Adventures of a Super Family

by Philister

Summary

When the planet Krypton died, Kara Zor-El was supposed to arrive on Earth together with her cousin Kal-El. She was supposed to keep him safe, take care of him, and be his protector and family. And in this world, this is exactly what happens. Meet the world's greatest superhero, Superwoman, her cousin turned adopted son Superboy, and their ever-increasing circle of friends, allies, and family.
The Arrival

Chapter Summary

Where the last children of Krypton arrive on Earth.

Adventures of a Super Family

Chapter 1: Arrival

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The world around her slowly came into focus, though her mind remained fuzzy. What had happened? Where was she? Her eyes took note of her surroundings, taking in metal walls all around her, the monotony broken up only by the rather soft padding she was lying on. Something small and warm rested in the crook of her arm. Something that was starting to move.

She looked down, seeing the infant clutched against her chest, and suddenly she remembered.

We’re out of time, Jor! We need to launch now!

The second craft isn’t ready, Zor! We’ll have to put them both in Kara’s ship.

Kara, love! There is no other way!

No, please don’t send me away! I can’t do this without you!

You need to take care of your little cousin Kal, Kara! You must protect him!

Come with me, please!

We’re out of time, Alura! Lara, give Kal to Kara!

Good-bye, my son! Kara, please take care of him! Take care of each other!

I promise I will protect him! I promise! I promise!

Launch! Now!

Noooooooo!

The sound of baby Kal in her arm waking up and crying managed to snap her out of the memories. For a moment the despair was overwhelming. Krypton was gone. Her parents were dead, just like her aunt and uncle, Kal’s parents. Everyone was dead. Kal and she were all that was left. They were all alone.
Tears staining her eyes, she forced the despair away. There would be time for mourning later. The dead could wait. For now she needed to make sure that Kal and she didn’t join them. The last thing she remembered was climbing into the pod and the stasis kicking in. She had remained awake just long enough to see the flash of light that signaled Krypton’s final doom, the planet tearing itself apart, before she fell asleep, not knowing if she would ever wake up again.

The craft around her looked intact, so it seemed everything had worked, or so she hoped. There had been so little time. Her father and uncle had had but minutes to tell her everything she needed to know. The craft was supposed to land on a distant planet called Earth, inhabited by a race called humans. They outwardly resembled Kryptonians, so Kara and Kal should be able to blend in and the yellow star of the system was supposed to have an enhancing effect on them.

Kara was actually amazed that she remembered that much, given that she had been crying and screaming in denial for most of that lecture. She hadn’t wanted to go and leave her parents and family behind. She was only a teenager, for Rao’s sake, still a child herself. Now she was supposed to take care of an infant on an alien world? She barely knew how to take care of herself.

The despair rose up from within her, threatening to drown her in thick black waves of sorrow, but she pushed it down again. Later! Much later! First thing first.

“It’s going to be okay, Kal,” she tried to soothe the crying baby in her arms. “I’ll protect you, I promise! No matter what, we’ll stay together!”

It seemed to work, for Kal’s blue eyes fixated on her and he stopped crying. For a brief moment she envied him. Kal was still so young, less than half a solar cycle old. He would not remember anything about their lost home. Would not remember seeing his entire world disappear, swept away like dust by some unseen god’s cruel hand.

“I guess we should take a look at our new home then,” she said, hoping her voice sounded somewhat steady. She was scared, so very scared. Out there was an entirely alien world and it was just the two of them. She had no idea what to do, only that she needed to protect the baby in her arms. Finding her resolve, she touched the controls next to her and the small craft opened up.

Sitting up, Kal securely in her arms, she looked around. The first thing she thought was “so much green!”. Her father had told her that this world was far younger than Krypton with a very extensive fauna and flora, but it hadn’t prepared her the sight of so much untamed nature. The craft had apparently landed in the middle of a field of some kind. A shallow crater showed that the craft’s touchdown hadn’t been entirely smooth, but the hull looked undamaged.

She blinked, noticing the bright yellow sun shining down on them. She felt it tingling across her skin, almost like a weak current. She drew in a breath and the oxygen-rich atmosphere almost made her feel giddy. Was this what her father and uncle had meant by enhancing effect?

