Clark was looking at her, a mixture of expectation and an apology written on his face, with just a hint of embarrassment. For a moment, Lois wasn't entirely sure how to respond. The disappointment that the kiss was over – and that it had only been a ruse – robbed her of words. Deep inside, she

longed for the kiss to have been real, even if she would never admit it out loud. She craved more.

Aware that she had to say something, however, she cleared her throat and weakly protested with an indignant, “Doesn’t anybody knock around here?”

Clark looked relieved that she wasn’t angry with him for what he’d done, as well as grateful that she’d understood why he’d done it. But was that also a flicker of longing in his eyes?

The rest of the night passed with all the speed of a glacier. Roarke and Harrington were no-shows in the building across the street, frustrating both Lois and Clark. And yet, there was a part of Lois that was almost grateful for the silent, dark windows across the street from them. It meant more time with Clark. It meant more time for her to explore her unexpected response to his kiss and the feelings that had been awakened within her heart with all the subtlety of a volcanic eruption. To buy time away from Clark to contemplate in silence, she excused herself and popped into the bathroom to take a long, hot shower. As the soothing jets of water pounded against her skin and loosened some of the tension she was carrying in her shoulders, she mulled the situation over.

Subconsciously, she ran her tongue over her lips – over all the places Clark’s own tongue and lips had touched her.

That was no ruse, she thought as she massaged the floral hotel shampoo into her hair. *No one is that good of an actor. That was real passion.*

She frowned as she let the water wash the shampoo away. If Clark’s kiss had been real, then that *had* to mean that the Revenge love potion stuff had worked on him too. But he hadn’t seemed all that different from his usual chipper self. She’d even thrown herself – literally! – at him. She’d shown up to his apartment in a mostly see-through harem outfit for crying out loud! And he hadn’t made a single move to take advantage of the situation. So, either he had the steel will of Superman, or he hadn’t been lying when he’d said that he just wasn’t that attracted to her.

And yet...

Lois growled as she squirted a generous dollop of conditioner into her palm.

There was no hiding the fact that Clark had been openly salivating over her ever since they’d met, regardless of the fact that she’d point-blank told him not to waste his time. So how had he managed to escape the “love drunkenness” of that foul pheromone spray? And why had he lied and said that he had no feelings for her, when it was clear that he always went out of his way to do nice things for her? Things that no other man had ever done for her before – like bringing her coffee and walking her home at night with no expectation of being invited inside and refusing to ever ride on her coattails to enhance his own career.

Conditioner slid down her body as the shower cleansed it from her hair, and she began to vigorously scrub her body with a soapy loofah. But deep down, she wasn’t quite angry with Clark. She knew – or at least, could guess well enough – why he would lie about his attraction to her. How many times had she hurt him? Especially in the beginning of their working relationship. He was probably too scared to tell her the truth.

Then again, he hadn’t exactly been shy during their kiss a few hours ago. She knew what a fake kiss from Clark felt like. She’d given him one when that nutjob Trask had been about to throw them both out of a plane in his demented attempt to lure Superman in. Sure, Clark had been surprised at first, but within a heartbeat he’d kissed her back. It had been a fleeting, tentative thing, and maybe he’d believed it was real at first, but it hadn’t been a *real* kiss. What she’d experienced with him earlier *had* been, she would stake her press pass on it.

The water rinsed the soap from her body, but she made no move to leave the shower. She let the water continue to run. There *had* to be a way to test her theory that Clark desired her. But... how? It was like she was playing an invisible game of chess with

him.

Games.

Ugh!

That’s all they’d done all day.

Board games. Card games. Game shows on the television.

Even a few word-finds and crossword puzzles that Clark had run to the hotel gift shop to buy for them.

All games which Clark had played with a grin on his face and a stubborn refusal to vie for the win. Even during the crossword puzzles, he’d noticeably allowed Lois to fill in the answers to the final clues. He hadn’t been the one to “finish” a single one of them.

She still didn’t understand his complete disinterest in winning. Didn’t everyone enjoy the rush that came with winning? He was a college football player! Surely, he’d felt the competitiveness that came from playing sports! He’d told her about his time playing ball and, from all accounts – though of course Clark had downplayed it – he’d been one of his school’s most valuable players, even setting some records that still stood. She had half a mind to bring this up to him when another thought made her excitement at winning the argument fizzle out. She knew exactly what he would say.

“It wasn’t just *me* on the team, Lois. Sure, I did my best to help us win, and okay, yes, I wanted us to win, but it wasn’t up to me. What I did was no more important than what any other guy on the team did.”

She sighed, knowing her guess was right, or close enough to it. Besides, sports were a completely different kind of game.

Running a football into the end zone was a completely different skill set from being cutthroat enough to win at Risk or Monopoly.

Games.

She sighed again and shook her head. If Roarke and Harrington continued to be no-shows, it was likely that she and Clark would wind up spending their whole faux honeymoon playing games – both the physical kind and the mental kind as Clark stubbornly refused to mention their kiss. She had to admit, she was getting tired of winning board games – the novelty had worn off ages ago as they’d played their sixth game of Scrabble – and the unspoken one they were both playing with their feelings was annoying and uncomfortable. Again, she had the fleeting image of standing opposite Clark on a chess board and...

“That’s it!” she whispered excitedly to herself. “A game!”

A devious smile ghosted over her lips as a plan slowly coalesced in her mind. She could make this work. All she needed was the right kind of game. Clark might have insisted to her that he never played with the intention of winning and that he played for the sake of playing, but Lois suspected that this wasn’t entirely true. All she had to do was find some kind of game that would *force* him to want to win.

