

A Lois and Clark Fairytale: Lois and the Beast

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Rated G

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Summary: A classic fairy tale, retold with characters from Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman.

Authors note:

Many years ago there was a challenge on the message boards to rewrite a fairy tale using Lois and Clark as the main characters. After reading several I decided to do one myself. Beauty and the Beast has long been one of my favored fairy tales. I have read many versions of the tale, a few novel adaptations, and of course the Disney animated film. Throughout this story, you will see influences from these sources. And of course there is major influence from the television series Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman. After so many years I have finally finished it, for my lovely wife who has periodically bugged me these many years I have let it sit unfinished. Those who knew us may remember we actually met through FOLCdom. So for Mother's Day this year I worked on finishing it to provide her for putting up with me and giving me a wonderful daughter and another child on the way.

And now the story.

Once upon a time there was a kind prince who was well loved by his people. Under his leadership, the kingdom had prospered and everyone was happy. Well, almost everyone. There was a wicked sorcerer who hated the prince. 'The peace the prince brought was so boring,' thought the sorcerer, 'he'd blow his brains out, only guns hadn't been invented yet;' there wasn't anything for him to do. He looked into the future in disgust and decided he needed to do something to prevent Utopia, as that future land was called, from ever becoming a reality. So Tempus, as the sorcerer was called, stewed in his tower trying to come up with the perfect plan to stop the prince and his Utopia.

While Tempus plotted, Prince Clark continued to help his people as much as he could. When his parents died, the young prince began running the kingdom. He was not technically of age to be king. However, the council had decided that he, personally, was mature enough to rule without a regent. Throughout the land, people said he was as wise as King Solomon, because his judgments were always fair and correct. Little did they know that he was able to hear their heartbeats and could tell when someone was lying and therefore knew who was right and who was wrong. Through his special abilities, he had managed to bring peace to the kingdom. The people knew they could not get away with dishonesty under his rule. Clark was sure his parents would be proud of the way he was running their kingdom. Little could he imagine what Tempus had in store for him.

In fact, Tempus did not even know what he had in store for the prince yet, but it was going to be nasty. Tempus did not just want to get rid of him, he wanted to torture the Prince for a long time, really get to him. Tempus had hoped that after killing the king and queen he would have been able to usurp power and

remake the kingdom in his own image, by becoming regent. Then that meddling prince had taken over and was ruining everything. He was definitely going to suffer.

Suddenly it came to Tempus: the perfect revenge. 'The prince is very handsome and sought after by many beautiful women. However, the sappy fool believes in the fairy tale kind of love. 'Doesn't he realize that stuff never happens in real life?' Tempus thought, scoffing. So Tempus would make sure that the prince never had the opportunity to find it. He would turn him into a hideous beast, as ugly as he was handsome now. His appearance would frighten his people and they would turn away from him. Even better, Tempus thought, smiling evilly, any woman would run screaming at the sight of him. Tempus knew that no woman could love such a revolting creature. So, to top everything, Tempus would make it so the spell could only be broken if a woman fell in love with the prince in his grotesque form. That, Tempus thought smugly, would ensure that the prince would always know what he was missing, constantly reminding him of what he had to live without. Satisfied, he began to cast the spell.

Shortly after Tempus began, Clark began to notice even more abnormal changes in himself. His teeth were becoming longer and more pointed much like fangs. Hair was beginning to grow in thick clumps all over his body. He was really scared, fearing his differences were causing these changes. What kind of monster was he becoming? Fearing what he might do once the transformation he seemed to be undertaking was complete, Clark demanded that everyone in the castle leave, for their own safety. He dismissed all his servants, but none of them would go willingly. They all wanted to stay and help their prince. Eventually though, Clark managed to get everyone to leave the castle and hid himself within, fearing what he would become.

Finally, Tempus finished casting his curse on the prince. It had taken several weeks and most of his strength, but he had done it. Exhausted, he decided he needed to take a few days off and regain his strength before going to taunt the Prince with what he had done. Who knew what frenzy the Prince would have worked himself into over the change, or how the townspeople would react? It would be very interesting to watch, Tempus mused. It was a very satisfied Tempus who went to bed that day.

When the villagers learned of the Beast in the castle, they feared for their beloved prince. It was widely assumed that the Beast had come and devoured him. They thought somehow he must have known the Beast would come and that was why he sent everyone away, in order to protect them. Once that conclusion was reached, the people only loved him more. Since beasts did not usually work of their own accord, the villagers looked for who would have sent the Beast. There was only one man in the land known to be unhappy with the prince, and that was Tempus.

While Tempus slept, the people fumed, sure that he was behind the death of their Prince. An angry mob, carrying the requisite pitchforks and torches, gathered around his tower. Tempers flared in tandem with the torches, reaching temperatures to rival those of the flames. Only one thought resounded through the minds of everyone gathered: revenge. As one, they threw their torches at the base of the tower, igniting it.

Tempus woke up sweating, thinking it was awfully hot for the season. Looking around, he quickly noticed why it was so hot; his room was on fire. Quickly, Tempus tried to come up with a way to save himself, but the only spells he could think of took hours of preparation, which he obviously did not have. His tower was far too tall for him to jump safely. Trapped, Tempus resigned himself to his fate, thinking that at least he had cursed the Prince and Utopia would never be. Comforted by that last thought, he was consumed in flames.

Clark remained hidden in his palace, not wanting anyone to see what he had become. As he grew, he continued to develop

abnormal abilities. His gifts seemed almost magical, yet somehow they felt normal to him. Clark was unable to just sit by and listen when he heard people in trouble, yet he did not want to scare anyone with his grotesque appearance. So, he took to disguising himself in a black robe and hood, keeping his face completely covered and relying on his special vision which allowed him to see through the cowl as if it was not even there, when he went to help. He never stayed around longer than necessary, fearing people would discover his true form and be frightened of him. People began talking about the guardian angel that swooped in and helped people in need. It embarrassed Clark, but there was nothing he could do about it. He could not stop helping people, it was just part of who he was and he had to help.

Since the Prince was presumed dead, the council took it upon themselves to rule the kingdom. They were reluctant to name a new regent or king, so it was decided they would rule jointly, at least for the time being. And so life settled into a new routine for the kingdom as the years passed.

6 years later

Lois hurried through town, filled with excitement. Perry had promised that her new book would be coming in today. Every time she saw one of her books in print, she felt a deep satisfaction, like she was proving to the world a woman could write. If only she was able to publish them under her own name.

It had all been Perry's idea, really. For as long as Lois could remember, she had loved reading and writing. She could remember just hanging out in the town bookstore, reading the books they had there and imagining herself in those far-off places. Perry, the owner of the bookstore, had befriended her early on, suggesting books and making a cozy place where she could come and sit and read. He even let her borrow some of the books to take home. But it had not been enough for her to just read the books. When she was fourteen she had started to write her own stories.

Lois still remembered the day she had finally shown her first story to Perry. She had just finished it and was feeling really proud of herself. Her dad, of course, had encouraged her to do what she wanted, and had been very supportive of her, buying her paper and ink. It had been no surprise that when she had shown him her novel, he smiled at her and said, "Princess, this is the best story I've ever read."

Of course her daddy had said that, he was always saying stuff like that to her. She couldn't trust her daddy's opinion, so she needed to show it to someone else. Her first thought had been to show Perry. He'd tell her the truth. So, clutching her manuscript, she had run to the bookstore anxious to see what Perry would say. He had loved it too, and beamed at her. It had made Lois feel so proud of herself, but sad at the same time. She had told Perry, "It's a shame I could never get this published."

Perry had gotten this thoughtful look in his eyes. "Now darling," Perry said, "Don't be so hasty. I have this friend in the publishing business. He'd never publish a woman's writing, but if I sent him this and told him it was from a friend..." Perry paused. "I know — my friend Lewis Lane. It's similar to your name but sounds male. What do you think, honey?"

Lois had not really known how to respond, but had found herself agreeing anyway. And so Lewis Lane's first novel had been published and was a great success. Every year Lois had written another one, and every year Perry had sent them to his friend for publishing. And now here it was, six years later and her sixth book should be coming in. Lois couldn't wait to see it.

There was something about holding a published copy in her hands that made it seem all the more real. Breathless with anticipation, she arrived at Perry's store. Bursting into the store, Lois exclaimed, "Is it here yet?"

Perry chuckled as he watched her burst into the store. "That's

just like Lois," he thought. With mock gruffness he said, "Why, hello to you, too."

Lois stopped abruptly, "Oh," she said softly. "I'm sorry, Perry. It's just I'm so excited and I forgot..."

Perry held back a chuckle as he cut Lois off before she could begin babbling, "It's OK darling, I was just funnin' with you."

"Well?" Lois demanded impatiently.

"Well what, honey?" Perry said, feigning ignorance. He could not resist riling her up a bit. As he waited for the explosion, he thought back to the first day he had met Lois Lane. She had just been this shy little girl, barely eight, who had been staring longingly in the window of his shop. When he had told her to come in she had hesitated, but finally she had entered the shop. After a few minutes of cajoling, he had learned that she loved to read but could not afford to buy any books.

Perry had taken an instant liking to this little girl, and told her to go ahead and pick out a book; she could sit in the chair in the corner near the fire and read it there. That way, she did not have to worry about paying for it. After a moment's hesitation, she had picked out a book and began reading. After that day, she had been a frequent visitor to his shop. Perry had come to view her as the daughter he never had.

Perry was suddenly jolted out of his musings by the explosion he'd been anticipating. "Perry," Lois barked, "You know very well what I'm here for!" Boy had she come a long way from that shy girl over a decade ago.

"Oh," Perry said, as if it was suddenly dawning on him. "You wanted to know if I'd gotten the shipment of new books yet. Well, let me think. Hmmm..."

Lois waited impatiently. Perry was surprised that she was not actually tapping her foot on the ground. She normally was not so restrained, he thought, smiling inwardly. "Did you or did you not get the shipment of new books today?" she demanded.