She carefully climbed out of the craft. Or at least that was what she attempted to do. As she pushed off, though, her body practically catapulted out of the pod, arcing through the air as if she weighed nothing. She gave a surprised yell, instinctively clutched Kal closer to her chest, and turned them around so her body was between him and the ground. Hitting the ground drove the air out of her lungs, but surprisingly there was no pain. Kal was actually laughing in delight.

Slowly Kara got back to her feet, disoriented. The tingling on her skin was getting worse, now feeling more like an itch. The light seemed brighter than just a moment ago and as she moved, the rustling of her bodysuit seemed unnaturally loud.

“What’s going on here?” she whispered, and even those words sounded extremely loud.
Suddenly there was a new sound, hitting her ears like a battering ram. She flinched, her free hand clasping her aching head, and looked around. There! Something was approaching. A vehicle of some sort. It was loud, so very loud! And... Rao, the stink! Some kind of exhaust cloud was trailing behind the vehicle and the odor was threatening to suffocate her.

She tried to get up, but didn’t make it any farther than her knees. It was just too much. The light too bright, the sounds too loud, and her skin felt like it was on fire. A small part of her mind registered that two shapes had detached from the approaching vehicle. Humans, had to be. They really looked like Kryptonians. But it hurt to think. Everything hurt.

One of the humans, a female, came closer and said something to her. She recognized it as one of the Earth languages her father had logged into the craft’s computer. During her long sleep the learning program had fed them into her brain. She understood the words, a question about needing help, but her mind was incapable of actually processing it. There was just too much.

She opened her mouth, trying to speak the human’s language, hoping that the sounds coming out somehow made sense, that the humans understood she was pleading for help. Then everything went black as her overtaxed mind finally gave up and sent her into blissful unconsciousness.

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When she regained consciousness an undetermined amount of time later, she found herself in a new location. She was lying on a bed and the roof above her seemed to be made from some kind of organic material. She looked around. She was in some kind of living quarter. Apart from the bed, there was a desk, two chairs, and some kind of storage closet. A window was beside her, but thick fabric hung in front of it, dampening the light coming in from the outside.

She realized that the room was quite dark, but for some reason she could still see everything clearly. Such as the fact that she was alone. A jolt of fear swept the last remnants of sleep from her mind.

“Kal?” she cried out, sitting up quickly. Too quickly, as it turned out, as she immediately became dizzy and also launched herself off the bed, hitting the ceiling, and falling back to the floor. While she still tried to orient herself, the extremely loud click of the door signified someone entering.

“Take it easy,” a female voice said in English. “Everything is okay!”

She looked up, seeing the female human from before. And there, safely in her arms, was Kal, happily giggling as he saw her.

“Kal! Oh thank Rao, you’re safe!”

She scrambled to her feet, managing to do so without launching into the air again, and quickly approached the human, who readily handed over her cousin to her. Kara enclosed him in her arms, tears of relief in her eyes. Kal simply giggled, seemingly without a care in the world.

“Why don’t you sit down,” the human said, gently guiding her over to one of the chairs. Kara didn’t resist, she was far too relieved to have Kal back in her arms to care about anything else for the moment. Rao, she didn’t know what she’d have done had something happened to him while she was out.

She needed a minute to compose herself, something the human seemed to realize, as she left her to it. When she finally looked up again, she studied the woman who had sat down beside her. Humans really did look like Kryptonians, even up close. The woman was clearly older than Kara,
fully adult, and her skin was somewhat darker, probably due to constant exposure to the sun. Brown hair with a bit of reddish tint to it framed a gentle face and the other woman smiled at her.

“How are you feeling, sweetheart?” she asked. “Are you hungry? Thirsty? Does anything hurt?”

Kara blinked, somewhat taken aback by the kindness she was experiencing. “I... I am unhurt, thank you. And... thank you for taking care of Kal while I was out.”

