

Lex Luthor's Revenge... Take One

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Summary: Just when you thought your mortal enemy had finally bit the dust....

Lois couldn't believe it. It had happened again. Didn't these yoyos ever get tired of kidnapping her? She struggled against the ropes that tied her hands to the back of the chair. She had tensed her muscles as much as she could as she was being trussed up, but the ropes were fairly secure and it was going to take some time before she could work herself loose. Not that she had any doubt that she would be able to eventually free herself. After all, she was an old pro at this captive game. It was just going to take some time, and pain, before she could loosen her bonds enough to get free.

She took note of her surroundings. The place looked vaguely familiar, like she'd been there before. But that was ridiculous. She had to admit that it wasn't your typical abandoned-warehouse-style hideout. Suddenly it came to her. This place looked a lot like one of the storage rooms that Lex had in his underground bunker. The one he'd shown her when it looked like Nightfall might prematurely end modern civilization.

She knew that the Metropolis police had locked up the site, which had included some heavy iron bars welded with heat vision across the access doors, courtesy of Superman. Had someone found a way to get in? Had there been some secret back door? Knowing Lex, she felt that was a distinct possibility. But who had brought her here? The only person Lois guessed that Lex would share the knowledge of this place with would have been Nigel St. John, and he was dead.

She chewed briefly on the tape covering her mouth, but then stopped. It would be fairly easy to free her mouth, but it might not be a good idea to let her captors know she could free herself from it until such time that she needed to. If this was indeed Lex's old bunker, then she knew that several feet of steel and concrete were between her and the streets of Metropolis. There was no way that any 'help Superman' was going to be heard through that.

Her thoughts drifted to Clark and what he might be thinking happened to her. Granted, she hadn't been gone that long yet. He might not even realize that she was missing. He'd left the house before she had, needing to answer a call for Superman. It was very possible that he hadn't even got to the Planet yet to find her not there. And even if he had, he might just assume that she had gone off to meet with a source or something. Still, it wouldn't be too long before he'd begin to wonder and start questioning people. The fact that she hadn't left him any sort of note would worry him.

Lois' musings on her husband were interrupted by the opening of the door. At last... was she going to get some answers? If her mouth hadn't have been taped shut her jaw would have dropped. She was stunned.

Striding into the room was... her! Well, not exactly her. This woman had Lois' face and figure, but the hair was different. It was worn long, well past the shoulders. Now she knew why her clothing had been taken from her when she'd first been brought in. This woman was wearing them. She, on the other hand, had

been forced to don an old T-shirt and a pair of baggy jeans.

Many thoughts and explanations were whirling through her head. Even though Lois was surprised to be confronted by a doppelganger, she wasn't shocked. It had happened too many times in the past for her to be completely thrown by it. She just had to figure out which version of a twin she was seeing. Was this woman a clone, an alternate dimensional Lois, or merely an actress? Given that she was in an old hideout of Lex Luthor's, Lois figured this must be a clone. The question was — was this phony Lois acting alone, or was someone else pulling her strings?

Her double strolled over and ripped the tape from Lois' mouth. She bit back her exclamation of pain. She didn't want to show this woman any weakness. Perhaps it was time to get some answers.

"So, Lois, I can call you Lois, can't I? After all, I feel like I know you."

"I doubt that."

"My, aren't we testy this morning."

"I get that way when I'm kidnapped before I have my morning cup of coffee."

The faux Lois wrinkled her nose. "I never acquired a taste for the stuff."

"There goes the clone theory."

The other woman laughed. "Oh, I'm a clone all right. I just like to think that I'm a more refined version of Lois Lane. I call myself, Clois. Cute, huh?"

Lois rolled her eyes. "Adorable."

Clois answered Lois' sarcasm with more laughter. She then pulled a small camera from her pocket and began to snap pictures of Lois. She appeared to be just taking pictures of Lois' head, as she moved around her, taking shots from all sides.