"I think I remember it coming in today," Perry said slowly. He was enjoying baiting Lois so much that he did not want it to end quite yet. Besides, it would not do for her to think he was a pushover. He watched her steam a bit more, and then he finally relented. "Yes I did, honey. Here you go the latest from Lewis Lane. I know how much you love his books," Perry said with a twinkle in his eye.

Perry watched her face light up as she looked at the book. It was worth all the effort he had put into getting them published, just to see that look on her face when she saw them in print. He remembered the day she had shown him her first story. She had obviously been bursting with something when she had entered the shop, and he had wondered what she had on her mind.

She had been nervous at first, but eventually she had shown him the story she had written. To say he had been astounded would be an understatement. It was one of the best stories he had ever seen. He could hardly believe that a fourteen-year-old girl had written it. The sadness she had revealed when she commented about not being able to get it published had nearly broken Perry's heart. It would be a shame to let such a story be overlooked simply because a girl had written it.

So, he had made up some story about having a publisher friend and convinced Lois to let him try and get it published under a male pen name. Then Perry had set about rewriting it in his own hand, so that it would look like he had written it, and then he had set out trying to find a publisher for it, passing himself off as Lewis Lane. It had taken him a while but he did find someone willing to look at the manuscript of the heretofore unknown Lewis Lane.

Perry had never let on how much effort had gone into getting it published, preferring to let her think it was just a simple favor from a friend. He knew she would be upset if she knew all the trouble he had gone to, but it was worth it to him. As much as he enjoyed this moment though, it could not last.

“Hadn’t you better get home before your father has to leave for the fair?” Perry asked. “I know he’d love to see the latest ‘Lewis Lane’ before he had to go. Besides, he could probably use some help with last minute tweaks on that invention of his.”

“You’re right Perry,” Lois said. “How much for the book?”

Perry almost laughed, they went through this every time. She always insisted on paying, but he would have none of that. They were her books, after all. “Now honey, you know better than that. How many times do I have to tell you they’re your books, and I won’t take a cent for them? You better go, now,” Perry replied, perhaps a bit more gruffly than he intended.

Lois relented, realizing that, yet again, Perry was not going to accept money from her. She felt bad that he went through all this for her and did not receive anything for it in return. He had always been so kind to her and she just wanted to repay him for all the kindness he had shown her. “Okay, Perry,” she said, giving him a quick hug. “Thanks for everything.”

Lois hurried across town, heading home, anxious to show her father her latest book. He had been skeptical at first, but every time she brought home a new book she could see the pride in his eyes. She loved her father very much. Before Perry, he was the only one she could really be herself around and not worry about being treated like an outcast just because she did not conform to society’s ideals for a young girl.

Lois arrived at home, but, just as she was about to enter, a voice stalled her. “Hello Beauty,” a deep, masculine voice said behind her.

Inwardly, Lois sighed. ‘*Anyone* but him,’ Lois thought. She hated the nickname Beauty. Sure it was nice to know everyone thought she was beautiful, but it also showed that that was all people thought of when they looked at her. They did not care what was beneath the surface. *He* was the worst of the lot too. Giving into the inevitable, she turned to face him, a false smile plastered on her face. She could not afford to annoy him.

“Why, hello Lex,” she said, false enthusiasm filling her voice. It sounded so hollow in her ears that Lois wondered how Lex could possibly miss it. Or maybe he just chose to ignore it. ‘Probably can’t imagine anyone not liking him,’ Lois thought with an inward sniff. Sure he was big and handsome, she thought objectively, but he was also arrogant, self-centered, and in general just a blight on society. She didn’t know what people saw in him.

He practically ran the town, too. Everyone was either too busy kissing up to him or terrified of him. If it were not for the fact that anyone who went against him or his gang of ruffians always ran into mysterious trouble, Lois would give him a piece of her mind. But she could not bear to let anything happen to her father or Perry. She cared for them too much.

While Lois was seething inside, Lex returned her smile and strode toward her, right over her prize rose bushes, trampling them. ‘How dare he!’ Lois fumed, almost losing control of her temper. She loved those roses and spent hours taking care of them. They were the only thing she had left to remember her mother. Her father did not normally like to tell stories about her mother. Lois was not really sure why but he always got very sad when Lois brought her up, but he did tell her how her mother had loved roses. He told her that her mother had planted these roses when she was carrying Lois, wanting to liven up the house for the child that was coming. Then he told her that her mother used to take her out with her while she tended the garden. Lois could vaguely remember being in the garden with her mother, enjoying the roses. Every time she tended the roses she felt as if she was keeping a part of her mother alive. ‘And now that arrogant, selfish, bast...’ she could not even think the word. Nice girls like her were not supposed to know such language.

Lex continued striding toward her, apparently oblivious to what was going on. If he had any clue what he had just done, he

gave absolutely no sign. He still wore that same wide smile, one that did not quite reach his eyes, when he finally stopped walking and began to speak. “Beauty, I’ve been looking all over for you,” he said.

‘Yeah, too bad you found me,’ Lois thought. “Well now you’ve found me,” Lois said, hoping her contempt was not showing up in her voice. “What was it you wanted, Lex?”

With what he probably thought was a charming smile, he asked, “I was wondering if you’d do me the great honor of having dinner with me tonight.”

Well, he did not so much ask as demand, even though it was phrased like a question. Lois scrambled, trying to think up some excuse not to have dinner with him. She didn’t think she could stomach his company long enough. Or hold down her food. Finally, Lois managed to blurt out, “Oh Lex, I’m sooo sorry but I have to wash my hair tonight. I really wish I could. Maybe another night.” Hoping that would appease him for now and frantically wondering how she would avoid another night.

A dark look fluttered across Lex’s face, but was gone almost before Lois could see it. “Very well Beauty, another time it is. I do hope that certain things aren’t distracting you.” He glanced at the book she was carrying, “Really Beauty, don’t you think it’s wrong for you to be reading books? After all, a woman’s place does *not* involve reading.”

Lois nearly sighed with relief when he turned and left after that. The thinly veiled threats and the criticism of her reading had been almost more than she could handle. He made her so mad. She had to get out of there, just get away and think. She could not bear being near her poor roses any longer. She just ran away from the house, letting her book fall on the doorstep.

She ran as fast as she could, trying to get as far from Lex and her trampled roses as she could. How far she had come from that happy, excited mood this morning when she went to get a copy of her new book. Why did Lex have to ruin everything?

As Lois ran, she was not paying any attention to what was going on around her. She did not even realize that she was coming up to the cliff not far from her house. Suddenly she was at the brink, and she could not stop herself. She plummeted over the edge.

As she fell, Lois screamed.

Clark was out flying, enjoying the rush of wind as he raced through the air. He had only been flying for the past four years, but he had grown to love it. It almost made up for his hideous form. The loneliness of his isolation was not so bad when he was flying. He felt so free and alive that he wished he could spend all his time up here, but he felt an obligation to his people and tried to do the best he could to protect and guide them while remaining hidden.

At first he had thought it was his being different that caused his transformation. His parents had told him how he fell from the sky in answer to their prayers for a child. As he had grown, he had noticed things about himself that were not normal, well except maybe to practiced wizards, but then he was *not* a practiced wizard. So when he had begun changing into some sort of monster, it had been perfectly reasonable to assume it was from the same source as his other differences. It had not been until about two years ago when he had rescued this strange woman that he had known it was a curse and not inherent in his being.

He remembered that day clearly, as if it were yesterday...

He was flying around as normal, when suddenly he saw a woman falling from a nearby cliff. He caught her, but before he could return her to solid ground she looked at him very closely, kind of like she was looking through him, and it scared him. Few people looked at him like that when he was in disguise.

She began to speak, in a sure and confident voice, nothing

like one would expect from someone who had just been plummeting to her sure death. “Hello, Clark. I’ve been meaning to talk to you.”

He nearly dropped her when she used his real name. How could she know? Everyone thought that Clark was dead, and no one knew that the Beast and the Angel were the same. Clark just stared at her as she continued.

“I know all about you, Clark. I know how you think that this transformation is due to the differences in you that give you the powers that make you the Angel. But I want to tell you it’s not, Clark,” she explained.

“An evil wizard named Tempus put a curse on you, causing you to take on this form. He wanted you out of the picture so he could take over and reform the kingdom in his own image. But his plan backfired and he was blamed for your death. His curse lingers on though. But as with every curse there is a counter,” she paused.

When she paused, Clark was tempted to shake her and demand she finish, but before his patience wore out she started again. “To break the curse, you must find your one true love. When she confesses her love for you of her own free will, the curse shall be broken and you will return to your natural form.”

After that she was silent, and since Clark did not know what to say he set her down and flew away. Clark did not know whether or not he should believe her, but she seemed to know so much about him he could not help but believe. After all, she had known his name. He was under the distinct impression she had gotten into trouble just to get him to rescue her so she could tell him about the curse as well. He did not know how he felt. He had been elated to know that it was not part of what he was, but at the same time he was depressed. For who could learn to love a beast?

After the encounter, Clark had wondered who the woman was and why she had gone to so much trouble to tell him about the curse. At the time, he had been too stunned by what she was telling him to think straight, but now that he had time to think about it all these questions he wished he had asked her were popping into his mind. So in order to satisfy his curiosity, Clark had set out trying to learn about her. He eventually learned that she was a local fortuneteller named Star, who made a living telling people’s futures. Well that helped explain how she knew, but he still had not figured out *why* she had done it. That answer had come later, when he recognized a family he had saved from a burning house visiting her. It turned out he had saved her sister and her family. She must have felt she was repaying him a debt. Now that he knew, he felt much better.

Eventually though he had come to terms with it. He no longer had the fear that a rampage would overtake him and he would hurt people without intending to. The realization that he was not going to change even further, or lose his capability for rational thought was a great relief, but in the end nothing really changed. It could not as long as he remained a beast.

