

# Fair Play

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Rating: K

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**Author's Note:** A birthday fic for alphielj.

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*"Pleeeeeeease, Mom! One more try!"*

Clark immediately turned toward the source of his son's voice, shifting in mid-air. He didn't spend even a second deciding to fly toward Jason... his summer reading list could wait.

"Jason, " Lois was telling him. *"These carnival games are rigged. You'd just be wasting another dollar. Don't you want some cotton candy or something instead?"*

*"I know I can hit it if I just try again!"*

Clark grinned. He loved those games, too. He could still remember the Smallville County Fair. How he had wanted to win that big stuffed teddy bear for Lana...

*"Kiddo, even if you hit the balloon dead-center, they fix it so it'll bounce right off! You should jus-"*

At that moment, her cell phone shrilled in her handbag. Clark could hear her dig for the phone as he touched down in an alley a block from the parking lot where the carnival was set up. He swiftly changed into a set of casual clothes, and strode toward the grounds.

*"Hello?"* Lois was saying. In the distance, X-raying through the crowd, he could see her guide Jason with one hand away from the games area and balance her cell phone on her ear. *"Oh? What did you hear?"*

Clark was now close enough to see them without any special vision. Jason was still looking back toward the stalls with longing while Lois talked on the phone. This was the sort of thing they should be doing *together*. He needed to tell Lois the truth about himself, and soon. With Richard out of the picture now, what was he waiting for?

"Hey, let me make some arrangements and I'll call you back. How long can you wait there?" Lois frowned. "Oh, come on, I'll make it worth your while..."

Clark sidled up beside them, waving goofily to get her attention. "Uh, hi, Lois. Jason. Lovely day for this, isn't it?"

Lois turned to him with annoyance, which turned to surprise when she realized who it was. "Oh! Clark!" She spoke into the phone again. "Hang on a sec." She covered the speaker with a hand.

"Hi!" Jason said enthusiastically. "Do you like carnivals, too?"

"Love them!"

"Oh, my God, Clark." Lois said, an edge of panic in her voice. "You have no idea how glad I am you showed up. I've *got* to meet with a source before he takes off. It's only a few blocks over, but I can't take Jason along..."

"Oh, of course, I'd be happy to, Lois. Y-You don't even have to ask."

"Yay!" Jason did a little jump in the air.

"You're a life saver! I'll be back as soon as I can." She bent down to kiss the top of Jason's head. "Be good for Clark, okay?"

"I will!" Jason was already eyeing the Balloon Darts booth.

Lois waved and sped off, her heels clicking rapidly against the pavement.

"So," Clark began, already knowing the answer, "What do you want to do?"

"Can we play the games?" He started toward the booth without making sure Clark was following. Clark chuckled and caught up easily.

Jason reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar. "Three darts, please," he asked, placing the dollar on the scratched-up counter.

"Ya sure ya wanna have another go?" the carnie asked with a sly wink. A shock of blond hair stuck out in all directions from under his baseball cap. "Ya gotta hit two of 'em to win the big prize."

"Yes," Jason answered with determination. Picking up the first dart, he aimed carefully and tossed it with a strong flick of his wrist.

The dart thunked into the board a centimeter from one of the balloons.

"Aw, good try, kid! Ya got two more chances!"

Jason picked up another dart without reacting. He aimed and threw again, this time with even more power.

This dart caught the balloon just right and it popped with a satisfying *crack*.

"Yes..." Jason said.

"Great job!" Clark clapped him on the shoulder. "You just need one more!"

"I know I'll get it *this* time," he agreed, picking up the last one. He lifted the dart, closed one eye, and threw it...

It bounced right off one of the balloons, just as Lois had warned. The sound of the dart thwacking against the ground made Jason's shoulders slump in defeat.

"Better luck next time, kid." The carnie turned toward the passers-by and shouted, "Try your luck! Pop two balloons and get a prize!"

Clark put an arm around his shoulder and led Jason a distance away. "I'm sorry, Jason, I guess you can't win them all."

"But it *should* have popped that last one! Why didn't it work?" Jason frowned in frustration, his expression an exact duplicate of Lois' when she was worrying at a problem.

"Well, maybe it was just bad luck...?" He knelt down beside him. "You want to ride the Dragon Coaster to get your mind off of it?"