"What are you doing?" Lois snapped. "If you want to remember what I look like, just glance in a mirror."

Clois shook her head. "Believe me, this is not something I'm looking forward to. But if I'm going to take your place I'm going to have to look exactly like you, and that means I'll have to get my hair cut just like yours." She frowned. "Honestly, whatever possessed you to cut your hair so short?"

"I happen to like it this way. Besides, it will take more than just a haircut for you to be able to pass as me. You'll never be able to get away with it."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that."

Lois' head jerked around at the sound of another voice. She hadn't heard him enter. An involuntary chill ran through her body. It couldn't be! "Lex?"

"Hello, Lois. It's been a long time. Have you missed me?"

"Why can't you stay dead?"

"Is that any way to talk to your former intended?"

Clois slinked up and wrapped her arms around Lex's neck and gave him a deep kiss. "I'd love to stay and watch you two get reacquainted," she said after breaking the kiss. "But, unfortunately, I have to get my hair cut so we can move our plan to the next phase." She gave him another quick kiss then left the room.

Lois' brain felt like it was going to explode. She'd thought that she and Clark had left Lex and all his machinations behind them when the cave-in at the abandoned subway tunnel had seemingly killed Lex once and for all. But now she was tied to a chair in a room with the one man in the world she feared more than anyone. How had this come to be?

"I saw Lex Luthor die. Who are you? Are you a clone also?"

He chuckled. "No, Lois, I assure you that I'm the genuine article. But the unfortunate fellow who did die in that cave-in was a clone. Surely you don't think, no matter how desperate things may get, that I would actually dirty my own hands with that little snatch and grab I did at the apartment that evening?"

"So, how much do you know of that night... I mean, if that

wasn't actually you."

The barracuda-like smile stretched Lex's lips. To this day Lois couldn't understand how the man had fooled her so badly. If ever she was to be considered galactically stupid it would have to have been because of her dealings with Lex Luthor.

"If you're referring to knowing that your 'aw shucks' farmboy husband is merely a façade for the Big Blue Boy Scout? Yes, I know that."

Lois wasn't surprised by his answer, but was distressed by it nevertheless. Even though she was afraid she knew the answer, she had to ask the next question. "Lex, why am I here?"

"Because I love you."

Lois closed her eyes and allowed a small sigh of expected disappointment to escape. Was there no end to this nightmare?

"But I don't love you. I never did."

He shook his head in denial. "You say that, but you loved me once. We were to be married."

Lois dropped her head and fought back tears of frustration. "Lex, whatever I might have felt for you once was destroyed when I found out what kind of man you really were." She took a deep breath. She knew that arguing with him was useless, but she couldn't help herself. "Why do you still want me? I don't love you. I never will. You don't need me. You have your Xerox to play with. She's obviously been brain-washed to the point where touching you doesn't make her violently ill."

He approached her and laid his hand on her cheek. She jerked away from his touch. He slapped her. "Don't ever do that again."

"Why do you persist in this madness? You know your Clois will never fool Clark. He'll find me, and you'll go to prison for the rest of your life. Take your Barbie toy and leave while you still can."

"Oh, Lois, you still don't understand, do you? You were the only woman who ever refused me. That can't be allowed. I'll be leaving all right, but you'll be coming with me."

"What? That's crazy."

He walked back toward the door. "Hardly crazy, Lois. Actually, I think it's quite a brilliant plan. Not only will I have you, but I'll also have a major measure of revenge against that infernal super sap you married."

"Clark will never be fooled by your clone."

"He was once."

"That was then. We've been married for quite some time now. She'll never be able to fool him for any length of time now."

He chuckled again. "Oh, I think she'll do just fine. If you remember, my clones have a regrettable flaw. They don't live very long. Clois, as she calls herself, doesn't have much time left, but she'll last long enough for my purposes." His smile sent shivers up her spine. "The only aspect of her that needs to fool your friends and loved ones is covered by her DNA."

