

Game, Set, Match

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Rated PG-13

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Summary: Luthor has a game plan to ensure that Lois will be with him forever. Lois, and fate, have other ideas.

It was all going according to plan, Luthor thought as he regarded his female companion. Lois Lane would be his and even Superman couldn't stop him this time. The drugs Doctor Deter had sold him – at exorbitant prices – were keeping her confused and compliant. Currently Lois thought her name was Wanda Detroit and that he was her lover, a character named 'Kent'. She thought they were on the run from her ex, a thug named 'Clark', and his dastardly accomplice Superman. Luckily the drugs kept her from analyzing his story too closely.

Luthor was pleasantly surprised at how easy it had been to keep her from thinking about it. But soon he wouldn't have to keep up the charade. Soon everything would be as it should be. As it was meant to be. As he wanted it to be.

Luthor looked up as the perimeter alarm sounded. Asabi was right on time. Odd that the person whose self-assured presence he found so irritating only a few years ago would be the key to Lex Luthor's continued survival.

"We have a visitor," Luthor said as Asabi rounded the corner. "Wanda, meet Asabi."

Asabi nodded his greeting. He looked positively smug in his white sherwani suit and turban. Luthor wanted to hate him but he knew he couldn't afford to waste energy on that at the moment. He would deal with Asabi soon enough. His game plan called for no loose ends.

Luthor turned his attention back to the matter at hand – preparing Wanda for what he had planned for them. "Asabi worked for me, several years ago, trying to instruct me in the mystic ways of the Thugee cult. But I rejected his teachings," Luthor explained. It was always best to stick as close to the truth as possible. "I was in love with all things scientific. What a fool. I know now that science is only the key which opens the prison door, but the power of spirit ..."

"... is the freedom to never again be trapped in *any* prison," Asabi completed the sentence for him.

Wanda just looked confused. "Uh, Kent? What are you yakkin' about? In English."

Asabi gave a faint smile. "Allow me. I speak of your soul. What is it, do you think?"

"My soul?" Wanda said, frowning. "It's uh... y'know, who I am ... and right now I'm a little fuzzy on that, to be honest."

Asabi moved to Luthor's table which still had the remains of lunch on it. He picked up a glass of water. "The soul is this water. The glass is your body," he said.

"I'm with you so far," Wanda said but Luthor could tell she wasn't really interested.

Asabi didn't seem to notice, or if he did he didn't care. "The soul is only trapped within the glass until one learns the very simple trick of ... " He poured the water from the glass into an empty bowl.

Wanda shrugged. "Send a search party, I'm lost."

Luthor chuckled. With the drugs in her system he knew she would have trouble following the simplest explanations. But it was almost fun to watch her try to cope. "My darling, do you know the Greek definition of seconds?"

"Hey, Nick, gimme another souvlaki," she chimed.

"No. The seconds that tick, tick, tick?"

She shook her head.

"Each is an arrow, the last one fatal.' But not for us," he said. He'd been looking forward telling her his plans for the future. Their future. "Our final seconds will be the first step to life everlasting."

He watched her face as he pulled the tarp off the two glass canisters that contained the bodies he'd commissioned Doctor Mamba to create for him. It had taken months to find where Mamba's creations had been stored after the good doctor's arrest. Wanda had proved herself an able assistant when he asked her to help him steal his property back from STAR Labs. His one disappointment was her absolute refusal to use lethal force.

He wasn't disappointed in her reaction this time. Her eyes widened as she regarded the two breathing bodies in the canisters. They were exactly as he had ordered from Mamba. Two genetically perfect specimens created to Lex Luthor's specifications. Young, blond, beautiful. Two sleeping beauties waiting for a soul's kiss to awaken them.

"The fetuses we took from the lab," Luthor explained, "their growth accelerated, their bodies now almost ready."

Wanda's eyes narrowed. "Almost ready ... for what?"

Time to spin his tale again. "We are sought by a man with great power ... and x-ray vision. How do you hide from such a man? You don't. Unless you exchange one body ... for another."

"Okay. One question," she said, eyeing the female body.