“That was no problem at all,” the woman said, her hand reaching out to brush across the few wisps of dark hair on Kal’s tiny little head. Kara tensed for a moment as the woman reached for her cousin, but then relaxed. If they had wanted to hurt them, they would have had every opportunity to do so while she was unconscious.

“This little guy is quite the charmer. What’s his name? And yours, while I’m asking.”

“I am Kara. Kara...” she stopped, thinking. Her full name was Kara Zor-El, as it was tradition back home on Krypton for children to carry the full name of their father until they reached adulthood. But her father was gone, everything was gone. Despite not being adult, she was now the oldest living member of the house of El and thus the head of the family.

“Kara-El,” she finally said. “And this is my cousin, Kal Jor-El.”

“Pleased to meet you, Kara,” the woman said. “And you, too, Kal. My name is Martha. Martha Kent. And you might remember my husband Jonathan, he was with me when we found you.”

Kara dimly remembered the second human, but it had been but a few seconds. Reading her face, Martha just patted her hand. “Don’t worry, sweetheart, you’ll meet him soon. He is downstairs cooking up some food for us. I am sure you must be hungry?”

Kara thought about that for a moment. Was she hungry? She should be, she realized. She had been in stasis sleep for Rao alone knew how long and she knew that people awakening from stasis were usually ravenous. But she didn’t feel hungry. In fact she felt quite energetic. Still, the idea of eating something was appealing, if for no other reason that she really had no idea what to do next.

“I... yes, I could eat something.”

Martha nodded and stood up, clearly intending for Kara to follow her. Kara moved slowly and carefully, remembering her previous attempts at moving fast. She felt too light, almost as if she might float away if she wasn’t careful about planting her feet on the ground. Adjusting her hold on Kal in her arms, she carefully walked after Martha. Outside the room was a corridor and a set of steps leading downwards. The light increased as they walked, the downstairs rooms not shielded from the sun. Kara squinted, the intense light was still hurting her eyes.

“Are you all right, dear?” Martha asked, clearly noticing her distress.

“It’s... sorry, the light is so bright, it makes my eyes hurt.”

Martha moved away from her and a moment later the light level decreased. Kara looked up and saw that Martha had drawn fabric across the biggest window of the downstairs area. The light was still bright, but it helped. Also, Kara seemed to be adjusting, at least somewhat. She noticed that the sounds, while still very loud, didn’t hurt as much as before.

A large table stood in the center of the room, surrounded by chairs, and things that Kara assumed were food items were on top of it. Martha gestured towards one of the chairs and Kara carefully sat down. Kal seemed to be happy and immediately his tiny hands reached for one of the food items.
Kara was uncertain of what to do, she had no idea if this alien food was good for a toddler.

“Don’t worry,” Martha said, once again seeming to read her mind. “We already gave him some milk earlier and a cookie, too. He seems to like them.”

Kara nodded, watching as her baby cousin chewed on something that she assumed was called a cookie. He didn’t have teeth yet, so it would probably take some time for him to finish this job.

“Ah, I see our strange visitor is awake,” someone said, causing Kara’s head to snap up. She had been so focused on Kal that she had completely missed the sounds of someone approaching.

“Jonathan, this is Kara. Kara, this is my husband, Jonathan Kent.”

Kara studied the male human, once again amazed at much like Kryptonians the humans looked. He was tall, a good deal taller than Martha, and had the same sun-kissed skin tone. His hair was as blonde as Kara’s own. He wore clothing that seemed quite worn and it left his arms bare, showing that he had an ample amount of body hair. Somehow that amazed Kara more than anything else. A good portion of Kryptonians considered it risqué to even have hair on top of their head. Body hair was almost completely unheard of.

“Nice to meet you, Kara. You made quite the explosive entrance.”

She needed a moment to understand his meaning. The ship. They had obviously seen the ship coming down. Which immediately caused another moment of panic in her.

“Oh Rao, my ship! I need to get back to it!” Everything that had survived of Krypton was on that ship. The computer contained the sum total of Kryptonian knowledge, as well as materials to construct Kryptonian machines and dwellings. She needed that ship, without it…

“Don’t worry,” Jonathan said, putting a hand on her shoulder. “We figured that leaving it out in the open like that was not the best idea. I towed it back to the farm, it’s outside in the barn.”

