

Countermeasures

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Rated: G

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Summary: This is an alternate universe story. Here is a chance to peek in on Lois' thoughts just prior to her wedding to Lex Luthor. What if Clark came straight to the wedding ceremony as *himself* rather than Superman? No terrible ordeal suffered within the Green Kryptonite cage and no fearfully contemplative Lois walking down the aisle to Lex eagerly awaiting her.

An awesome trio of betas, Andreia, Bob and KenJ, helped to push this fic from a meager outline to a full-blown story. Katherine Kent provided the idea about the scene in the elevator. My hat is off to them! This is my answer to the "I Love You" challenge posted on the message boards.

Oh yes, one final thank you to Janet Owens, GE and writer extraordinaire!

Legal Disclaimer: Some of the dialogue is from *The House of Luthor* episode. The characters and settings are all owned by DC, September 3rd productions and anyone else with legal claim. This is merely a quick little nonprofit story strictly for fun.

A vivid and colorful assortment of exotic flowers, bird of paradise, ginger rojos and heliconia, lush as a rainforest and as soothing as an ocean breeze, decorated the large, brightly lit room. With wild abandon their heady scents swirled about, as if trumpeting the day's meticulously planned events. The orderly debris of wedding preparations was evident; empty shoe boxes and yards of muslin wrappings for the wedding gown were laid on the settee. A carelessly discarded red silk robe that clashed vigorously with the sea grass coverlet rested on the foot of the sumptuous king-sized bed.

Directly opposite the bed near the tall oak double doors was an elegant vanity table. On top sat a single vintage perfume atomizer containing Chanel No. 5: yet *another* expensive wedding present from Lex that the bride neither requested nor needed. The expensive perfume was lovely, yet she preferred light jasmine cologne. But Lex had insisted the scent would be an ideal fragrance for him to breathe in on their wedding day. In a small touch of rebellion, she sprayed her favorite jasmine scent on her body.

Only minutes before the master bedroom suite of Lex Luthor and his soon-to-be wife had been populated with a noisy entourage of stylists to rival a classic rock star or Hollywood actress. Two teams of nail technicians, makeup artists, and hair artists and dress stylists had worked industriously. These professionals had descended upon the Lane women, determined to take them from ordinary folk to chic women — fit to inhabit Lex Luthor's world. The internationally renowned designer of Lois' wedding gown had been flown in from Milan, merely to make sure the bride looked exquisite in his latest frothy creation.

Of course Lucy happily accepted the pampering; in her mind this was precisely how the Maid of Honor should be treated. Ellen Lane submitted to the makeover with the manner of a tranquil yet strong queen. Despite being in her late fifties, Ellen was still a handsome woman. She emerged from the dressing room wearing a pale pink suit with delicate pearl buttons and looking better than ever.

Earlier that day Lois had stepped into the suite wearing jeans and her favorite white t-shirt, her loveliness evident for all to see. But when these artisans of beauty had completed their task, the former investigative reporter for the Daily Planet looked like a latter day Aphrodite, newly emerged from her shell. The stylists gushed and praised their perfectly turned out charges, no doubt imagining that the tip from Lex Luthor would be as generous as their fees.

Rounding out the group was Greta Keith, the perpetually cheerful wedding coordinator. She constantly darted in and out of the suite, consulting her leather-bound planner, asking questions and demanding answers. She had no intention of letting a single detail of this wedding go unattended.

Only the bride-to-be, amidst all the excitement, was pensive and silent.

With all the grooming preparations concluded, Greta had shooed everyone out, so the bride could have a moment to herself. She chirped enthusiastically, "My goodness! Mr. Luthor certainly is a lucky man! You will make him the *perfect* wife!"

Once the heavy wooden doors had closed behind her, the room was plunged into stillness. Despite the cheerful decorations and exquisite floral arrangements, it was a heavy, oppressive silence, broken only by the quiet sniffing sounds of a woman in tears.

Lois stood up from the upholstered bench in front of the vanity table and gazed at the image in the full-length mirror. The woman looking back at her was an absolute stranger, wearing a designer's lacy wedding gown with a thousand tiny pearl buttons arranged like soldiers in a line down her back. She remembered thinking that each button Lucy closed sealed her future all the tighter.

The silk tulle elbow length veil with its pearl embellished edge was created from the lightest fabric, to faintly caress her face like a lover's kiss, but instead, it felt like an iron mesh shroud weighing on her head.