"Of course," he agreed blandly.

"Are you orbiting the planet?" she hissed at him. "You think I'm gonna shuck my body like a piece o' corn? I got enough problems here, Lex..."

"Darling, please." He reached out for her.

"...I barely know who I am as it is," she said, shaking off his hand. "I'm having all these crazy dreams and... hey, who's Lex?" Her forehead was creased in confusion as she stared at him.

"Pardon?"

"I called you Lex. Your name's Kent. You told me your name's Kent."

"Well, that's easily explained..."

She shook her head and frowned. "...but Lex rolled right off my tongue like I've said it a hundred times, Lex ... Lex L ..."

According to Deter, the drugs would keep Lois from accessing her memories except through fragmentary dreams. But obviously Deter had underestimated Lois's natural skepticism and the drugs seemed to be losing their effectiveness. She was becoming harder to fool.

"Lex Kent," Luthor answered quickly. "You've always called me by my last name. That hit you took on the head must be worse than we thought."

"Lex Kent ... ?" she repeated. There was more than a touch of disbelief in her voice. She looked over at the bodies in the canisters. "Well, whatever. I'm not doin' this."

"Then let me tell our future," he said, keeping his voice soothing and low. "We run, we hide; we're caught, caged and

die alone. And let me tell you something else. If that's what you wish ... I'll make it so. I'll give up my freedom, my future, my life for you."

He could see the indecision in her eyes as she studied his face. He moved closer, taking her hand. "But know that at this moment," he added, "we stand at the very precipice of all our tomorrows. And if you just close your eyes and make the leap, we shall know eternity. Together."

He could see her weakening.

Finally she shrugged, eyeing the blonde female body. "I just never saw myself as a blond. But ... all right, what the hell... it can't be any crazier than the rest of my life."

Wanda turned to go back to the bed to lie down. The drugs that had made her compliant also sapped her energy. Since he took her, she had spent much of the time napping. He had hoped she would be more interested in him – the 'Wanda' persona had seemed rather promiscuous – after all, he had pulled her out of a dive in Suicide Slum where she'd been making money as a 'singer'. Luthor had hoped he would be able to convince her to sleep with him. But Deter had warned him that the drugs that kept her confused also diminished libido and while 'Wanda' seemed to buy into the idea that they had been lovers, she hadn't shown any interest in having sex with him.

He hadn't wanted to force the issue *yet*. But his patience was getting thin.

"I see into her mind, her heart," Asabi murmured. Luthor hadn't heard him approach and wasn't sure how much the man had overheard.

"And?"

"Memories submerged in darkness, fighting to find the light. She is strong. And she is not alone," Asabi said.

Luthor shrugged. "Of course not. She has me."

"No. Another. A great love; one that transcends time. Even now, she longs for him in her dreams."

"And if I kill him?"

Asabi shook his head. "The love would not die. The memories would surface."

An unexpected frisson of fear ran through Luthor. "Help me, Asabi. I can't lose her."

"There is but one way to sever this love and bind her to you forever," Asabi said. "She must kill this man. With her own hands and of her own free will. That done, the love dies ... and she is yours."

Relief flooded through him. "Well, why didn't you just say so? For a second, I was actually worried ..."

It was going as planned. Luthor had stolen the Lois Lane clone away from Clark Kent and with her was all the cash and bearer bonds he had set aside for a 'rainy day.' Then the clone, in a desperate attempt to get back into his good graces, gave him the key to control and then to destroy Superman. Who would have imagined that the most powerful creature on the planet hid in plain sight as a cog in the media machine? A cog that had family and friends, all of whom were pawns in a game Luthor planned to win.

Game, set, match, Lex Luthor.

He looked over to where Asabi was explaining the soul transference ceremony to Wanda.

"You will inhale the smoke of this sacred flame; it takes all that you are, all that you shall

ever be ... exhale, and at that moment, your new bodies inhale the smoke and ..."

"... and that's it?" Wanda asked. The disbelief in her voice was palpable.

"Yes."

"Just like that, boom, I'm a blond? Jeez. It's harder dyin' your roots."