His people avoided the castle. They were afraid of the dangerous Beast that lurked there, the one they blamed for killing their prince. Clark was glad the people had cared so much about him, but their hatred for his new form prevented him from revealing the truth. He doubted he could convince them, and while he was pretty sure they could not *physically* harm him, he did not think his heart would survive anything they did try to do to him. So he just let things stay the way they were. Every once in a while some cretin got it in his head to try and sneak into the castle and steal some of the priceless treasure they were sure the Beast kept hidden there. Clark was sick of people invading his home and trying to take what little he had left of his parents.

It had been almost seven years since his parents had mysteriously died in their bedchambers. No one had been able to figure out how they died. They had been perfectly healthy and

then the next day they were found dead in their bed. It had caused quite an uproar, but when even the best physicians had been unable to come up with a solution, the furor had died down. And so the kingdom had mourned their deaths.

He remembered that at the time, one of his parents’ former advisers, a shady man named Tempus had tried to become regent. But since Clark had never trusted him, he managed to convince the council that he could rule without a regent, even though his coming of age birthday would be some time later. He had not really thought anything at the time, but after his transformation, and learning the true cause of it, he realized that this Tempus had probably also killed his parents. Clark felt a bit of guilt that he enjoyed the fact Tempus was now dead, at least he would not have to worry about Tempus interfering in his life again.

Suddenly Clark’s thoughts were pierced by a loud scream. Pushing his thoughts to the side, Clark raced towards the sound of the scream. He saw someone plummeting off a cliff. ‘Oh no, not again,’ he groaned inwardly as he swooped down and caught her. ‘Why do I always seem to have to rescue women falling off cliffs?’ Clark wondered. It seemed to be becoming a habit. Women were always falling for him, just not the right one. Quickly he returned her to the safety of solid ground, but before he could dart off again as he normally would, he saw her face.

She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her shoulder-length, chestnut hair was in a windswept disarray that made her look all the more alluring. Her eyes were pools of deep brown Clark could see himself drowning in if he looked into them long enough. Her lovely mouth was still parted in surprise at her sudden rescue, and Clark had to resist the urge to kiss her. That certainly would not go over well, he knew. Besides, with his fangs he doubted he could kiss her safely.

Suddenly, her voice snapped him out of his reverie, “You’re the Angel they talk about, aren’t you?” she asked, breathlessly.

Clark was tempted to laugh. Him an angel? More like she was the angel that had fallen into his arms. Unable to ignore her question completely, as he normally did on rescues, he gave a barely perceptible nod and flew off.

As he flew away, he recalled how he had thought jokingly about women falling into his arms, but never the right one. Well, cruel fate had finally sent the right one. He knew it was crazy, but ever since he had gotten a good look at her, he just knew she was the one. He had already fallen for her at just a glance. He did not even know anything about her. She was probably married already; beautiful women like that did not stay single long. She could also be a horrible person, or a complete dunce. It was ridiculous, utterly ridiculous to believe he was in love with her. Somehow, though, he could not quite convince himself of that.

As he flew home, Clark did not know whether it was better to have met her and know what he was missing, or to have never seen her. He entered the castle and removed his cowl, looking in the one mirror left in the entire castle. The first thing he noticed was his long, cruel looking fangs, designed for ripping and rending flesh. His brow was low and heavy, covered completely with fur, as was the rest of his body, making him look stupid as well as ugly. His eyes were almost completely hidden beneath bushy eyelashes, creating an almost sinister look. In anger and frustration he lashed out, shattering the mirror. He could never let anyone see him like this, let alone the angel he had just rescued. He could not take seeing the fear and horror in her eyes. It would break his heart.

Lois was still reeling from her brush with death when the Angel flew away. One minute she had been running away from Lex, trying to let go of her anger without making him angry, then the next she had been plummeting to her certain death. By some miracle though she had been saved. She had always been somewhat skeptical of the Angel people reported saving them,

but now that she had seen him with her own eyes she believed.

He had been clad all in black, and his face was covered so she could not see it, but instinctively she just knew he had to be male. Something about the way he felt and moved told her that. Somehow, she had managed to ask him who he was, and she could have sworn he nodded in response. In all the sightings she had heard about, he never gave the slightest hint of a response to anyone. ‘So why had he responded to her? Why did he fly around helping people? What was he like under that disguise?’ Having now met the angel, Lois was filled with questions about him. ‘Why couldn’t he stay to talk to her? Was he afraid of something or just unable to converse?’ She wished she could see him again to ask, but short of falling off another cliff, which she did *not* want to try again, she had no idea how to contact him.

Frustrated, Lois began the long walk home. She had not realized how far she had run earlier; she had been so intent on just getting away from Lex and her trampled roses. Now she had to get back to see her father off before he had to leave for the fair. She only hoped her detour had not made her too late. She was also bursting to tell him about the Angel, though she was afraid he would yell at her for getting in trouble in the first place.

The sun was beginning to set and Lois shivered, not wanting to be out alone at night. Hoping she could make it home before it got too dark, Lois picked up her pace. Her dad would have left by now, he would have needed to leave at least an hour ago unless he wanted to ride all night to make the fair. She hated when he did stuff like that, hated the thought of him being out late at night. He often stayed late tinkering with his inventions, trying to get them just right before leaving, but this year he had promised not to do that. Who knew what might happen on some dark road?

She managed to make it home just before full dark set in, and was very relieved. Not that she was scared of the dark, she quickly reminded herself, she would just rather not be out in it. She was surprised to see a light on in the cabin; her dad must have left it on for her. She entered the house to see him sitting there waiting. ‘Daddy!’ she protested. ‘You promised you’d leave before dark so you wouldn’t have to ride all night. You know I hate the thought of you riding alone in the dark all night.’

Sam sighed, he had known Lois would be upset when he did not leave like he promised, but he had seen the altercation with Lex outside and knew she would be upset. He had to stay and make sure she was okay, and was even considering canceling the trip to stay with her. Knowing Lois, she would not accept it but he was concerned about her. ‘Princess...’ he began uncertainly. ‘I saw what happened outside... I had to make sure you were okay. I know how Lex upsets you. I couldn’t just leave you alone. Are you sure I shouldn’t stay?’

Sam waited for the expected outburst. He knew Lois would not like the suggestion, but he had to ask anyway. Sure enough, Lois responded, ‘I’m *fine*, Daddy. I know how important the annual fair is to you, and I don’t want you to miss it on my account.’

‘Lois, I saw you run away, and you were gone a long time. I know this affected you more than you’re letting on. What happened?’ Sam asked.

Lois sighed, she wanted to tell him, really she did, but she didn’t know how to start. Also, she was afraid of worrying him further. Slowly, she began to explain, ‘Well, you know how Lex and his attitude towards women always infuriates me, so I was already upset when he started talking to me. Then when he trampled over mom’s roses, it was all I could do not to lash out at him then and there. When he left, I just needed some release so I just started running. I guess I wasn’t paying much attention to where I was going...’ Lois trailed off, trying to judge her dad’s mood before continuing.

Sam did not like where this was going. Obviously something had happened to Lois, and she was afraid to tell him. If someone

had hurt his little girl why he would... well he did not know what he would do, but it would *not* be pleasant. Trying not to let too much concern show on his face, he waited for Lois to continue her story.

‘I didn’t notice the cliff I was headed for and I ran right off the edge,’ Lois continued.

‘What?!’, Sam thought. His little girl had fallen off a cliff? What had happened? How had she survived? He was glad she had, but it just did not seem possible.

‘But then the most amazing thing happened. The Angel that people talk about came swooping down out of the sky and caught me. At first I was so shocked I didn’t even realize what was going on, but when he set me back on the ground I was able to gather my thoughts. He didn’t fly off immediately like everyone else says he does, and when I asked a question he answered me, I think. It looked like he nodded at least. It was amazing.’ Lois still could not really believe what happened, but it was the most amazing experience of her life. She would definitely have to try and work it into her next novel.

Sam tried to digest what Lois had just told him. She had almost died! He did not know who or what this angel was, but he sent it a silent thanks. He did not think he could go on living if he lost Lois too... but he did not want to think about that right now. Besides, Lois was safe now and that was what was important. And it was just like her to be so unfazed by nearly dying. ‘I’m glad you’re OK Lois, but really you should have been more careful. You and I both know you didn’t even really believe this angel character existed before this, what would have happened if he hadn’t existed or hadn’t been nearby? You can’t count on it happening again.’

‘I know, Daddy. I’m really sorry. I was just so mad I wasn’t thinking straight. I promise I’ll be more careful in the future.’ Lois said apologetically. She was surprised he was taking this as well as he was, she had expected a big blow up at least. He had to be upset, but for some reason he wasn’t letting it show. She almost wished he would get angry and go into one of his lectures, at least then she would know what he was thinking.

‘Good, now I think it’s time you got to bed. You were through quite an ordeal today,’ Sam said. ‘I’ll be in the next room if you need me.’

Lois shook her head. He was *still* insisting on staying? She would have to change his mind on that quickly; she did not want to be babied. She was twenty years old and capable of taking care of herself, even if it sometimes seemed the whole world refused to accept it. ‘No, you have to leave now to make it to the fair. You’ve worked very hard on your invention this year, and I’m sure it will be well received. I will not be responsible for you missing out. Go, now!’ Lois exploded at her father. Then, in a small, concerned voice. ‘And be careful.’

Sam still was not quite convinced, but before he had a chance to respond, Lois said ‘I’ll be fine, *really* I will.’

Sam sighed, he had not realized his reluctance was so obvious. ‘Okay, princess,’ Sam conceded, knowing his daughter would not budge. ‘I’ll leave now, and I promise I’ll be careful. I’ll be back in a few days. You take care of yourself while I’m gone. If you need anything, I’m sure Perry will help.’

‘Goodbye, Daddy,’ Lois said. ‘Good luck.’

‘Goodbye, Princess,’ Sam said, leaving the house. Then, quietly, mostly to himself, continued, ‘Be safe.’

Sam navigated his way carefully through the woods, heading towards the fairgrounds. It was very dark and he was having trouble seeing the trail, there was not even a moon out to help light his way. The meager light from the lamp attached to the wagon he had rented only radiated a few feet, barely illuminating enough of the trail to manage to stay on path. He shivered; there was something very ominous about tonight. How Sam wished

there was some moonlight by which to see.