Kara had no idea what a barn was, but the knowledge that her ship was close helped to relax her some.

“Now if you don’t mind, Kara, we have some questions of our own,” Jonathan said, sitting down beside her. “We... ah... well, we couldn’t help but notice that this ship you arrived in... it’s not exactly from around here, is it?”

Kara looked at him, feeling as if the human man’s eyes were gazing right through her skin and down to her soul. Of course they would have questions. She knew that Earth was a primitive world with no contact with other planets or civilizations. Aliens were probably the stuff of fiction for them.

She briefly considered what to tell them. Some kind of lie? Just enough to keep them off her back until she could get away? But get away to where? Where could she possibly go? She knew little of this world. Some basic information, yes, but certainly not enough not to stand out. It started with the clothes she wore, the Kryptonian bodysuit looking very, very different from the clothes Martha and Jonathan wore. Kara might look human, but she had no idea how to behave like a human. Never mind the fact that she was still a child herself. Running around by herself was sure to draw attention from adults, even more so because she had a baby with her.

Also, there was the fact that her own body seemed to be changing. Her skin still tingled, though it didn’t hurt as much as before. She wasn’t hungry, though she should be. Her eyes and ears were still hyper-sensitized, she doubted she could step outside into the bright sunlight without fainting.
Amazingly Kal didn’t seem bothered, but that might simply be because he was still so very young.

These people had already been incredibly helpful. And right now it seemed Kara had little choice but to trust that they would remain so.

“You are right,” she finally said. “My ship... we... are not from Earth. Our home was called Krypton.”

“Was?” Martha asked.

Kara nodded, even as the despair welled up inside of her again. She tried to push it down once more, tried to keep a calm head, but for some reason it wasn’t working this time. Her eyes filled with tears and she felt as if a great weight was pressing down on her.

“They’re gone,” she whispered, barely managing to formulate the words in the still-unfamiliar alien language. Sobs were building in her throat. She could not breathe. “They’re all gone, our entire world. My... my father and uncle, they... they knew it would happen, but no one believed them. They built ships in order for us to escape, but there was not enough time. Only one ship was finished, and they… they told me to get inside, to take Kal, and… and then...”

She could not finish, she could not put it into words. They were all gone. It was just Kal and she, alone on an alien world. The last of their kind. All alone. It was up to her to keep Kal safe and she had no idea how. No idea what to do, where to go, how to handle all this. She was still a child herself. Kal, sensing her distress, was starting to cry, too.

Suddenly there were arms around her and she felt herself pulled against Martha’s chest. The human woman was careful not to crush Kal between herself and Kara and the three of them ended up huddled together, Kara’s cheek resting against the soft fabric of Martha’s shirt. She couldn’t stop crying. All the grief she had suppressed just came pouring out and the kindness shown by the alien couple into whose lap she had fallen broke down whatever barriers remained. Kara cried for her lost world, her lost family, and for Kal and herself, who were all alone in the universe now.

“You’re not alone,” Martha said, holding her. “It’s terrible what happened to you, but you’re not alone. We will help you, I promise!”

Somehow, without any logical reason, hearing these words helped. It did not lessen the sorrow, it did not dampen the pain, but maybe, just maybe, it wouldn’t all be up to her. Maybe she did not have to do all this all alone. Maybe she did indeed have help.

“Thank you,” she whispered, relaxing in the embrace of a stranger.

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Six years later

Kara was sitting on top of the Kent farm’s barn, eyes closed, just relaxing in the early morning sunlight. It had become sort of a ritual for her during these last few years. She did not really need much sleep, so she always got up at the crack of dawn and let the morning sun wash over her, focusing on the feeling of her cells soaking up that wonderful warmth.