"Does she know how you plan to use her?"

"What do you think?" He gave her a slight nod as he slipped quickly through the door. She heard the click of the lock.

Lois felt sick inside. As much as she may have been appalled by the clone's existence, the fact that Lex Luthor planned to use the short-lived creature for his own purposes then discard her like yesterday's garbage disgusted her.

She turned her attention back to her bindings and working on getting loose.

She'd been left alone for hours. Lois had been working on freeing herself. Her wrists were raw and she was sure she felt some blood dripping through her fingers. As much as that might be distressing, and painful, it did have a good side also. If the ropes binding her got coated with her blood, they'd become more slippery, giving her a better chance to get loose. She just had to make sure that Lex didn't notice. He might decide to secure her in some other fashion. Some way that might be that much more

difficult to escape from.

Suddenly her efforts were interrupted by the opening of the door. Lex stepped in, then moved aside as one of the goons who had grabbed her earlier wheeled in a cart with a television on it. He bent over and plugged it in, then left.

"I thought you might be interested in seeing the evening news." Lex walked up next to her, pulled a remote out of his pocket and thumbed the switch.

The screen came to life. An over-groomed manikin sat behind the LNN news desk. "Repeating the top story of the day. Metropolis was stunned today by the shocking, brutal murder of Daily Planet star reporter, Lois Lane. The body of the award-winning, investigative reporter was discovered stuffed in a dumpster in the alley adjacent to the Daily Planet building a few hours ago. Metropolis Police Inspector Henderson had no comment."

Lois felt a cold hand tighten around her heart as scenes of the Daily Planet newsroom and her co-workers flashed on the screen behind the commentator. The atmosphere was sombre. She spied Perry and Jimmy both pushing past the cameraman without speaking. They both made their way into Perry's office and firmly shut the door behind them. She didn't see Clark, but by looking closely at the silhouettes on the frosted glass of Perry's office she could guess where he was. Too soon, the anchor moved on to the next story and she lost the visual of the bullpen.

Lex thumbed the remote and the television blanked out. "You made the lead story, Lois."

A tear rolled down Lois' cheek. "You bastard."

"Tut, tut, my dear. You knew as well as I did that our poor Clois wasn't long for this world anyway. It was fortunate that I could find one last use for her before she expired. I'm afraid your outfit was a total loss though. Blood stains are so hard to get out." He strolled over and placed the remote on the top of the set. "My sources at the Planet say that your colleagues were appropriately shocked and saddened by your untimely demise. Especially that super lout of a husband. I hear tell that he actually broke down and cried like a baby."

A few more tears escaped as Lois imagined the devastation that Clark must have felt when he was told. It had always been his greatest fear that he wouldn't be able to save her someday. That he'd be somewhere else, and not be there when she needed him most. To him, his worst fear had just been realized and he would be lost.

Lois burned with hatred for the monster standing in front of her. Lois had disliked, and even hated several people in her short life so far. But no one affected her like Lex Luthor. No one was able to bring out the depths of emotions that he was able to.

"I swear I will kill you for this, Lex."

His eyes turned a steely grey, and cold. He reached out and grabbed her by the chin. It hurt but she refused to cry out. "I love you, Lois, and because of that I can forgive an occasional transgression in your behavior. But be warned, I do have my limits, and I won't be threatened... by anyone." He released her chin, and walked back to the door. "I'll be back later to feed you. I need to finalize a few more arrangements. We should be ready to leave sometime tomorrow." He gave her a wink, then left.

She must have dozed off because Lois was woken up by the sound of the door opening once again. Lex came in, holding a small tray in his hand. On the tray was a bowl of some sort of stew, and a glass of a liquid she couldn't identify. He set the tray on the top of the television set. There was no other furniture in the room besides the chair she was sitting on. He stepped back out into the hallway and brought in a small, metal TV tray and placed it in front of her. He retrieved the food and placed it on the tray.