Several hours later, it became apparent to Sam that he was lost. None of the surrounding country was familiar, and he should have been nearing the fairgrounds, but there were none of the typical noises one would associate with the inventor's fair. Suddenly lightning flashed overhead, illuminating a castle ahead of him. The sky opened, and a deluge came down, instantly soaking Sam. Not wanting to be caught out in the storm any longer than necessary, he headed for the castle and the shelter it promised.

The gates to the castle grounds were in disrepair and parted when Sam pushed on them. They groaned and creaked, protesting the effort to move them, but the struggle was no contest. Sam went inside and entered the castle looking for shelter. The interior was dark and foreboding, but at least it was dry, Sam thought. Lightning continued to flash, giving him glimpses of the inside of the castle. It was in surprisingly good repair for one that was apparently abandoned. There was no dust, no signs of age one would expect in a derelict building. But Sam was too tired and cold to do more than briefly wonder at it. He was soon asleep on the hall in the entryway.

Sam woke the next morning to the sounds of birds chirping and the sun streaming into the castle. In the light of day, he could see that the castle looked well cared for on the inside, despite the outward appearance of being abandoned. Surmising that someone lived here in secret, Sam was suddenly eager to leave the castle, fearful what the occupant, or occupants, might do if they found him invading their space.

Outside the sun was shining brightly, the air was crisp and clean with that after the rain smell. Everything looked so much brighter and cheerier in the day, no longer ominous like last night. Looking around, Sam noticed rose bushes lining the path to the castle. They were the strangest roses he had ever seen, they were a pale lavender color unlike any others he had seen. They were also among the most beautiful roses he had ever seen.

He smiled sadly, remembering Ellen's love of roses. Before Lois was born, she had wanted to plant rose bushes to brighten up their cottage for their child. Sam had let her work the garden while he tinkered with his inventions. Occasionally he would come out and help, but more often than not he got caught up in his work and the day would pass before he realized it. Slowly though, she had managed to get the rose bushes to grow and bloom in the once barren land in front of the cottage. She had been so proud, Sam remembered.

Not long after that Lois had come into their life. Sam had been disappointed because he wanted a son to carry on his legacy, but he had tried not to let Ellen see it. He began to spend even more time on his inventions, leaving Lois and Ellen together to keep each other company. Now, he wondered, if he had not been avoiding spending time with them because of his disappointment in having had a daughter instead of a son. So went the first few years of Lois' life. He regretted missing them now, especially after what happened to Ellen.

Just before Lois turned three, Ellen had begged Sam to go and purchase some more seeds for the garden. She had wanted to expand it as a birthday present for Lois. Lois was already becoming a frequent visitor to the garden, spending time there with her mother. But Sam had delayed, not wanting to leave his inventions to go. Eventually Ellen had gotten fed up and gone to town without him.

Sam nearly broke down and cried as he remembered that day. He had not even realized she had gone at first, barely acknowledging her when she said she was leaving and asked him to watch Lois. It was not until dusk Sam had even known anything had happened. Then his world had crumbled.

There had been a knock on the door, and on the other side

was the town magistrate. From the look on his face, Sam could tell something had disturbed the normally stone-faced man. "Sam..." the magistrate began, unsteadily.

"What's wrong?" Sam asked, concerned. The man was obviously having trouble with something.

"I don't quite know how to say this," he continued. "We found your wife outside town about an hour ago. She was... it was awful. We found her beaten, barely recognizable. It must have happened some time ago. There was nothing we could do; she was dead when we found her. We don't know what happened, but apparently she had been waylaid and robbed. I'm sorry."

Sam was stunned. Ellen was dead?!? Someone had beaten her to death over what, the piddling amount of money she had taken to buy seeds? He should never have let her go. He should have gone himself like he had promised. How was he going to survive without her? He had not even been able to respond.

The next several days were a blur, he was suddenly stuck a single father with very little idea how to care for a child. He had missed Ellen horribly; he still did. He cursed the time he had wasted with his inventions instead of spending time with her. Silently, he promised he would try to make it up by being the best father he could be. So he had cut down on his inventing, spending more time with Lois. He had encouraged her to do what she wanted to, denying her very little.

As she had grown, Sam had come to realize that she was not a disappointment. She was everything he could want in a child, even if she was not male. He had taught her to read and write when she had expressed an interest in doing so. He was proud of the young woman she had become.

Lois had come to love the roses as her only connection with her departed mother. Once she was old enough, she had taken over tending for the roses, which Sam had been doing up until then in memory of his wife. She lovingly tended them every day, rain or shine.

That thought suddenly brought Sam back to the events of the other day. He had been waiting at home for Lois to return, when he had heard voices outside. Through the window he had seen Lois and Lex talking. He did not like that Lex fellow, he was just too slimy, and he kept bothering Lois. That really upset Sam especially since Lois was not interested. But Lex was not one to take no for an answer, and he had set his sights on Lois. He watched in horror as Lex had trampled over Lois' prized roses, sure that he had done it on purpose because they were something that she cared for, and Lex could not abide that.

It had taken all of Sam's restraint not to rush out there and do something to Lex, but he had known that would only bring trouble. He had watched Lois valiantly hold her composure until Lex left, then run off. He did not blame her; his own fists were still clenched in rage. Sam had decided to stay until Lois returned home, even though he should be leaving soon, in case she needed his support. He had known she would have been upset at him for staying, but he had needed to be sure she was all right before leaving. Things had gone much as he expected when she returned. He had been glad to see the spark back in her, and had felt much better about leaving. Of course, he had ended up lost in the dark, which would upset Lois even more; he had best get home soon before she began to worry.

Coming back to the present, Sam decided to bring one of the roses back for Lois. Hopefully, it would make her feel better about losing her roses. Sam reached out to pluck one of the roses, and suddenly the sun was blotted out behind him and he heard a fierce growl. Fearfully, Sam turned around, thinking the master of this place had found him. Behind him, Sam saw a large, dark form towering over him, mere inches from him. The form blocked out the sun, and Sam was unable to make any features of the form out as a result. The aura of light surrounding the form made it all the more difficult to tell what it was, but what little he

could make out had Sam shaking.

“How dare you defile my rose bushes!” a harsh, raspy voice boomed, with an eerie animal like quality.

Sam gulped, barely able to swallow through the sudden tightness in his throat. He stammered a reply, trying to explain himself, “I’m sorry, sir. I noticed your unique roses, and I wanted to take one for my daughter. She loves roses, and recently her own rose bushes were trampled. I meant no harm, I just hoped to cheer her up with one of these lovely roses.”

Sam scarcely dared breathe while he waited for a reply. Something in the figure’s posture softened, and it replied, in a much softer, though still somewhat feral, tone, “Take it and go.”

Not willing to waste a moment, in case it changed its mind, Sam took the rose and rushed off, quickly mounting his steed. Not daring to glance over his shoulder, he raced away through the woods not stopping until he reached home.

Clark had been unable to stay in his castle after looking into the mirror. He had taken off and just flown away as fast as he could, trying to outrun his thoughts. But, inevitably, they had caught up with him again, and he had stopped running and collapsed, emotionally worn out. Some time later, Clark was not sure how long, but judging from the sun he had been there all night, he made his way back home.

Upon his return, Clark noticed a figure in his garden. Anger welled up in Clark at the thought of yet another thief stealing from his castle. Quickly, he swept the castle but nothing seemed to be missing. Relieved, Clark was about to let it pass when the man reached out toward one of his flower bushes. His anger returned full force as he watched. Those roses had been a gift from Star, who had told him about the curse. When he had finally tracked her down, after their initial encounter, she had given him this strange rose and told him it would lead to his freedom from Tempus’ evil. Clark had not really believed her, but when he got home he had planted a cutting anyway. It had become his symbol of hope that someday he would be human again, or as close to human as he was before.

Now someone was tampering with the rose bush. Clark could not take it. He swooped down, positioning himself behind the man so that the sun was behind him and would blot out his features, unwilling to let anyone see him in this form. His animal nature taking control, Clark growled a warning. As the man explained himself, Clark’s reason reasserted itself. Ashamed of his outburst, Clark told the man to go and returned to the solitude of his castle. His loss of control was just a reminder of what he feared most, losing himself completely.

Lois waited impatiently for her father’s return. She worried about him whenever he went away, who knew what trouble he might run into on the road, especially late at night. Normally she would tend to her roses and try to take her mind off of it, but they were beyond care now. And thinking about it just upset her all over again. She could not concentrate on anything, not even her writing, and spent the time watching for her father’s return.

By the time the sun began to set, Lois was climbing walls. Her father should have been home hours ago. She was just about to give up waiting when he finally arrived home. “Daddy!” Lois exclaimed throwing her arms around him. “Welcome home. I was worried about you.”

“Hi Princess,” Sam replied, returning the hug. “Sorry I’m late, I got a little lost...” Trailing off, Sam produced the odd flower he had found to distract Lois from questioning him about getting lost. “I saw this and thought you might like it.”

“Oh, it’s lovely,” Lois exclaimed, taking the flower, totally distracted by it. “Where did you find a rose like this?”

Sam panicked for a second, not wanting to tell her about the castle, or the fearsome monster he had encountered there. Unable

to come up with anything, he fumbled, “Uh, just happened to see it in a clearing in the woods over there,” gesturing in the general direction and praying she would drop the subject.

Lois could tell he was avoiding the subject, but rather than pressing it and make him suspicious, she decided to investigate later on her own. To allay her father’s fears though, she replied, “Oh, it doesn’t really matter. It’s so beautiful, thank you. I’ve never seen a rose like it.”

Sam was so relieved that she had not pressed the point, he decided not to press his luck. “Well it’s late Princess,” he said. “I think I should turn in. I’m tired from my journey. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Lois watched her father go to bed, already planning to search for this mysterious clearing tomorrow. She might not have much to go on, but she was determined to make a good try of it. Satisfied, she headed for bed, intending to get an early start in the morning.