"Our souls are made to escape. It is only thought which holds them prisoner," Asabi explained.

"And we are prisoners no longer, my love," Luthor interrupted. "Soon we shall be free to start any lives we dare dream. So, what would you like to be, hmm? A European countess? A South American horsewoman? No? I have it. A Russian poet."

Wanda's forehead creased in thought. It was a habit he was going to have to break her of – it would lead to wrinkles and he hadn't spent millions having Mamba create a perfect woman for her to be marred by wrinkles.

"A writer ... " Wanda murmured.

He frowned. Wanda had shown no particular interest in books or reading. Even the fashion magazines she found boring and he hadn't dared allow any recent newspapers or news magazines into their hideaway.

"A writer ... " she repeated. "When you said poet, I ... yeah, a writer. That's crazy, though, I can barely talk, who do I think I am being a writer?"

"You have more locked within you than you can possibly imagine," Luthor assured her. "Believe me."

"I just wish I didn't have this weird feeling," she said. "I know this is the right plan to get us outta this corner we're in but somethin' keeps eatin' at me ... somethin' ... It's like being in the dark, looking for a light switch; you know it's there and it makes you nuts not to find it."

Luthor pulled her into his arms and kissed her. It had worked as a distraction many times before but this time she didn't respond. She was staring at the bodies in the canisters.

He pulled back. "We'll find it together. But first, I've got to run a little errand. I won't be long." He grabbed the molecular disruptor he'd acquired from one of his military contacts – a contact that was no longer of any use for him and whose body would never be found.

Asabi stopped him at the door. "She is emerging from her darkness. Struggling ever closer to her truth... the love she longs for, the..."

"Yes, I know. But that love *will* be severed," Luthor snarled at him. "I'm going to lure him here tonight and she's going to kill him."

It had started so well. Luthor had convinced Wanda that Superman was evil and a menace to them. She had balked only a little when he insisted she learn how to use the disruptor.

"I don't know if I could shoot somebody," she said.

"Believe me, no one treasures life more than I do but this man is evil," Luthor told her. "He works for Clark and wants to destroy us. So we must be ready to defend ourselves ... with deadly force, if necessary." He twisted the power dial and put the weapon in her hands. "Now it's set at full power. Finger goes on the trigger there, aim and fire at that canister in the corner."

It was one of his best performances – convincing her he had been attacked by Superman and had barely made it back to her. She believed him and she was ready to kill to defend him. By the time she realized the truth – that he had been the attacker and Superman the victim – it would be too late.

Nothing could stop him now.

Asabi set up the ceremonial fire while Luthor checked the inert bodies in their canisters. Soon they would awaken of their own accord and then, according to Asabi, nothing could prevent the strongest disembodied soul in the vicinity from taking command of them despite the psychic barriers Asabi had put into place to protect them.

“We’re ready anytime you are, Asabi,” Luthor said. He knew it was going to be close. He had planned for Superman to arrive before the ceremony. His death would have made the perfect counterpoint to the soul transfer. Superman blasted into atoms while Luthor and his bride lived on in perfect bodies. But Superman was late and the ceremony had to go on.

“Open your minds to the eternal,” Asabi instructed as he sprinkled herbs over the fire. “Remember that death is irrelevant. The soul is indestructible and ever transitive. Death is not to be feared.”

Superman burst through the door, expression grim. “All right, Luthor, it’s over.”

“Superman ...,” Luthor murmured, mostly for Wanda’s benefit. He left Wanda’s side to face the intruder. “Get out of here, leave us alone!” he ordered.

As expected, Superman grabbed him and hoisted him off his feet. “I don’t think so. Where’s my Mom?” Superman demanded.

“Wanda!” Luthor shouted. “Shoot him!”

Luthor watched as Superman’s attention was drawn to Wanda and the disruptor. “Lois? Don’t...”

Wanda paused and Luthor could read the confusion playing across her face. He didn’t dare give her time to think. “Shoot him! Now!” Luthor ordered.

She was watching Superman and Luthor thought he saw a flicker of recognition in her eyes. “Let him go,” Wanda ordered.