As they often did, her thoughts inevitably travelled back to that fateful day when she and her baby cousin Kal had landed here, the sole survivors of a doomed world. So much could have gone wrong. They could have drifted endlessly in space until their life support gave out. They could have crashed into a sun or on a hostile world. They could have encountered people intending to harm them. Instead, though, they had met the Kents. And everything had worked out from there.
She smiled, thinking of how confusing those first few months had been for all of them. The Kents had been determined to help them. Mostly because they were just that good a people, but also because Martha and Jonathan had instantly fallen in love with Kal. With her, too, probably, but mostly Kal. Kara now knew that Martha and Jonathan had tried for a long time to have children of their own, but it had never worked. So two alien children just dropping out of the sky and right into their laps had been a godsend as far as they had been concerned.

Thinking back, it might have been easier if they had both been toddlers, at least as far as constructing a backstory here on Earth was concerned. With Kara being roughly 13 Earth years old or so at the time, though, they had to be a bit more imaginative. Martha and Jonathan had gone through many possible scenarios with her, all of them focused on making sure that no one had any reason to question Kara and Kal being related and staying together, no matter what. Thankfully the Kryptonian technology from Kara’s ship had made it easy to hack into the primitive Earth computers and lay a convincing data trail.

Which was how they had ended up with their current identities. Kara was now called Karen Kent, the 19-year-old daughter of Jonathan Kent’s older brother Samuel Kent, who had died in Vietnam without ever knowing that he had fathered a child. Kara was extremely thankful to “Uncle Jonathan” for allowing her to use his deceased brother’s name for her deception. According to the documents, Karen had been born to a woman called Alya Jones (who was entirely fictional), who had died in a car accident when Karen was 12. After a brief (and also fictional) stay in the foster care system, Karen had been given to her only living relatives, her uncle Jonathan and his wife Martha.

How to incorporate Kal into this story had been harder. The Kents could have passed him off as their own child, thus making Kara his cousin on Earth as well, but people in Smallville would have wondered how Martha managed to carry a child to term without ever appearing to be pregnant. Plus the fact that, while Kara had at least a minor resemblance to Jonathan, Kal looked nothing like either Kent. Passing him off as a parentless child from the foster system had also been a possibility, but it would have meant that, in the eyes of the law, Kara and Kal were unrelated, which Kara simply didn’t want.

In the end they had decided on a somewhat riskier version of events. During her fictional stay in the foster system, Karen had fallen pregnant from an unknown father. Given that she had been 12 at the time, it was pushing things a bit, but sadly it was not that uncommon on Earth for barely pubescent girls to be impregnated and giving birth, even in developed countries. So as far as everyone except Jonathan, Martha, and Kara was concerned, Karen Kent had a son. A son called Clark.

And speaking of Clark: “Mooooooooom!”

She opened her eyes, having long since heard the hyperactive 7-year-old boy storming out of the house. He knew that she enjoyed watching the sunrise. Quickly sliding down from the roof, she let herself fall to the ground and a moment later Clark was there, embracing her.

“Hey, little guy? Sleep well?”

“Like a log, mom!”

Even after six years, it was still strange for her to hear him call her mother. She had had long debates with Martha and Jonathan about how much they should tell Kal. There was no question that he would be told the entire story sooner or later, but expecting a little boy to keep up their cover story all the time was just asking for trouble.
So for the moment Clark thought that he was just a normal human boy and that she was his normal human mother. Well, not quite normal. He knew that his mother was special, possessing abilities beyond those of most people, and that he was not supposed to tell anyone. She had also hinted at the possibility of him also gaining powers once he was older, something he was terribly excited about. So far, though, Clark might as well be a human boy. The miraculous powers that Earth’s sun and atmosphere had gifted to Kara had not shown up in him yet. She was sure, though, that it was just a matter of time.

“Are Uncle Jon and Aunt Martha up yet?” she asked, despite clearly seeing the two of them moving around in the kitchen.

“Aunt Martha told me to get you for breakfast,” he said, jumping up and down.

Smiling, she followed him into the kitchen of their home. And it was their home by now. She felt safe here. She would never be able to repay Martha and Jonathan for all that they had done for them, not if she lived to be a thousand years old. She loved the two of them and she knew that they loved her and Clark as well.

Martha and Jonathan had basically raised Clark as if he were their own child. Of course Kara had been there the whole time, too, but she had already been a teenager and struggling with her own problems. She had needed the better part of a year just to get a consistent grip on her powers, so she was more than thankful that Martha and Jon had taken over most of the parenting duties. And afterwards she had needed time to settle into Earth culture, too.