Holding up her left hand to gaze at Lex's diamond engagement ring it was simply far too large and ostentatious for her taste. Of course it was Lex's ring. Such a grandiose piece of jewelry could never be *her* engagement ring. It was not at all appropriate for an investigative reporter who moved effortlessly between the strata of Metropolis' underbelly and its polite upper crust of society. Still, the overgrown rock was suitable for a woman who was about to align herself with one of the wealthiest men on the planet. Lex Luthor's wealth and status deemed his wife wear such a ring. Was it a foreboding symbol of their pending marriage?

Her lips tugged into a brief, watery smile as she remembered how Lucy had squealed with envy and girlish delight when she clapped eyes upon it for the first time. So typical of her sister, gazing at the size and sparkle of the stone and not considering what was behind it.

Looking again at the image in the mirror, she thought, were these not the normal silken accouterments of a woman on her wedding day? If so, why did she not feel happy and cherished but rather like another shiny new Luthor possession about to be put on public display?

Yesterday, during the rehearsal dinner, Lex had kissed her hand and called her his beautiful queen. Sadly she didn't feel that way; he had fixed her with the gaze of a hunter keenly studying its prey. No doubt in eager anticipation of their wedding night. All through their courtship and engagement she had held him off, stating she wanted an old-fashioned first night together. With that night now looming before her, what could she possibly say to hold him off? She was going to be his wife and he would have every right to make love to her.

Now, hot, salty tears slid down her cheeks, ruining the carefully applied make-up that a highly paid professional had just

completed.

“Ten minutes, ‘Mrs. Luthor.’” Greta cheerfully said through the wooden door.

Lois took a deep breath, grabbed a handful of tissues from the vanity table and savagely wiped away yet another cascade of tears. She looked at the reflection in the mirror, feeling sad, lonely and a little afraid.

She turned her gaze back to the stranger in the mirror. “Lois Luthor,” she said, trying out the last name and discarding it like a pair of ill-fitting shoes; a pair of *painfully* ill-fitting shoes, the kind that pinched the instant your foot slide into them. If you were smart and didn’t let the glossy appearance turn your head, you put them back into the stiff cardboard box.

“Lois Lane-Luthor.” She puffed out the name. The last name was again an awkward fit, settling neither her ears nor her anxious heart. It was a name connected with great wealth, undeniable privilege and power, but not deep friendship and trust.

Out of the blue, a new combination sprang to mind and she said softly, “Lois Lane- ... Kent?” Hearing that name felt so much better to her ears that it slipped between her lips again, like a whispered promise. “Lois Lane-Kent.” Her disturbed emotions and jagged heart began to soothe and calm with the gentleness of a rolling river. A third time she spoke the combination aloud with serenity. “Mrs. Lois Lane-Kent.” The names fit together like perfectly preserved pages in a love letter, scented faintly of red roses, the heady bouquet making even the most tentative of lovers blush with keen anticipation. This last name was a perfect fit; this name meant warmth, laughter and ... comfort. Pleasant, happy memories spilled into her mind; at their center was Clark, with all his maddening Midwestern quirks, who was her best friend, partner and everything else in between. He understood her as no one else before. Putting up with Mad Dog Lane moods, chocolate-and-caffeine-propelled investigations and hair-raising, sometimes heart-stopping schemes.

Most men with any sense would run for the hills, but not Clark Kent. He was the perfect partner, always steadfastly by her side.

Thinking back, when had Lex ever been supportive in any endeavor that did not have direct impact on him? If anything, whenever there was a disagreement between them he produced an expensive gift ... a pretty bauble to silence a naughty child. With this revelation before her with such clarity, how could she marry a man who to all intents and purposes was an absolute stranger?

Despite the warmth of the bright sunshine that spilled through the windows, she shivered with trepidation; Lex was not the kind of man to calmly accept being jilted at the altar. Unhappily, it was far too late to make any counter moves.

A firm knock at the door gave her a start. She pulled out three more fluffy white tissues and tried vainly to repair the damage her tears had done.

“I’ll be out in a minute!” Her voice mingled with fear and anger in equal measure. This was her last private moment as Lois Lane. How dare anyone rush her into the life of Mrs. Lex Luthor?

In response the door gently swung open. When she heard the door move, she whirled around, thinking it was her mother. Probably coming in with the idea of giving her the traditional reassuring mother/daughter pre-wedding pep talk — a talk she couldn’t bear to hear.

Instead of the perfectly composed Ellen Lane, standing before her wearing a black polo shirt and charcoal pants and looking better to her than if he were sporting a hand-tailored Armani tuxedo, was the only person she truly wanted to see right then... Clark!