In doing so, *she* would win.

And when she won, she could force Clark to tell her the truth about that kiss.

All she had to do was choose the perfect game to play with him.

The most obvious answer, of course, was Truth or Dare. But Clark was an expert at weaseling away when things got uncomfortable, and he was a skilled wordsmith. There was no doubt in her mind that he would find a way to answer whatever questions she threw at him without *actually* answering her questions. Or he’d suddenly decide that he needed to grab a cab to go across town for some obscure knickknack that she never seemed to see him with. No, Truth or Dare wouldn’t work. And besides, that was more of a preteen girl’s game. She wasn’t completely sure she’d be able to convince Clark that he should play. Although, she had to admit, he was a pretty laid-back guy who always seemed eager to please...

She shook her head. No. She needed something better than

Truth or Dare. Something where there would be an actual winner. Something more... iron clad, without an arbitrary winner just because one or both of them grew bored with the game. But still, the question remained: what should she use in her trap?

Realizing how long she'd been in the shower at this point, she turned the tap off and dried herself with the fluffy white hotel towel. She dressed slowly, still mulling her dilemma over. Then she turned her attention to blow drying her hair. By the time she was done, she was no closer to picking a game than when she'd started. Sighing, she checked her appearance over in the full-length mirror on the back of the door, deliberately delaying her return to the living room. Normally, at home, she'd be in her most comfortable pair of pajamas and settling down to a movie or an old Ivory Tower tape, perhaps with a tub of ice cream. But since she was on a stakeout – and in close quarters with Clark – she'd foregone her usual pajamas in favor of an old pair of sweatpants and a Metropolis University shirt. The shirt brought back a host of good memories – mostly of her journalism classes and the tight little group of friends she'd had in the dormitory. While they had all drifted apart after graduation, Lois still treasured the memories of their years together, and how freeing living away from home had been. She and her friends had managed to have a few wild adventures. She recalled the first time she'd drank too much at the local bar and had, in her inebriated state, been persuaded into a game of...

That's it!

A smile curved her lips as she gave herself a once over with her eyes. Exiting the bathroom, she made a beeline back to the cozy living room in the suite, where Clark was standing by the windows like a silent sentinel, watching the still dark building across from their hideout.

"Clark?" she called.

"Yeah, Lois?" he replied, turning away from the boring tableau before him.

"I wanted to ask you something. About the way you play games," Lois hedged.

"Again?" He rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "I already told you, Lois. Winning just doesn't mean the same thing to me that it does to you. I just enjoy playing to have a good time," he patiently explained.

Lois folded her arms. "I don't believe you. And I can prove it."

Clark gave her a quizzical look. "I'm not sure I understand," he responded slowly.

"I bet you that I can find at least one game where you *will* be playing to win," she explained, a dangerous twinkle in her eyes that Clark seemed to see. He looked dubiously at her, as if half afraid of what she might be thinking of.

"Lois, I've already..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she said dismissively, waving away his words with one hand. "Are you up for the challenge?"

Clark advanced across the room, stopping just short of where she stood. He warily eyed the hand that she stuck out for him to shake.

"Oh, come on, Clark!" she exploded impatiently when he did not immediately take her hand. "Are you in or out?"

"What are the terms?" he finally answered in a playful way.

"If I win, you have to truthfully answer one question of my choosing," she resolutely replied, already planning to make him admit his feelings toward her.

I need to know how he feels before I even attempt to figure out my own feelings, she told herself. *I won't let myself be heartbroken again.*

"And if I win?" Clark asked, arching one eyebrow, as though skeptical that she would win this bet.

"You won't," she promised.

"I might," he teased.

"I thought you didn't *like* trying to win," she protested in an almost flirty way.

Clark chuckled a little. "For argument's sake," he prodded.

"Okay, fine. If you win..." She paused, trying to think of a suitable prize. After a moment, she shrugged. "I don't know. What do you want?"

Clark sighed, raking his hand through his hair. "I guess... I don't know," he stammered awkwardly. His hand slid to his neck and he rubbed it self-consciously.

"How about the same terms?" Lois proposed. "If I win, you have to answer one question of my choosing. And if you somehow win, which you won't, I'll answer any question you want. But you have to *swear* to tell the truth, no matter what. And I'll do the same. Deal?"

Clark studied her face for a moment, then took her hand and shook it firmly, sending her heart into a gallop. His earlier kiss had messed with her more than she wanted to admit. Maybe it was because they were in the honeymoon suite. Maybe it was because they were posing as newlyweds.

Or maybe there's something genuine between us, a little voice in the back of her mind dared to whisper.

We'll worry about that after we win this game, she firmly thought back, squashing any arguments the other part of her might make. *I have every intention to make him tell me the truth about how he feels about me. Just as soon as I win this bet.*

She was glad when Clark posed his next question. "Deal. What game did you have in mind?"

"Poker," Lois immediately answered.

He rolled his eyes again and laughed heartily, probably thinking that he'd already won the bet. "Lois, you can't be serious! You've seen firsthand how much I don't care about winning at poker. Believe me, that was *not* an act to appease Perry."

"Oh, I know," Lois replied silkily, putting a hand on his shoulder and patting him. "But this isn't the Chief's monthly poker game. This is just you and me."

"And how's that any different?" His eyebrows crept up into his hairline in a bemused way.

Lois smirked as she leaned in to whisper into his ear. "Because, Clark, we're playing *strip* poker."

THE END