"How this progresses from here is entirely up to you, Lois."

I'm not going to untie you to let you feed yourself. Sorry, but I don't trust you with any potential weapon, no matter how innocent these kitchen utensils may seem." He gave her a smile that once, long ago, people thought was charming. "So, you can either behave and allow me to feed you, or you can do without."

Lois' first thought was to tell Luthor where he could stuff his meal. Then she thought about spitting it back into his face. That would give her a small measure of satisfaction, but in the end it would be pointless. And the truth of the matter was that she needed to keep up her strength. She was going to need every advantage she could get if she was to get out of there. Besides, it might be good to let Lex think that he was beginning to wear her down, that she was starting to surrender to the inevitable. She bit on her bottom lip, glared at him, then allowed a sigh to escape her lips. With a frown of resignation, she slowly nodded, and opened her mouth.

It was galling to let Lex feed her, but she had to admit that the stew was tasty and the chocolate shake that he'd provided was like manna from heaven. The food also took away the ache in the pit of her stomach. She hadn't eaten any breakfast and hadn't realized how hungry she was. Of course, it did nothing to ease the ache in her heart.

Lex walked over and grabbed the remote and thumbed the TV on again. The familiar set of LNN flashed into view. A different anchorperson was currently sitting at the desk, but she recognized Inspector Henderson on the screen over their shoulder. He was as stoic as ever, but Lois could see a sadness around his eyes. Though he'd never admit it to her, she knew that Henderson liked and respected her.

"The autopsy places Ms. Lane's death at around 10:00 am this morning. She died from multiple gunshot wounds. One to the abdomen, and two to her chest. There were also indications that she had been tortured prior to her death." Lois shot Lex a venomous glare. He simply grinned. "We currently have no leads in the case and are asking the public for any information they might have concerning Ms. Lane's whereabouts early this morning, or who she might have been seen with."

Henderson stepped away from the microphone, and Lois gasped as she saw Perry White take his place. The Chief looked like he'd aged ten years. His eyes were bloodshot, and his pallor was positively gray. He tapped the microphone with his finger.

"As Editor-in-Chief of the Daily Planet, I've been authorized by my paper to offer a reward of fifty thousand dollars to anyone who can provide information that leads to the arrest and conviction of any person or persons responsible for this horrendous crime. Lois Lane was one of the best reporters my paper has ever known, and her loss will be greatly felt by the Planet and the citizens of this city. But more than that, she was a wonderful person and a dear friend. I can only hope that the scum who were responsible for her death will be caught and punished to the fullest extent of the law. She deserves no less."

Tears were welling up in Lois' eyes. "Please, turn it off."

Lois awoke with a start. She had no idea how much time had passed while she had slept. The same single overhead light still shone. She knew that she was very far underground, so, of course, there were no windows which would allow any natural light in to give her some clue. She couldn't imagine that she'd sleep very long since she was so uncomfortable. The chair was too hard, and her wrists throbbled where she had worn the skin off them in her attempts at escape.

Gritting her teeth against the pain, she began to work on her bindings again. She wanted to cry out, but pride, and her teeth clamped firmly on her lips, kept her silent. Suddenly, her thumb slipped past one of the loops of rope which bound her hands. A few contortions later, she had one hand free. She stopped to take a few breaths, then worked at the ropes some more. In a couple

more minutes she had both of her hands free.

Bending over, she was able to work loose the knots securing her feet to the chair legs. She stood, then had to grab the back of the chair to keep from falling over. Her legs protested their sudden use. Apparently they'd gotten used to not supporting any weight, and they weren't quite up to the task just yet. Lois allowed a few more minutes for the blood flow to equalize in her legs so she could move normally. She ignored the aches and shooting pain as she walked around the room.

Belatedly, she wondered if she was under surveillance. She wouldn't put it past Lex, but she hoped that there wouldn't have been any reason to have equipped this room in such a manner when it was originally built. It was a bit frustrating, not knowing what time it was, but she was determined to be ready when her chance presented itself.