The crumbled tissues slipped from her fingertips like white rose petals; she took a tiny hesitant step in his direction. “You ... came ... I...” she stammered and then any further words caught in her throat. She looked at her former partner, as if seeing him

for the very first time. Lord knew, Clark was a handsome man. But today his appearance was different; he stood tall and strong, like a determined warrior king of ancient times come to claim his bride. The power emanating from him struck her almost like a physical thing; this power was comfortingly familiar, yet strangely frightening. Was this her gentle friend? Surely he hadn’t come to wish her well? Had he perhaps come like the prince in a fairy tale... to rescue her?

Coming from the hallway, she imagined hearing the sharp, authoritative tones of Perry’s voice somewhere down the corridor and, oddly, Bill Henderson’s as well. The former was in Florida, supposedly enjoying his retirement and the latter certainly had no reason to be attending her wedding. As she watched, without a word Clark stepped into the room and quietly — almost reverently — closed the door behind him, shutting out all other sounds. The visage of warrior king held for a moment, but was fast melting away like the morning mist, to be replaced by a gentle prince.

She studied the man before her as his lips parted; however no words ushered forth. Too overcome with emotions, he was seeing the woman he cherished with all his heart and soul adorned in a wedding dress ... a wedding dress she was wearing for *another* man. He took one firm step and then another as he came closer and looked down at her. With infinite care, like he was touching a precious, fragile gem, his hand cupped her cheek and he whispered with that familiar sexy rumble, “Lois, I had to come. We’ve said some pretty harsh words to each other over the past few months...”

Lois placed a small trembling hand over his larger one and then entwined her slender fingers with his. The reassuring familiarity and warmth gave her courage to answer. Her fine brown eyes filled with pain, sadness and shame for realizing too late just what this man meant to her. “Fighting over this situation was wrong. I ... I’ve missed you so much.”

“So have I. Lois, I came to say...”

Her voice sounded so small and young. “Yes?”

“Please, don’t do this to yourself ... to me ... to us,” he whispered and then, at the last, his voice broke and the transformation of warrior king into a young prince was complete. He stood entreatingly one last time for the hand of his lady.

Tears sprang afresh to her eyes and suddenly she didn’t care about the make-up or the designer’s lacy confection of a wedding gown. All she wanted was to be held by the man before her. Words, so many words, kept shuttling about in her mind. All of them useless, empty and pale in comparison to the three words this tender, loving man so richly deserved to hear. Simple words she realized that she had *never* said to her fiancé — even on the night of their engagement.

With calculated, purposeful movements, Lois removed the ornate engagement ring from her finger that bound her to another man and stepping away placed it firmly on the vanity table. Come what may, it was time to face Lex and the wedding guests. Clark had given her the necessary strength to take this daring countermeasure.

The strong, clean masculine scent of his cologne that always reminded her of fresh cut wood and wide open blue skies enveloped her at the same time as his strong arms. At last, the uncertainty and sadness vanquished from her once aching heart. The long denied words emerged, joyous and clear. “Clark, I love you!”

Looking up at Clark, she knew these words had touched him, like a nurturing balm to his soul. He was shedding tears now, tears of profound relief and rejoicing. What was he thinking? She prayed those simple words had given all the dreams of his life substance and form. Now they had *hope*.

With a gentle, questing finger he reached up and caressed her cheek, once more wiping away tears, this time of joy. The finger

moved down to touch her lips. Lois felt his hesitation; after all, only seconds ago she had been engaged to another man. But for once, prudence and convention were cast aside as he leaned down and tenderly brushed his lips to hers. The kiss held love and deep, abiding ardor; her heart jumped and she felt a happy trill of desire. *Definitely* not the innocent kiss of a friend, but the kiss of a man wishing for a deeper, richer relationship, one of an intimate nature.

When they separated, he looked intensely into her eyes, his own dark with passion and finally said the words she longed to hear. “Lois, I love you.”

Abruptly, only a few feet beyond the door, they heard the sound of loud voices and running feet. A voice — Lex’s — was heard, angry and defiant. A brief fight broke out, then a body slammed hard against the door. She heard a woman scream, probably Greta Keith thinking she was going to lose her commission. Lois looked at Clark, an expression on her face swathed in questions.

Clark explained, “I ... I came here with Perry, Jimmy and Jack. We brought along some folks from MPD. Luthor ... your *ex-fiancé* has committed numerous crimes and the powers that be want to have a few words with him.”