The next morning, Lois sneaked out as soon as she could without arousing suspicion. Her determination to discover where the unique flower had come from had not wavered all night, and she was barely able to contain her curiosity long enough to wait. She was not sure where to start, but she had an idea.

First, since she had never seen it before it could not be very close to the village. On the other hand, it could not be more than half a day or so’s ride, because her father had not been gone more than a day. Determined not to let lack of information stop her, she set off in the direction her father vaguely gestured.

After several hours of walking, Lois was getting tired. She was not used to going so far, normally she just stayed in the village. It had seemed so much easier back home when she had just been thinking about it. Not that she would let a little discomfort stop her, but she needed a rest. Only when she found a stump to sit on, did it occur to Lois she had not brought any food to eat. Well, she could live without food for one day. Might even do her some good.

Hungry, but unwilling to give in, Lois continued her search. As noon came and went, Lois began to wonder if her search would prove futile, as so far not a hint of her father’s trail, nor the wonderful rose had been found. Still, Lois pressed on, unready to admit defeat.

Soon after, Lois realized she would have to turn back if she did not want to be caught out after dark. Even now, she was not sure if she could make it home before nightfall. But she knew that if she returned, her father would do everything he could to prevent her from leaving again. Pushing her luck, she decided to press on a bit further before heading back.

Lois pressed her luck way too far, and began to notice the shadows creeping, telling her sunset was not far off. She cursed herself for being so stubborn, and began to look around the woods a tad fearfully, wondering what creatures night might bring. Lois decided it was time to turn back, and hoped she would not get lost or worse in the dark.

When she started home, Lois thought she saw something out of place to her right. Heading to where she could see past the trees easier, she could see a tower of some sort in the distance. Thinking perhaps salvation was at hand, from the encroaching darkness, she headed towards it. As she approached, she saw the tower was part of a large castle, surrounded by a high wall. Hoping whoever inhabited the castle was friendly, or at least non-hostile, she picked up her pace.

It was nearly dark by the time she reached the castle. Lois feared she might be stuck outside, but she noticed the gate was open. Hoping that it was a sign of friendliness, Lois entered the castle grounds. Upon entering, she gasped at the lovely garden she found herself in. Roses of every type, including several she had never seen before, bloomed everywhere she looked,

including the one her father had brought.

She had found the source of the mysterious rose. Suddenly, she remembered her father's fright and wondered what had been so terrifying. Briefly she considered fleeing, but when she looked back at the forbidding forest, decided she would rather confront the imagined horrors here than what she was certain would be out there.

Putting on a bold face, in spite of the fear she felt, Lois strode toward the castle. Upon reaching the entrance, she cautiously opened the door. Peering inside, she asked "Hello? Is anybody home?"

Her voice echoed loudly in the silence and Lois cringed. After a few moments without a reply, she let herself in. Slowly, she looked around. Suddenly, Lois yawned and she realized just how tired she really was from walking around all day. Searching around quickly, Lois found a soft couch to lie on, and promptly decided to use it for her bed. She was out mere seconds after lying down.

Clark spent a long time brooding and berating himself for almost losing control after the man fled. Eventually, he could not take being in the castle anymore and took off, flying aimlessly. If he had hoped to escape his thoughts though, it was not working. Thankfully, it was not too long before he heard a call for help. Donning his disguise, he raced to the rescue.

Afterwards, Clark was starting to feel a bit better. Helping others normally made him feel good about himself, as if he had a purpose for existing, even if he was a monster. He spent the rest of the day flying around and helping others in trouble.

When night approached he decided to stay out rather than going back home and possibly bringing back memories of what had transpired. He did not really need that much sleep anyway. He spent the night flying the countryside.

As the sun began to rise, he went to the top of a nearby mountain. He loved watching the sunrise, it was always so beautiful and invigorating. He always felt better when the first rays of the sun hit him, stronger somehow. The world was so beautiful from here, he felt so peaceful. He could almost forget the monster he was, gazing down like this.

Clark was drawn out of his reflections by a scream. 'No rest for the weary,' he thought as he raced off to the rescue. He spent the rest of the day flying around helping out as he could. This time, when dusk approached, Clark was beginning to feel tired so he decided it was time he headed home and got some sleep. Hopefully all the good he had done would help him forget about the earlier incident. More tired than he realized, he barely made it to his bed before collapsing into a deep sleep.

He woke early the next morning and immediately realized something was out of place with his castle. At first he could not place the feeling, but then he realized he was hearing a soft, steady thumping noise. After a few moments, it dawned on Clark that it was a heartbeat. Quickly scanning the castle, he saw a form lying asleep on a couch in his castle.

Despite his promises to himself, and his best attempts not to, the anger rose in him like a beast of its own. Storming through the castle, he approached the sleeping figure. As he neared the figure stirred.

"How dare you invade my castle?" Clark growled loudly. "What gives you the right to...?" He trailed off as the woman turned on him quickly, startled. She started backing away and tripped back onto the couch. As he looked into her terrified doe eyes, sudden recognition flooded him. It was the woman he had rescued the other day.

Lois was startled out of her sleep by the sound of something stomping through the castle. As she started to get up, a loud voice, with a strange bestial quality, growled at her.

"How dare you invade my castle?" it said, as she turned toward it.

There was a horrible looking monster growling at her. Suddenly frightened, Lois tried to back away but tripped over the couch she had slept on, ending up sitting on it again. This behemoth must be what had frightened her father. It continued growling at her, "What gives you the right to...?" Suddenly the monster trailed off.

The creature just stared at her. She was not sure what it was doing, but suddenly it seemed less threatening than before. Emboldened by this behavior, Lois jumped up and started yelling back.

"How dare *you* come storming in here, yelling at me, after you left the gate and door open. If you really don't want anyone entering, why don't you keep it locked up tight? Really, you think you'd at least find out *why* before you jump down my throat about it. Did it ever occur to you I might have a good reason? I didn't want to be trapped out in the forest after dark. I just wanted shelter for the night. Honestly, it's not like I was going to cause any harm." Lois said quickly, hardly pausing to breathe.

It seemed to deflate before her. Quietly, and apologetically, it said, "You're right. I don't know what I was thinking. I... I let my temper take control of me and I shouldn't. It was wrong. Please, go. Leave before my control slips again."

Lois' fear was gone now, as she looked into its eyes, very human eyes, she noticed. Eyes that showed a pain and even fear that she did not quite understand, but something inside her made her want to reach out and sooth the pain away. She could not explain it.

"No, I suppose it is a bit suspicious to find someone in your castle, just like they own it. Maybe we should just start over." Lois said, with more confidence than she actually felt. "Hi, I'm Lois. I was out in the woods and night was coming, so I sought refuge in your castle. The gate was open so I hoped you wouldn't mind."

He, for now Lois thought of him that way, seemed utterly confused now. After a few moments, he replied, "Hi Lois, I'm Cl... Beast, you can call me Beast. That seems to be what they call me now. And you are welcome to shelter in my castle."

Suddenly something clicked in Lois' mind, and she was not sure if she should be afraid again or not. The Beast is what the townspeople called the monster that had been sent by the evil wizard Tempus and killed the Prince. Could this be the same one? Could this be the castle it had taken over? She had never known where it was.

"Are you the Beast that killed the prince?" She asked hesitantly, hoping not to anger him again.

A look of incredulosity fell upon his face. "Lois, I swear to you I never killed the Prince, nor anyone else for that matter. I'm not sure what happened to the Prince, but yes I believe this is his castle. It was deserted so I took refuge here, so as not to scare the townsfolk. I guess they assumed I had gotten rid of the Prince."

Lois was not sure why, but she believed his story. Something she could not explain told her to trust him. "I believe you." she responded.

Suddenly, his face brightened. He was obviously relieved she had believed him, which just affirmed her belief in him. She wondered what her dad had found so terrifying about him. Thinking about her dad reminded Lois he would probably be getting worried since she had been gone so long.

"I hate to cut this short," she said, a touch regretfully, "but I have to be going. My father will be worried about me since I didn't come home last night. I just hope I can find the way."

The Beast's face fell slightly. "Of course," he said, his voice losing much of its bestial quality now that he had calmed down. "You're from the nearby village aren't you?"

Lois nodded and he continued, "I can show you the path, it's

a bit overgrown but you should be able to follow it. It's a several hours walk..."

He trailed off and appeared to be pondering something. "Before you go, let me show you something. Follow me."

Curious, Lois followed him, wondering what he might want to show her. He took her around the castle, towards a stable. In the pasture were several beautiful horses. She could not help but gasp, she loved horses but her father had not been able to support one. Why was he taking her here? Maybe it was something beyond the stable and pasture. To her surprise, he stopped near the pasture and gazed at the horses. Curious, she moved up to the fence next to him.

"These horses are some of my few companions. I feed them, treat them well, show them a little attention, and they don't judge me by my appearance. I wish more people were like that," the Beast said, a tad wistfully.

As he spoke, one of the horses, a pretty mare with a gray coat with scattered black flecks, trotted up by the fence and nuzzled Lois' hand. Lois reached out and petted the mare on the head. "You're right. People judge by appearance all too often," Lois replied, briefly thinking of Lex.

"Well, you seem to have made a friend," the Beast said, brightening. "She seems to have taken quite a shine to you. Why don't you take her?"

"No, I couldn't," Lois protested. "It's too much, she's your horse."

The Beast roared with laughter. "I have plenty of horses, besides it's not like I ride them. This way you will be able to get home much faster. And I want to give you something, because you're the first person who..." he paused for a moment, "hasn't seen me as just a monster."

Lois was not sure, but she suspected he might have started to say something else. Unable to resist the lure of her own horse, she gave in. "Alright, but I really should give you something in return."

"That's not necessary," he protested.

"Nonsense," she responded. "I know, I'll come back and visit you again. You seem like you could use company sometimes."

"I'd love that," the Beast replied, grinning. "You're welcome here any time."

Something in the way his voice quivered told Lois that she had definitely made the right choice. With that settled, they saddled the horse, and he showed her the route home. As Lois rode home, she hoped her father would not be too worried about her.