Unlike Clark, who was in school now, Kara had not partaken of the American education system. Given the advanced level of schooling she had already gone through on Krypton, she had easily tested out of all classes and gotten her GED at 14. She was taking numerous college courses by correspondence, too, and planned to have several degrees before she hit 20. Once, a long time ago, she had fully intended to follow her father and uncle into a life of science. She planned to do the same here on Earth, but that was more of a side project.

Looking on as Clark ran over to Martha and Jon, her plans for the future and her adult life on Earth were affirmed once more. She had arrived here on Earth as a refugee, helpless, alone, with no idea of how to take care of the precious life entrusted to her care. She had found help here, more help than she could ever have reasonably expected. She could never repay the Kents, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t do her own part to help others.

She had powers far above those of the humans. Given everything she could do, she was easily on a par with Earth’s mythical gods. And she would use those powers. Not to set herself up as a goddess, but to provide others with the same help she had received. Krypton was gone. Earth was home to Kal and her now. And she would use every single bit of power her new home had given her to protect it from harm.

“Coffee, Karen?” Martha asked, looking at her.

Walking over to the woman who she had no problem calling her aunt, Kara hugged her gratefully and took the coffee cup.

“Thank you,” she said, sitting down with her family.

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End Chapter 1.
Author’s Note: having watched and read numerous iterations of the Superman / Supergirl story, I became very partial to the version where Supergirl is actually older than Superman and was supposed to arrive on Earth together with him as his caretaker. And I wondered how it would have worked out, had that actually happened. So here we are. I will borrow freely from any and all versions of Superman / Supergirl and the other DC properties. There will be elements from Man of Steel, the Animated DC series, the comics, the Supergirl TV series, and everything in between (probably not Smallville, though).

As for the story itself, it will be pretty much episodic in nature, showing different events in the lives and times of Karen, Clark, and their eventually expanding families. I used to love the old “Superman Family” comics from DC way back in the day, and I’m hoping to recapture some of that feeling, too. Let me know what you think.
Chapter Summary

Where Kara, who has served as the world's unseen guardian angel for a year now, finds that her anonymity is about to end.

Chapter 2: Going Public

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Perry White was the kind of reporter whose picture could have been put in the dictionary right next to the word. He was tenacious, had a sixth sense for good stories, and was almost impossible to dissuade once he had sunk his metaphorical teeth into a scoop. He had been a mainstay at the Daily Planet, Metropolis’ major newspaper, for as long as anyone could remember and most people considered it a given that he would become the next editor in chief the moment he got tired of running after stories himself and asked for the job.

Which was why it was somewhat of a surprise to see him at a mere publicity event such as this. The launch of an experimental new high-altitude passenger plane was exciting, sure, but it was not the kind of story Perry White usually pursued. Standing around on an airfield, watching a plane take off, listening to PR people talk about the advances in technology, this was usually the kind of stuff given to junior reporters to get their feet wet. But here he was, Perry White himself.

Truth be told Perry was here for two reasons. Number one, he was bored. His desk was currently devoid of any substantial leads to anything he might consider a worthy story. Which brought him straight to number 2, he had a hunch. It was nothing he could put on paper, nothing that would hold up to any scrutiny, but he had a hunch. He had read about the impending launch and something in his gut had said that he needed to be there.

Of course he had done his homework and looked into the launch. The new plane was the first of its kind outfitted with a new kind of navigational control. The tech jargon was far beyond him, but basically it meant that the new tech could do a better job at half the size and a quarter the cost. He had traced back the development records to a small new start-up company called K-Solutions, which seemed to specialize in developing new technologies and proofs of concept before selling the ideas to bigger companies.

Again, there was nothing there that screamed “story!” at him, but his gut said otherwise, so here he was, standing amidst a crowd of spectators and other reporters, watching as a futuristic-looking plane rolled down the runway to prepare for take-off.