Closing her eyes, she began to take deep breaths in preparation of her exercises. Slowly, she began to work through her martial arts routine. She had missed the last couple of her Tae Kwan Do classes, but the initial limbering and stretching routine was always the same.

She had no concept of the passage of time but eventually she heard the sound of someone at the door. Grabbing the sturdy metal chair that she'd been tied to, she placed herself against the wall such that those entering wouldn't see her until it was too late. She inched back and the door began to swing open. Watching the shadows on the floor she could see that there were two individuals coming through. From the size of his shadow, Lois saw that Lex's goon was preceding him. She took a firm grip on the chair. She was only going to get one shot at this and she had to make it good.

Once the fellow had cleared the doorway, Lois stepped out and swung the chair with all her might. It crashed solidly against the side of his head with a loud thunk. Chair and skull rebounded against the heavy metal door and the man went down like a pole-axed steer.

Lois jumped back and confronted a startled Lex. His look quickly changed to anger.

"What is the meaning of this? Surely you know there is no escape." He reached his hand out. "Come. You are an intelligent woman. Can't we conclude this arrangement like two civilized adults?"

"We seem to be one short." Lois' eyes blazed with hate. Every time she allowed herself to imagine what Clark had been going through this past day, it threatened to blind her with fury. She had to regain her composure. She would use her rage to fuel her strength, but she couldn't allow it to make her careless. She made a 'come get some' gesture with her hand. "You want me, come and get me."

Lex rolled his eyes and assumed an arrogant posture. "What? Are you going to beat me up now?" His sarcasm rolled off his tongue like dripping venom.

Lois allowed herself a slight mocking smile. "That's exactly what I'm going to do. You are going to pay for all that you've put me and my family and friends through. You're going down, Lex. And you are going down hard."

"Seriously, Lois, have you lost your mind?" Lex pulled a revolver out of his pocket and pointed it at her.

"So... what? Are you going to shoot me? Are you so afraid of me that you feel you need a gun to subdue me? Can't take on a mere slip of a woman without your real manhood clutched in your sweaty fist?"

Lex shook his head. "You may know a little martial arts, but I am, after all, a healthy, fit male. I'm twice as strong as you. You don't stand a chance against me." He tossed the gun aside. "I don't want to hurt you, but I will if I have to. Let this be your first lesson as to who is in control of this relationship."

Lois' smile turned absolutely feral. "Yeah, let's."

She knew she wasn't at her peak physically, but emotionally she was more than ready to take Lex Luthor down. As someone who was concerned about his image, Lex kept himself in good shape. But it was a fitness created in the gym, strictly for the sake of looking good. He was probably quick and pretty agile, and if she were fencing with him she knew she'd stand no chance. But Luthor was not the kind of person to dirty his own hands in physical endeavors. He had people to do that for him.

Lois risked a quick glance over at Lex's goon, but that guy was not going to be a factor for several hours. Her greatest asset in the coming fight was Lex's own arrogance. There was no way he would think that she could best him in any physical contest.

"Lois, this is silly." He strolled casually toward her, as if a fight was the last thing on his mind. "I know you really don't want to do this." Suddenly he lunged at her.

It was a tactic that Lois had been expecting. Try to lull her with calm words, then make a sudden move, hoping to catch her off guard. Lex's entire life was based on deception. Why should his fighting technique be any different?

Lois blocked his strike with her right forearm and followed it up with a left-handed punch to his throat. He lashed out with a savage backhand which caught her in the right ear. She stumbled as stars flashed briefly before her eyes. Lex threw a punch that split her lip and caused her to fall to her back. A look of satisfaction marked Lex's face as he moved in for what he assumed would be the finish of their little battle.

Lois planted her foot into his stomach and catapulted him over her. He landed heavily behind her. Getting up quickly, she turned and faced him just as he was getting up. An inarticulate growl escaped his lips as he rushed, headlong, at her. A smart hip check sent Lex tumbling into the near wall.