Lois blinked and looked over Clark’s shoulder to the mirror. The image that looked back had been altered; no longer frightened and confused, now the stranger that she’d seen in this same mirror only moments ago had vanished. Standing here with Clark, that other woman — that shiny new possession of Lex’s — was forever gone. For the first time in months she was herself. The thrall Lex had mysteriously woven around her with his immense wealth and charismatic charm had evaporated. The steely, confident investigative reporter had returned. She carefully removed the silky white veil and placed it on the vanity table beside the atomizer and engagement ring. These discarded items belonged to that stranger. “Crimes, partner? What sort of crimes? Against whom?”

“The Daily Planet for one.” Clark’s voice trailed off as he got that familiar faraway look in his eye, as if he were listening for something no one else could hear. His eyes focused upon her once more and he said, “Honey, please let me get you out of here. This place is going to be swarming with police and the media, asking a lot of intrusive questions. Besides,” he said shyly, “we have a *lot* to talk about.”

Clark opened the door wide and she felt his hand as it lay protectively on the small of her back; it was comforting, so familiar, so reassuring!

The quiet intimacy the reunited couple shared in the bedroom suite was shattered like delicate crystal. As they stepped over the threshold of the bedroom suite and into the corridor, the world surrounding them had fallen into chaos. Suddenly the air was charged with confused and angry voices, all shouting at once to be heard. The public area of Lex’s penthouse, normally as quiet and controlled as its owner, was overflowing with LexCorp staff, several bewildered wedding guests and the police. In the midst of the maelstrom stood Inspector Bill Henderson, reading the Miranda rights to an uncharacteristically disheveled Lex Luthor, who was using a white silk pocket square to stop the blood flow from a wickedly split lip. A young police officer approached the millionaire and secured a pair of dull steel handcuffs to his wrists.

“That maniac assaulted me!” Lex snapped. “Why don’t you arrest *him*!”

“Assault? He probably did you a favor. Who knows what might have happened if you reached your office? Come on, Mr. Luthor,” said a reticent Henderson as he began to lead him away.

Lois clutched Clark’s hand and looked at her former fiancé. Drawing strength from Clark, Lois finally spoke the words she had feared she would never be able to utter, “Lex, the engagement and wedding are off. I have returned your ring; it’s

on the dressing table. Goodbye.”

For a moment the trio stared at each other as a mosaic of emotions played across their faces. Lex could see their hands clasped. Abruptly he spoke with a touch of the old defiance. “The contest is done. Kent, you have won the prize. I challenge you to prove yourself worthy of her.” With a sense of worn dignity, he looked away.

She stared at him, disgusted and appalled by his pathetic attempt to salvage whatever shreds of decorum he could by saying such hateful words. She leveled her gaze at Clark. The warrior king had returned, the broad shoulders square and erect, eyes piecing and head held high; the stance seemed familiar. Her brain was about to take a mental leap when his voice, so low only the three of them could hear, filled her ears.

“Lois Lane is no one’s prize. She’s an intelligent, loving woman, to be respected and treasured — not a possession to be put on display like a trophy.” He took in a deep breath, gently squeezed her hand and continued. “She is the woman I love who I hope one day will accept me as her husband.”

Joy of the kind only felt once in a lifetime, unabashed and complete, filled Lois’ heart. <Yes,> she thought, <yes, Clark, I will be your wife, to have and to hold, for richer or for poorer, until death do we part.>

Anger flashed in Luthor’s obsidian eyes. He bowed his head, whether in acknowledgement of defeat or consideration to plan the battle anew, no one could say.

Bill Henderson, the quiet exchange not lost on him, nodded to Lois and Clark and then led the prisoner away. Not far behind stood a grim-faced Perry White rubbing the bruised knuckles on his right hand. She heard him growl, “That’s for what you did to The Daily Planet...”

The rest of his words were lost as an ecstatic Lois ran to Perry and engulfed him in a tight hug. Directly behind the older man stood Jimmy and Jack; she gratefully hugged each of them in turn. These men were her real friends and family. It was so good to be among them again rather than an entourage of paid companions!

Happy tears streamed down her cheeks. “Perry... I’m so glad all of you are here! This... this marriage would have been the worst mistake of my life! Can you ever forgive my behavior over the past couple of months?”

The much beloved southern drawl reminded her of the comfort and security of happier days working at the Daily Planet, but most of all the sincere fatherly love Perry always held for her. “Ah, now, darlin’, you mean the world to us.” He looked after the retreating figure of Lex and snarled, “That snake oil salesman had us all fooled!”

“Not me!” Jimmy said resolutely.

“I was never a fan,” Jack added with a scowl.