"Well..." he said, a light coming on in his eyes. "Mom said that the games were 'rigged.' What does that mean?"

"It means that they try to cheat you by making the game harder. It's not fair, but people do it all the time," Clark explained, his voice sad.

"But, how? It's just balloons and darts! Do they have trick ones or something?" He frowned again. "Can you... you know..." He made a gesture with two fingers going outward from his eyes. "...look?"

Clark's eyebrows rose. Jason knew? How much did he know? "Look?"

"With your..." He lowered his voice. "...X-ray vision. If they're cheating, shouldn't someone do something about it?"

"Huh," Clark huffed. Well, check one revelation off his mental list. They were going to

have to have a talk, and soon. "Well, sure. Give me a moment."

Clark turned toward the booth, noting several details. The balloons were only half-inflated... the dart tips were completely dulled... and the counter was too far back for a fair throw, especially for a little boy.

"I think I see how they're doing it."

"Are you going to bust them?" Jason said excitedly.

"I'm not sure that the police would take us seriously, Jason."

"Oh..." Jason's excitement deflated like the balloons. "So they're just going to get away with it?"

Clark looked into his son's eyes, feeling every bit of his disappointment. Even though this would seem small to Jason later, right now it probably felt like Clark had when he learned Luthor had walked out of prison.

"Probably..." A thought came to him just then, and along with it, a smile. "But I bet we can win you that prize, yet."

"Oh?" Jason's eyes lit up, but then he paused. "But I'm out of money!"

"I can spot you a dollar or two. Come on."

They stepped up to the counter once again, and Jason placed the dollar Clark had given him on the counter.

"You don't give up, do ya?" the carnie grinned, his tanned face rippling into a dozen tiny wrinkles. "But I admire a man with determination. Here you go."

He handed over the three darts, but Clark picked up one and examined it in the afternoon sunlight. "Uh... are these darts special in any way...?"

"Special?" the carnie frowned. "Nah, just your plain old darts. They're the only ones we've got, though." He added in a less jovial tone, "And no refunds."

As the man spoke, Clark trained a razor-thin line of heat vision on the end of the dart, super-heating it. "Oh, well, I don't really know much about darts, anyway. Here you go, Jason."

He took it and aimed with his usual concentration. With a toss, the dart soared into the air...

And glanced the side of one of the balloons. But the balloon popped with a loud bang anyway.

"Yay!" Jason shouted, ignoring the carnie's frown.

"Wonderful shot!" Clark enthused.

"I think it's because you touched it, Clark. Do it again!"

"O-Okay." He lifted the next one up and singed the end of it as well, pretending to pass it back and forth like a magician. Handing it to Jason, he declared, "Abracadabra!"

Jason giggled and tossed it.

But he had not been as careful. It sailed across the stall and punched into the board. Clark hoped the worker would not notice the thin trail of smoke emanating from the place where the dart was sticking.

"Ah..." the carnie sighed, satisfied that Clark hadn't tainted his game. "Better luck on the last one."

"I didn't aim it good enough, Clark. Can you pick it up one more time?"

"Sure," he said with a wink. "Nothing fancy this time." He lifted it, seeming to peer into the colored end. Once the end was heated again, he gave the dart back.

Jason closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He opened his eyes, aimed, threw...

In slow motion, Clark could see the dart veering slightly to the left. If it continued on this course, it would just miss one of the balloons. He blew very lightly, changing the dart's path...

*POP!*

The balloon spattered against the board.

Jason leaped into the air and pumped his fist. "I did it!"

"Ya sure did," the carnie said, impressed. "Quite an arm there. Well... which one do ya want?" he asked, gesturing to the row of prizes.

Jason didn't hesitate. "*That* one."

Two chili dogs, a large coke and a funnel cake later, Lois strode up to them, looking satisfied. "Well, that was totally worth it. We've got a juicy bit of news to add to the city council article, Clark." She sat beside them on the bench. "What did you guys do, except pig out?" she asked, pointing to their pile of trash.

"I won *this!*" Jason reached behind them and held out a huge plush toy for Lois to see. "Isn't it *awesome?*"

Lois shared a look with Clark. As her eyebrow rose, he shrugged helplessly. She laughed, taking the three-foot tall Batman doll into her lap, and tweaked its pointy ear. "Totally awesome."