Rising slowly, his eyes fastened on the chair which happened to be near. Lois saw where he was looking and raced to get to the chair first. She lost. Lex couldn't get a good grip on the piece of furniture, but managed to swing it at her with one hand. She flinched away, but one of the metal legs caught her in the side. She thought she heard a rib snap.

He made another lunge toward her, but she was ready this time. She hit him with a flat palm shot to the nose. Blood immediately poured forth. He stumbled back a few steps then glared murderously at her. Cursing her, he attacked again.

Lois side-stepped his charge, then brought her knee up hard to his groin. As he was doubled over, gasping for breath, she brought doubled up fists down onto the back of his neck. It was the hardest she'd ever swung her arms before. Her shoulders ached from the effort. Lex fell, face down, to the hard floor. He tried to rise back up, but a feeble groan came from him as he flopped back down.

Lois quickly ran over to where Lex had thrown his revolver. She picked it up and pointed it at the beaten man. "Get up. We're getting out of here."

He rolled over and stared up at her, his eyes clouded with pain. "I don't think so. I'm just going to lay here for a while. I need to recover a bit before we continue." His smile was barracuda-like. "I may have underestimated your fighting prowess, but I think I know you well enough to be certain that you won't shoot me."

"Think again." She fired the revolver without hesitation. The bullet struck Lex in the fleshy part of his upper leg.

"Ow! You witch!"

"Did that hurt?" Lois barked out an evil laugh. She had no sympathy for the monster who lay before her on the floor. She was sorely tempted to just end the nightmare and put a bullet between Lex's eyes. Unfortunately, that wasn't her... but Lex didn't need to know that. She fired off another shot which ricocheted off the floor near his head. Several concrete chips flew up, causing small cuts to his face and hands.

"Now get up," she growled. "We have an appointment with Inspector Henderson."

Lois was exhausted; Henderson had kept her under wraps for several hours. Not only had he questioned her relentlessly, but he'd sheltered her from any press, or news leak. The last part was her idea. She didn't want it known that she was back from the dead until she had a chance to reunite with one particular individual. Henderson, himself, had driven her to the townhouse on Hyperion.

Now she stood outside the door. It was dark, and quite late. No neighbors were awake to see her. There were no lights on in the house, but she suspected that Clark wasn't asleep. Tomorrow was to be her funeral. She worried that he might be in Smallville, but deep down she could feel him in the house. Probably just sitting and staring off into space.

She quickly found the spare key they kept under the flower pot, hers having been in her handbag which the clone had taken, and unlocked the door. She stepped into the dark entry and instinctively reached over and flipped on the overhead light.

Sitting where she knew he would be was her husband. He was slouched into the sofa, and staring off at the far wall. His face was still blotchy from dried tears. It took him a few moments to realize someone was in the room with him. The look of loss and despair on his face tore at her heart. Finally he turned his head. Tears came to her eyes as she saw the look of wonderment come over Clark's features.

"Lois?"

She smiled through her tears. "Hi."

He stood. She could see his legs wobbled a bit and he made his way toward her. "How?"

She shrugged. "It's a long story. You know, evil masterminds, leftover clones. Remind me to tell you about it...later."

His hand reached for her cheek. He seemed hesitant at first. "You've been hurt." She could hear the anguish in his voice.

"You should see the other guy."

"How bad is it?"

She reached up and stroked his cheek. "I'll live, but I suppose I'd better see a doctor." He was about to say something but she put her finger over his lips. "Tomorrow. We'll go see a doctor, tomorrow. Right now I need you to kiss me, then take me upstairs. I want to spend the night lying in your arms."

His lips captured hers in a tender and passionate kiss. He scooped her up in his arms and headed for the stairs to their bedroom.

It had been a very trying past couple of days; but it was over now, and Lois was back where she belonged. In the arms of her husband.

Fin

THE END