“Lois, honey, we’re sorry for getting here at the last minute, we never stopped looking for a way to prove ...” His voice trailed off; now was the wrong time and place for explanations and bluster. He turned to Clark, pointed his chin towards the crowd and said, “Think you can get Lois away from this mob and safely home? I have to square young Jack with the authorities.” He turned towards the guests and Lex’s minions and bellowed, “Hey, *everyone* needs to leave so the police can go over the penthouse. It will be quicker if we all take the service elevator.” That having been done, he gave her another hug, and then gallantly handed her back to Clark, the man who orchestrated the downfall of Luthor and was her true rescuer. Perry whispered, “You two take the private elevator, that way the paparazzi will be so busy sorting out who’s in the group leaving they should miss you.”

Clark smiled, happiness twinkling in his eyes. “I think that’s a perfect idea, Chief!” He quietly took command of the situation. Firmly taking her small hand in his, Clark skillfully maneuvered

through the gathered throng to the private elevator, never once taking his eyes off the woman by his side. He worried that several reporters, both print and broadcast media, might be in the car hoping to talk with anyone connected with the canceled nuptials, but after a quick scan, realized that thankfully the car was empty.

They stepped in; he pushed the button and the doors closed, sealing them off from the cacophony of sound emanating from the penthouse. Lois was being taken away from the hollow, artificial life Luthor had so carefully constructed to start a new life with the man who cherished and loved her above all others.

A silence laced the air as they stood facing each other, but this was not the silence of fear and loneliness she had felt only fifteen minutes before. It was a cherished silence, one mingled with love, desire and a spicy hint of seduction. Before the atmosphere between them became too overwhelming Lois reached over and pushed the Emergency Stop button, then turned to Clark and spoke with a firmness and confidence she hadn't felt in ages.

"I will marry you, Clark Jerome Kent ... the sooner, the better."

He cupped her sweet face in his hands and whispered, "No, no, Lois, it's too soon after," he gestured upwards, "after all of this. We both need time to heal, but honey, when we *are* ready — I want you to take that walk up the aisle to me and I want to remain by your side forever. Someday we will look back at this day and remember it as the end of one part of our lives and the beginning of another. Lois, you are my heart and my soul. While you were engaged to him I couldn't breathe, couldn't think, and couldn't be the man I should have been. To stop it from getting this far, I ..."

"Oh, no, Clark, letting that ... that snake oil salesman near me was a mistake. From now on it's *us*, as a couple, the way we were supposed to be. Starting right now ..." She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her full lips gently on his own. The first kiss they shared in the suite was chaste and innocent compared to the nerve-rendering steamy turmoil their bodies felt as they indulged in this passionate embrace. Clark drew her closer to him; the scent of her jasmine perfume filled his nostrils. His senses were completely overwhelmed by the beautiful woman in his arms, as together they gave vent to all the heat and excitement of long-denied desires.

Reluctantly they parted, but Lois laid her head on his chest, listening to the upheaval of his rapidly beating heart. Her voice when she spoke had a slight quaver, but was still strong and determined. "OK, we'll wait, but not too long. Until then I look forward to working with my *real* partner again." She reached for and reset the Emergency Stop button. Coming to a decision, Clark stopped her, pressed a different button and they resumed their course. Eventually the elevator chime went off, the car smoothly stopped and they discovered themselves back where they had started. When they exited the private elevator, the penthouse was now eerily quiet; the only people remaining were a few police officers. Clark led the way to the Emergency stairs and they ascended. Lois gathered the heavy skirt of her gown around her hips. She was mystified as to why they were going up and not down. Clark again took her hand and led her down a lushly carpeted corridor to the roof. She wondered when her partner had acquired such an intimate knowledge of a place he had only visited a few times.

He opened the heavy door with ease; the early afternoon sun shone brightly and the fresh air was a welcome change from the stifling atmosphere of Luthor's penthouse. Lois, standing there in an exquisite gown, looked more like a fairy princess than a woman who had only moments ago canceled her wedding. She turned and looked at him, brown doe-shaped eyes questioning. "Why are we here?"

He brought both of her hands to his lips and kissed them. "I

have something very important to show you..."

Releasing her hands and backing to the center of the roof, never taking his eyes off of her, he removed his glasses and his lips quirked into a sheepish, almost frightened smile. Suddenly he began to move, spin at an impossible speed and then suddenly stop.

Lois' eyes grew wide, then a tiny gasp of surprise escaped her throat, taking in the sight of the man before her, and she realized she had indeed been saved by a determined warrior king...

THE END