Clark watched her ride away with a wistful smile. He still could not quite believe the events that had just occurred. He had lost his temper yet again. Ever since he had been changed into his present form, he seemed to have a hard time keeping it under control. And of all the times for it to happen, it had to be with Lois.

He still had a hard time believing that she had not fled out of his life forever, mere seconds after having stepped back into it. But instead of fleeing from him, as everyone else did, she had started yelling back at him. It was unbelievable. She had a courage and fire within her which only made him fall more deeply in love. Not that anything could ever come of it, she was too beautiful to be with a monster like him. She probably had someone back home anyway. Women like that did *not* stay single for long.

They had talked, the first time he had a real conversation in God knew how long. When they had introduced themselves, he had almost given his real name, but he could not do that. She would never believe what had happened to him. It was amazing enough she had believed him about not killing anyone. He had not been comfortable about it, but he had dodged around the

truth, unwilling, and unable, to tell her the whole story.

As they had talked, he was more and more convinced that he had fallen for her. It was bittersweet talking with her, but he would not trade it for anything. His life might be hundreds of times harder now, knowing what he was missing, but for today he was happy. He would let himself dream until tomorrow, then he would let reality come crashing back in.

When Lois said she needed to go, he had taken her to the stables on a whim. He had wanted to give her something in return for just talking to him like he was a human again. When he saw the way her eyes lit up when she saw the horses, Clark knew he had made the right decision. After a little persuasion, he had managed to get her to accept his gift.

Then the most amazing thing had happened. He had not thought anything could be better than what had already occurred, but she had actually asked if she could visit him again. It was all Clark could do to keep his composure and not break out in tears. He had never imagined she would want to see him again. He agreed, and wondered when she would return. He hoped it would not be too long.

Sam was very worried about his daughter. It had not been too unusual when she was gone before he woke up. Lois was a very independent spirit, and he knew better than to try and control her. When she had not returned for lunch, he was a little worried, but while it was not common for her to not come home for lunch, it was not unheard of for her to stay out. By the time darkness started to fall, he was really worried though. What if something had happened to her? Unable to do anything with night encroaching, he went to bed and a restless night.

In the morning things were just worse. Lois was still missing, and he was convinced something had happened to her. He was going to go into town and organize a search party. Could, God forbid, Lex be behind this somehow? No, no he would not do anything like this. Besides, he would not get away with it. She was probably just lost in the woods somewhere. She must have taken the wrong path and gotten turned around. She would be just fine. She had to be.

First, he started searching the house for clues as to where she might have gone. He came across the flower, could she have... no, it was impossible. Besides she would never find the castle and that monster. When he was all ready to head to town and find help, Lois walked in the door.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, upset. "I've been so worried."

"I'm sorry, daddy," Lois said. "I got lost in the forest and I couldn't find my way back in the dark. I came back as soon as I could."

Sam immediately felt guilty for being gruff. "It's okay, princess," he said softly, hugging her tightly. "You're back home and safe now. That's all that matters."

He quickly forgot his worries and was just glad to have his daughter back safe and sound.

Lois was relieved when her father had not asked her for details about what had happened. She knew he would be upset if she told him the whole truth. As much as she loved her dad, she knew he would never approve of her befriending the Beast. Somehow, she felt drawn to him despite his appearance, and she knew that he had no one else. He needed her, of that she was certain.

Lois was not sure when she would be able to visit him again, but she would be sure to do it as soon as she could. Maybe tomorrow she would be able to go back. She was restless, but felt she had to stay home to allay her father's worries. Somehow she would just have to keep herself occupied at home.

She did go out a few times to tend to her new horse, hidden

just out of sight of the cabin in the forest. She was really touched by the gift, though she did not really understand it. How lonely the Beast must have been to have given such a gift to the first person who talked to him without being afraid of his appearance. She felt so sorry for him; he must be so lost and alone.

Eventually, the day came to an end. She curled up in bed wondering about her new friend, how he handled being an outcast. Well, no more, she decided. Whatever happened, she would be his friend. Sometime later, she fell asleep.

By the time dawn rolled around, Clark had almost convinced himself that yesterday had been just a dream. There was no way Lois had actually showed up at his castle. Better yet she had even wanted to be his friend. It was impossible. He would never see her again.

Even when he heard hoof beats approaching the castle, he dared not get his hopes up. Surely it was not her, just some traveler passing by. It could not be her. Not until someone was entering the gates did Clark finally allow himself to think it might be Lois.

As he watched her approach, Clark smiled broadly. Just seeing her made him feel lightheaded. In fact, he realized with a start he was beginning to float. Quickly reasserting control, he hoped Lois had not noticed anything out of the ordinary. Chastising himself, Clark strode out to greet her.

“Lois,” Clark said, beaming. “I hadn’t expected to see you again so soon.”

“You didn’t think I’d just take your horse and ride out of your life forever did you?” Lois teased.

Clark laughed, nervously. In a way that had been exactly what he had thought. Again he chided himself for his pessimism. Lois was continually surprising him.

They talked for hours about many different subjects. Sharing some of their likes and dislikes, just getting to know each other. All too soon it was time for Lois to head home. Their parting was bittersweet as Lois promised to return within the next few days. Clark watched her ride off, astounded by this wonderful woman who had entered into his life and gave him a sliver of hope again.

The last few weeks had been some of the happiest in Lois’ life. She had never really had any friends. The only people she was close to were her father and Perry, who was very much like a second father to her. She had never been close to the other girls her age because their interests did not coincide. While she loved reading and wanted adventure, they had all been interested in dolls and then later boys. It had not helped that as she had grown so did her beauty. The other girls had often been jealous and excluded her even more as they grew.

As for boys, while she had more in common with them, they rarely were interested in friendship. At least that was in the beginning, before she had caught Lex’s eye. After that, none of the boys would do more than glance at her before quickly turning and heading away. She knew he had probably threatened them. It had led to her having an isolated life.

She had always had her books, and later her writing to keep her company. As much as she loved that though, she now realized something had been missing. The Beast had become her only true friend, and today she was going to share her secret with him.

She had recently learned that he shared her interest in books and wanted to show him her latest writings. After all, much of it had been inspired by him. She hoped he would like it. She grabbed her latest copy and headed for her horse.

Lois was nervous when she approached the castle. She was a little apprehensive about how the Beast would react to learn about her writing and how she got her work published. Part of her was afraid he would look down on her and tell her women were not supposed to do these types of things. Screwing her courage to

the sticking place. Lois entered the castle ground.

The Beast greeted her warmly as he always did. Smiling sheepishly, Lois said, “There’s something I want to tell you about.”

“What is it, Lois?” the Beast asked.

“Well…” Lois said, unsure of how to broach the subject.

“Remember how we talked about our love of reading books? Well I had decided I would like to write my own at some point, so I started writing stories. Then Perry, did I tell you about Perry, he’s the owner of the town book store and well, we’ve always been close. I think he thinks of me like a daughter.”

Lois just kept talking, barely pausing to take a breath. She kept plowing through, knowing if she stopped she would not be able to get it all out. “Anyway, one day I finally showed him one of my stories, I just wanted to see if it was any good. I mean my father told me it was the best story he ever read but of course *he’s* biased and I couldn’t trust his opinion.”

She was full on babbling now and she just could not stop it. The words just kept pouring out of her mouth. She did not even dare look at the Beast, for fear of seeing his reaction. “Perry told me the story was really good, and I just couldn’t believe it. I said something, I don’t even really remember what anymore, about never being able to get it published because no one would take a young girl’s story and publish it. But Perry insisted he had a friend who would publish it, as long as we pretended a male had written it. So he made up the name Lewis Lane and got my first novel published.”

“I’ve had a few others published since then. The proceeds are all donated to charities, the publisher thinks Lewis is a recluse who doesn’t want any money, but really it’s because my father is just a poor inventor and people would notice if we suddenly had more money and we don’t want to bring any extra attention to ourselves.” Lois glanced up at the Beast quickly and saw a look of horror on his face. She stopped suddenly and looked away. She knew it, he did not approve of a woman writing and lying to get published.

“That’s entirely unfair,” the Beast said, a hint of anger in his voice. “You should be getting the proceeds from your books. You shouldn’t have to hide and give away all the money. That’s unbelievably wrong.”

It took a few moments for his words to penetrate. Suddenly she realized, the look of horror was not for what *she* had done, but the situation which prevented her from acknowledging her work and profiting from it. She felt her eyes tear up and tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent herself from crying.

“Oh Lois, I’m so sorry,” the Beast said tenderly. He moved as if to hold her, but stopped suddenly. Sensing he was afraid to touch her, Lois closed the gap and lay her head upon his chest. He encircled her with his arms and just held her. She felt so safe and protected in his arms, and eventually she was able to get her emotions in check again. They separated, but remained closer together than before.

“It’s not your fault,” Lois said, when she felt steady enough to speak again. “No one has ever quite understood like you did. The money doesn’t bother me though, really. I know it’s going to help people. The really important thing is getting my work out there. Though, I would love for it to be under my own name.”

“Thank you so much for understanding,” she told the Beast. “I wanted to give you a chance to read this,” she said, handing him her unpublished work. “It’s going to be my next novel, and I would love to know what you think of it.”

“I’m sure I’d love anything you wrote,” the Beast replied, smiling.

Feeling emotionally drained, Lois bid the Beast farewell and headed home.

As Clark watched Lois leave, he again marveled at the

wonderful woman she was. He could tell she had been nervous as soon as he saw her. Little had he expected what she had told him. It had been a wonder to watch her keep talking on, hardly pausing for breath. It had almost made him breathless, even though he could hold his breath a very, very long time.

He had been amazed to hear about her writing, and thankful that she had been able to get published. But his anger had reared its ugly head when she told him about not being able to get anything for it. When he told her his feelings, she had surprised him again by breaking down and crying. He had wanted nothing more than to hold her, but had not felt he had the right.

But then Lois did something completely unexpected again. She had come to *him* and he had held her tightly to his chest. It had just felt so right, holding her there. He comforted her, helping to sooth her. He had never wanted to let her go again.