Superman let go of Luthor’s clothes, dropping him to the floor.

Superman took a step toward Wanda. “Stay back,” she ordered but Luthor could tell that her heart wasn’t in it.

“Lois. It’s me,” Superman said.

“Wanda! *Shoot* him!” Luthor ordered as he stepped toward her.

She simply stared at him as though he’d lost his mind.

“Oh, for God’s sake ...” Luthor muttered. He grabbed the disruptor out of her hands and fired it in Superman’s direction. But Superman wasn’t there. Chunks of concrete and steel blasted from the far wall.

“Luthor, what have you done with my mother?” Superman demanded. Luthor fired again. This time one of the concrete pillars holding up the ceiling exploded. Superman was on the floor writhing in pain. Apparently the blast had grazed him.

Luthor offered Wanda the gun. “My dear, would you do the honors?”

She simply stared at him.

Luthor took a deep breath. “I want him dead and I want you to do it,” he explained patiently, as though to a child.

“You told me your name was Lex *Kent*. Only he called you ‘Luthor.’ You said *we* were being unjustly persecuted but good guys don’t go around shooting unarmed people. Good guys don’t go kidnapping people’s moms.”

Luthor shrugged. “Every man is the hero of his own story.”

Superman had stopped moving and seemed to be

unconscious. Pity that he was in no condition to beg for his life. Luthor would have liked to hear him beg one more time before blasting him out of existence.

No matter.

Luthor aimed the disruptor at him. It would be a little close to the canisters but Luthor had every faith that he could make this shot – it would be like shooting fish in a barrel. And he was a crack shot.

Wanda grabbed his arm but he shoved her aside. “Learn this now... I love you, but never, ever stand between me and what I want.”

He aimed at his fallen opponent. “Good bye, Clark *Kent*.” He squeezed the trigger then looked on in horror as Wanda drove toward Superman and the beam.

“Nooo!” he heard himself scream as her torso evaporated in the blast. Then he smiled as he realized that Superman was dead as well. There was a charred hole where his chest had been.

He looked around for Asabi but the man seemed to have disappeared. Luthor moved closer to inspect his work. He knew he should feel sad about Lois’s death – after all his entire game plan had been about stealing her from Superman – but he found that he was angry instead. He was angry that she hadn’t fallen in line with him, hadn’t chosen to follow his game plan. He was angry that she had chosen a meddling alien over him. And now she was dead.

She had chosen death rather than life ever-after with *him*. But the alien was dead, too. No more Superman.

Game, set, match – Lex Luthor.

Luthor heard footsteps approaching. They were too loud and too many for it to be Asabi returning. Luthor realized he had only one way out – the endgame, the final moves that would win him this game forever.

Asabi’s fire was still burning. Luthor dropped the remainder of Asabi’s herbs on the fire and breathed in deeply before approaching the canister that held the male clone. He looked up to see a pair of blue eyes looking down on him reproachfully. He looked at the female. Another pair of reproachful eyes.

“Nooo!” It couldn’t be. They couldn’t be awake. He couldn’t have failed when he was so close to success.

A woman screamed. Luthor turned to see Martha Kent and the accursed imitation Lois Lane standing with uniformed police officers. Mrs. Kent started toward him only to be held back by an officer. If looks could kill, Luthor would have been a smoldering pile of ashes.

One of the cops yelled for him to drop his weapon. Luthor ignored him and raised the disruptor. Lex Luthor would not live in a cage – but first he had to deal with the two bodies. They could not be allowed to live.

Shots rang out and Luthor felt a pressure in his chest. The disruptor hit the floor with a clatter.

He looked up. The pair had their hands on the inside glass. Tears were running down their cheeks. Tears for *him*. He hated them but he didn’t have the energy to do anything about it. Then the world went black.

Game, set, match – Lois Lane and Clark Kent.

THE END

Seconds was written by Corey Miller & Philip W. Chung. A/N: After reading Pam Jernigan’s **Just Like That...** (<http://www.lcfanfic.com/stories2/justlikt.txt>), I was attacked by a vortal, probably rabid, plot bunny.