Clark had almost told her his whole story then, but he was afraid. He just was unsure how to explain how he had been transformed into a monster. Besides, if he told her everything about the curse, she would probably freak out and never want to be near him again. After all, the thought that he might love her as a man loves a woman would repulse her. And she would never return his love, so there was no point. He would still remain a beast forever.

Of course, Clark did have another secret he could tell Lois. He could tell her that the mysterious being known as the Angel was him. But he was afraid of scaring her away. After all, she probably would not take well to the fact he was probably some abandoned fay child. Knowing he was being cowardly, Clark had held onto his secrets.

Then she had given him her latest story to read. After she left, he had sat down to read it and was floored. It was obvious she had used him for inspiration. The story told the tale of a kind, but very lonely man who was isolated by a hideous appearance. He was very moved to see her treatment of him, and it was one of the best stories he had ever read. Especially because she had shared with him. As had happened so often of late, his love for her continued to deepen.

Deciding that now was time to close the deal with Beauty, Lex had to come up with the perfect ring. She was getting on in years and it was time to stop this foolish independent streak she often exhibited. He would tame her. He knew just what would finally end her reluctance to his advances.

Many years ago, Lex had come upon several strange crystals, of varying sizes. They had resembled some sort of emerald, but appeared to be magical. The glow it gave off enchanted Lex. It was one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen. He had collected as many as he could find and brought them home.

Lex quickly set about getting the rock cut into gems for his use. They turned out to be very delicate, and he went through three different jewelers before finding one that could cut it without destroying the entire rock. And those that had destroyed his precious rocks, well they would not have a chance to fail anyone again. He had been left with a precious few gems in the end.

He would have one of these gems set into a betrothal ring. Surely then Beauty would accept and become his wife. He was certain the lure of the gem would be more than enough to break through her reluctance. She would finally belong to him as it was meant to be.

Satisfied, Lex went to retrieve a gem from his hiding spot.

As the days passed without Lois visiting, Clark began to worry. While true it had not been the longest passage of time between visits, Lois had been so emotional at the last one that Clark feared she might be avoiding him. Maybe he had overstepped some bound when comforting her. Or perhaps she

was just embarrassed over losing control like that.

He briefly considered flying to the nearby village and checking to make sure she was okay, but he quickly dismissed the thought. It would not be right of him to invade her privacy like that, she would return if and when she decided to, and not a moment sooner. He would just have to be patient.

Clark realized he had been spending more and more time at the castle, and less flying around. He still left when he heard a cry for help, but he had been staying close not only to be with Lois, but to be near if she came to visit. He found himself reluctant to spend time away for fear he would miss even a moment with her.

Lois had become an essential component of his life in such a short time. If he were honest with himself, he had known she was a necessary part of his life since he met her. He was not sure what to make of the changes in his habits, but decided he still needed to fly and look for help beyond his normal range of hearing from time to time.

‘Now would be a good time to start,’ Clark thought. And if he checked on the castle more frequently it did not mean anything. Did it?

Lois groaned when she saw Lex approaching the cottage. She was planning on making another trip to the Beast’s castle and the last thing she wanted was to have to spend even a moment with Lex instead. Pasting a smile on her face as he drew near, Lois said, “Hello Lex. What brings you here this morning?”

Lex ogled her, as he was wont to do, as he said, “Why, to see you of course, Beauty.”

Suppressing a sigh at his continued insistence of calling her Beauty, Lois could not help but think about how much he looked like a snake when he smiled. She hoped it would not take too long to get rid of him, not feeling up to dealing with his presence today. It had been several days since she last made it to visit the Beast and she knew the Beast would be lonely and worried, especially if she did not see him soon.

Their last visit had been very emotional for her, and she hated to think the Beast might think she was avoiding him. She had just been busy, finishing up her novel and getting it to Perry. Copying everything to show the Beast had helped her a bit in that regard, but she had felt the need to go back and change things even more.

“I know you’ve been worried about not being good enough for me,” Lex continued, still wearing that snake-like grin. “But I wanted to assure you that you are the one for me.”

Lex pulled out a ring, capped with an eerie, glowing green gem. Lois was repulsed by the sickly light and wanted nothing more than to get away from it. Something about it just felt so wrong to her. Caught up in her revulsion, she barely registered his next words. “Marry me, Beauty,” he said, slipping the ring on her finger as she stood stunned.

Lois felt trapped. The revolting ring was on her finger, and Lex had just presumed she would take it. He had not even asked her to marry him. It was more like a demand. She felt her anger flaring, but knew it would be too dangerous to let anything show. She had to do something about it, though what that something was, she had no clue.

“Oh Lex, I just... I just can’t. It’s too much, too soon. I need some time,” Lois stammered. She removed the ring and returned it to Lex. “You have to understand, I’m just not ready for marriage yet. Just give me some more time, please?” She batted her eyelashes, in, she hoped, a coquettish way.

Not giving Lex a chance to reply, Lois fled into the cottage as quickly as she dared. She just could not be in his presence any longer. Once inside, she tried to get control of herself and slow her racing heart and breathing. She had no idea how to deal with Lex. She briefly considered talking to the Beast about it, but quickly dismissed it. She knew Lex was dangerous and could not

bring herself to put the Beast in any risk. She would have to find a way to deal with it on her own. Lois wondered if she would be able to, without ending up married to such a monster.

Not for the first time, Lois wondered why some people were so beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside and others were ugly on the outside and beautiful on the inside. Lex was certainly the former, while her Beast was most definite the latter. Lois started for a moment when she realized she was beginning to think of the Beast as hers. Unsure what to make of that, she once again left her home. This time she would make it to visit her friend.

Lex watched darkly as Beauty left. He did not understand what was preventing her from accepting his proposal. He had done his best to convince her she was worthy of him. He had even had a gem made from his magical crystal stash to show her. She claimed to need more time, but he sensed there was something else behind it.

Not one to be deterred, Lex decided he would have to do something about it. He decided to follow Beauty, carefully so she would not see him, and investigate. He looked around and found a spot where he could remain hidden and keep an eye out.

Lex did not have to wait long, as a short time later he watched as Beauty left the cottage. He followed, keeping his distance, as she headed into the nearby forest. He frowned as he watched her mount a horse. 'Where did she get that horse,' Lex mused. It was a fine specimen, and far beyond the means of her father. Suspicious, Lex decided to track the horse and see where they went.

Before setting off, he returned to his hidden stash and replaced the ring. It would be safe there until he returned. He would give it back to Beauty after removing whatever was causing her to hesitate. She would be his soon enough.

He followed the tracks left by the horse for many hours, refusing to give up. Eventually the tracks led him to a large castle. Lex frowned, 'What is Beauty doing here,' he wondered. Whatever it was surely involved that horse he had seen. Quietly, he approached to peer into the courtyard.

From his vantage point, he could only see a small portion of the garden inside, but he spotted Beauty easily. She was conversing with a figure just out of his vision. The voices were unintelligible at this distance, but the other figure's voice was distinctively masculine.

Lex cursed quietly. Someone else was courting his Beauty. This would not do, he would have to remove this competition. Then suddenly the figure moved into his line of sight and he almost fell. Beauty was conversing with a hideous creature. Quickly moving out of view, Lex settled in to wait. He would take care of this beast once Beauty was safely away.

Clark turned as he thought he heard something outside the courtyard walls. Just as he was about to engage his special vision to check things out, Lois called his attention back, saying, "Am I really that boring?"

"Huh?" Clark mumbled, caught off guard.

"Well it sure looks like you've decided the courtyard wall is so much more fascinating than I am," Lois said, teasingly.

"I'm sorry, Lois," Clark said, apologetically. "I thought I heard something and was just trying to check it out."

Lois started laughing uncontrollably. "If only you could see your face. That look, it's just so out of place on your face," Lois tittered.

Clark paused, thinking for a moment trying to imagine how he might look. He tried to picture his grotesque mug looking sorry, from Lois' perspective. Suddenly, he started laughing with Lois. With a start, he realized for the first time he was not repulsed by the thought of his own appearance. That just caused

him to guffaw even harder. He felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders, and it was all due to Lois.

"Thank you, Lois," he said, tenderly. Whatever he might have heard earlier was completely forgotten.

"Thank you for what?" Lois asked.

"For being my friend. For accepting me as I am. For helping me forget, even for a moment. For making me feel..." Clark paused, afraid to give away too much. Not wanting to scare her by declaring his love, as he had come dangerously close to doing. "Just for being you," he finished.

He saw Lois' cheeks start to turn red. He was afraid he had said too much already when she replied, "You know, for a Beast, you are the sweetest man I've ever known." She smiled at him softly.

Taking Lois' arm in his, he led her on a stroll in the rose garden. Clark knew how much she loved being among the roses, so they often spent time here. His heart was so light and he had to keep struggling to make sure his feet stayed firmly on the ground. He had not been this happy for a very long time. He had nearly forgotten what it felt like.

He was determined to do away with this rival for Beauty. He had decided she must be under some sort of spell cast by this Beast, which had to be why she had rejected him. Once the monster was defeated, she would be his again. He lurked, waiting outside the castle, watching for Beauty to leave. Finally, as the sun was just beginning to set, he saw her ride out from the castle and toward home. Now was his chance. Once she was out of sight, he approached the castle stealthily.

As he neared the castle, he could see a figure upon a balcony watching something in the distance. Though he could not tell from the distance, he was certain it was the Beast he had seen Beauty with earlier. Wasting no time, he crept into the castle heading for his prey.

Upon reaching the tower leading to the balcony where he had seen the creature, Lex began his ascent. When he finally reached the top, he was delighted to see the Beast still staring off into the distance. This was his chance. He quickly drew an arrow and knocked it, letting it fly.

With surprising quickness, the Beast turned toward him. Lex watched gleefully as the arrow headed straight for its chest. The arrow hit and shattered. Momentarily stunned with disbelief, Lex quickly recovered. The Beast must have some sort of hidden protection. Unfazed, Lex drew his dagger from underneath his tunic. He approached the Beast, certain he could finish it off in close quarters. The blade glinted in the waning sunlight. The gem in its hilt pulsed with a sickly, green glow.

Clark sat in the setting sun, watching Lois ride off. Using his abilities, he was able to watch her long after a normal man would have lost sight of her. It had become a habit of his, sitting on top of the tower watching her all the way home. He tried halfheartedly to convince himself he was just concerned for her safety, but deep down he knew he just was not ready to let her out of his sight.

He began to reflect on the time he had known Lois. She was such a marvel, and he realized he was hopelessly in love with her. She was just perfect, but she only saw him as a friend. However, he would treasure and hold that friendship dear to him for all eternity. That was all he could expect from Lois and it was more than he felt he deserved.

Suddenly, a twang broke Clark out of his reflections and he turned toward the noise just in time for an arrow to shatter against his chest. There was a man advancing on him holding a strange looking dagger. Clark sighed, wondering what brought another intruder to his castle. Was he here for fame or glory? Treasure? He just did not feel like dealing with it now. Luckily, he knew he

was in no danger so he began to approach the intruder.

As they closed in on each other, Clark suddenly felt the oddest sensation. The room was starting to seem shaky and then his body flared in what he shortly realized was pain. It was a sensation he had not felt since before his transformation, before even his abilities had begun to develop. Confused, he looked around frantically trying to determine what was happening. When his eyes landed on the glowing gem in the dagger hilt, Clark instinctively knew it was harming him and could lead to his death. All he could think about was getting away from it.

“Not so tough when you have to face a real man,” Lex said as Clark retreated the way he had come. “Did you really think you could offer Beauty anything? You are just a monster.”

Lex continued to chase Clark all the way to the edge of the balcony. The pain intensified as Lex closed, but Clark had nowhere left to run.

“I shall enjoy watching you suffer before you die,” Lex sneered. “That will teach you to come between me and my desires.”

Lex plunged the dagger into Clark’s side as he roared in agony. Clark could not decide which was worse, the wound from the dagger or the increased proximity of the strange jewel. As Lex pulled the knife out and shifted his grip to make another stab, Clark flailed about wildly, knocking his attacker’s arm.

Lex watched in horror as his precious dagger flew from his hand and, unthinkingly, he lurched toward it. Grasping at as the dagger plunged toward the ground below, Lex lost his balance and reeled wildly as he too toppled over the edge. He managed to grab onto Clark’s leg as he fell. Clark’s relief at the dagger’s sudden disappearance was short lived as he too was pulled over the edge.

Clark shot his hand out quickly and barely managed to hold onto the edge of the balcony. The sudden stop jarred Lex loose from his leg, and Clark stretched his free arm trying to grab on but he watched in horror as the man fell and hit the ground below with a loud crack. Weak and barely able to hold on, Clark knew he was in trouble. He attempted to grab the ledge with his other hand but his strength fled him and his tenuous hold slipped.

Falling was a strange sensation for Clark, who was so used to having free reign of the skies. He tried in vain to fly but that strange jewel had somehow robbed him of all his abilities. He managed to stop for a brief moment, but gravity quickly reasserted itself as if it had resented all those times he had managed to defy its pull. His last thoughts were of regretting being unable to tell Lois he loved her. Then he hit the ground with a thud and knew only darkness.

As Lois headed home, she had felt an increasing sense of wrongness and foreboding, as if somehow she knew the Beast was in trouble. Pulling up on her horse’s reins, she brought the mare to a stop. She quickly turned the horse around and rode off at a gallop back towards the castle.

The race back was the longest the trip had ever been as the sense of dread grew inside her. Nearing the castle, she could just make out two figures grappling on a nearby tower. When she noticed a faint green, glow coming from the towers she gasped, knowing it was Lex grappling with the Beast. How he had come to be here, and why he was attacking the Beast she did not know, but somehow she knew it was her fault. Lex must have seen them together and decided to eliminate the competition for her attention.

Lois choked back a sob as she leapt from the horse to race towards the tower. She watched in horror as one figure toppled over the edge and pulled the other with him. For a moment, both were clinging to the edge then she saw one of them begin falling. She watched as the figure of Lex tumbled towards the ground landing with a sickening crack.

Quickly turning her eyes from the unmoving body, she saw the Beast struggling to hold on. Praying she could reach the top in time, Lois raced for the tower. Her hope turned to despair as she watched the Beast lose his grip and drop toward the ground below. She watched him fall as if in slow motion, feeling as she was moving through molasses. For a moment it almost seemed like the Beast stopped in his fall and she hoped to see the Angel rushing to his rescue. But alas it must have been her imagination as he continued his plummet into the ground, landing with a dull thud.

Time started to move normal again and she continued running to the fallen Beast. When she reached his motionless form, she collapsed next to him. Tears began to stream down her face as she held him and sobbed.

After a seeming eternity in darkness, consciousness slowly returned to Clark. Pain had been replaced by a certain numbness. He felt like he was floating, and for a moment began to wonder if he was dead. It was almost as if he was no longer attached to his body. Soon Clark began to feel a dull, distant ache.

As more awareness of his body returned, he felt something, or rather someone, pressed against him. Eventually he was able to recognize that it was Lois. Her crying was like a knife to his soul. He struggled to respond as he heard her plead, “Please don’t leave me. You just can’t. Come back to me please.”

‘I’d never leave you Lois,’ he thought, unable to speak. His body just would not respond it still seemed to be a long way off. He could not bear to hear Lois in such pain. Try as he might, his muscles just would not respond.

His heart was breaking as he heard Lois, barely a whisper, say “I love you.”

Suddenly the darkness Clark was trapped in exploded with light.

Lois continued weeping over the broken form of the Beast. Seeing him like this had helped her realize the depth of her feelings for him. And now it was too late. She would never know happiness again.

Suddenly, she felt movement below her. Startled, she sat up and watched as the Beast’s body began to float in the air before her. Lois watched incredulously as light began streaming off the beast, growing brighter and brighter until she could look no more and had to turn away.

When the light died down, she turned back to see the most handsome man she had ever seen looking at her. Before she could begin to voice a question, he said, “Lois, it’s me.”

Lois looked at the man very closely. He did not look familiar, except the eyes. She would recognize those eyes anywhere. She had gazed into them many times and saw the same concern and affection she always did. That is how she knew this was her Beast. “It is you,” Lois said, smiling.

Leaping into his arms, they kissed. It was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to Lois and she knew she was home now. And it was only the beginning.

EPILOGUE

Clark had never been happier in his life. Less than a year ago he had been wallowing in his own misery, convinced he would remain a monster forever. Then his salvation, Lois, had literally dropped into his life. He had loved her from the beginning, but never really dared hope for her love in return.

Lois had continually surprised him, first by standing up to him when he had lost his temper. Then she had gone on to befriend him. And though it took nearly dying, she had given him her love.

Upon his return to his natural form, he had revealed what happened to the entire kingdom. The council had ruled to

coronate him as soon as possible. Within a month he was crowned king. He had never desired power for himself, but felt a duty to rule his kingdom fairly.

Today Clark had finally given the kingdom a new queen. Though not of royal blood, he had insisted he wanted to marry Lois, if she would have him. She had laughed when he said that. Her acceptance had actually caused him to lift off the floor. That had forced Clark to tell her about his double life as the Angel.

Lois had been remarkably understanding. She had encouraged him to continue, readily seeing his inability to not help when he could.

Now, as he danced with his beautiful bride, he again had to struggle to stay on the ground. Suddenly, he heard a far off cry for help. He had not wanted to tear himself away from Lois, but she had said "Go. You're needed."

Leaving the ball room as quickly as he dared, he smiled. Just as Star had promised, the rose she had given him had brought love into his life and ended the curse. Life was perfect.

Lois watched as Clark ran off to go help someone in need. She smiled softly as she thought about all the changes in the past year. She thought she had been content with her life, but now realized just how empty it was. Now she knew what true happiness was because she had found her soul mate.

Her life had completely changed the day that Lex trampled her flowers. She had not known it at the time, but that was the day she first met Clark. He had saved her from her own foolishness. She had just blindly run off a cliff only to be rescued by the mysterious Angel. Now that she knew Clark, it was so obvious he would do something like that with the gifts he had been given. Any other man would have used them to conquer as many kingdoms as possible. But all Clark wanted to do was help people.

When Clark had told her about his unique heritage and revealed that *he* was the Angel, Lois had been shocked. She had thanked him for saving her life that day. Clark had replied that she had saved *his* life that day.

He had told her how he was just going through the motions and had given up hope, until he had found her. His hope had been rekindled that day. Then he had said every day since then had been a blessing for him, because she was in his life. Her heart had melted, and if it was possible, she had loved him even more in that moment.

They had discussed what to do about his rescues. Lois knew he could never give up helping, so refused to hear anything about him giving it up for her. He would tear himself apart. However, he had insisted he would continue to remain anonymous and kept himself disguised. He said he was afraid for her safety, but Lois felt that deep down inside he was afraid the kingdom would reject him again.

Clark said he understood everyone being afraid of the Beast, and they had certainly welcomed him back readily when he revealed himself after the curse was broken. Some had even said he should have told them, they would have understood and stayed by his side. But Lois knew Clark did not believe it. And she was certain, even if he himself was not aware of it, the fear it would all happen again prevented him from showing his abilities openly.

Still, Lois had never been happier, and today she had become his queen. She told everyone the King was tired from today and had retired and she would be joining him shortly. She headed off to their bed chambers to await his return. Life was indeed perfect.

It was widely said that the only things that surpassed the Queen's beauty were her quick mind and kind heart. The King often left meeting petitioners to the Queen, but when he sat in it was whispered he must have some sixth sense. Rumor had it that it was impossible to tell a lie before the King without his

knowledge. They also said that sometimes it seemed as if the King could gaze right through you. But he was always fair.

Through the years the Angel continued to appear when needed, saving many people. It was widely said this was a sign that their reign was blessed from above. And under their rule the kingdom prospered for many long years.

As for Lois and Clark, they lived happily ever after.

THE END