The start went off without a hitch and the plane circled around for a fly bye as it began to climb. Perry was almost at the point where he was ready to give it up and go home for the day, figuring that his hunch had been wrong, when it happened. A thunderous boom caused everyone to look up. One of the engines of the plane had just blown up in a big ball of fire.
The plane tilted to the side, trailing smoke, debris fell down to Earth. The plane had been over the bay when the explosion occurred, but Perry quickly realized that it would not stay there. The aircraft had been in the middle of a turn, its nose was now pointing directly at the landing field. With growing horror Perry White saw tomorrow’s headline forming in his mind:

EXPERIMENTAL PLANE CRASHES INTO THE CITY, HUNDREDS DEAD!

The fact that his own name would be part of the obituary was on his mind as well. At its current heading the plane would plow straight through the observation platform they were all standing on, and then into the city behind them. He briefly considered running, but he was right in the middle of a panicking crowd. The plane was coming closer at frightening speed. There was no way to escape. He was dead.

No matter how much he thought about it later on, he would not be able to tell what it was that made him take his eyes off the approaching plane and look at the young woman standing to his left. Perry had an eye for people, he had taken notice of her when he arrived. She was in her early 20s, if that. Long blonde hair, tall, looking like she could easily work as a model if she wanted. She wore casual clothes, Jeans and a light jacket over a blouse, nothing extraordinary. She did not look like a reporter, so he had taken her for a mere spectator and not paid any further mind to her. The days when pretty young women held his attention for longer than a few seconds were behind him. So why was he looking at her now? What was different about her?

It was her face, he realized a moment later. Unlike everyone else around them, she did not look scared. Which was highly unusual, given that a burning airplane was about 10 seconds away from crashing down on top of them. Her eyes darted every which way, as if looking for a way to escape, but again, not in fear or panic. A moment later a look of resignation came over her. And then she took off.

Perry White blinked, briefly entertaining the notion that the plane had already hit and his dying brain was firing off some last-second hallucinations to ease his passing. Human beings did not “take off”! They ran, they jumped, they fell, but they did not just shoot upwards into the sky like a rocket. No way, no how! Without any conscious input from his mind, his eyes followed her. She was heading directly towards the approaching plane.

Perry did not remember reaching for the camera he had taken with him on his hunch, did not remember hitting the button over and over again as he watched the most incredible thing he had ever seen in his entire life. A flying woman, he repeated inside his mind. It was impossible, but there she was. And not just flying. She darted upwards, came around, and positioned herself directly underneath the falling airplane. And then she lifted.

Perry White knew what was possible and what was not. There was simply no way a young woman, even if she was somehow able to fly, could lift an airplane that probably weighed hundreds of tons. It was completely and utterly impossible that she would somehow stop its descent and bring it in for a relatively soft landing on the airstrip. This was the stuff of children’s comic books and bad pulp stories. It was simply ridiculous to think that something like this could happen in real life.

But it was happening. He was watching it. He was taking pictures of it. And even as he gaped on in utter disbelief, a very different headline for tomorrow’s edition was forming in his mind.

FLYING SUPERWOMAN SAVES AIRPLANE

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Martha Kent was standing in her kitchen, putting away the groceries, when her grand-nephew
came running in, looking more excited than she had ever seen him. Which was saying something, given how excitable he was.

“Aunt Martha! Aunt Martha! Come look, quickly!”

“What is it, Clark?” she asked, smiling. “Did you and Lana find another treasure?”

It had become something of a favorite pastime for Clark and his best friend Lana Lang. They would run around the fields and inevitably find something exciting, such as old coins, pieces of equipment, and once even a rather expensive wrist watch that someone had lost. Martha was rather sure that Clark was slowly starting to gain the same enhanced senses as Karen, she didn’t know how else he would always manage to find something on their outings.

“No, nothing like that! Come quickly! It’s mom, she’s on TV!”

Martha froze upon hearing those words. Calm down, she told herself. There could be any number of reasons why Clark would see Karen on TV. She had flown to Metropolis for the launch of that plane her company had helped build, Martha remembered. Maybe the cameras had taken pictures of the crowd and Clark had spotted her. Or maybe someone had figured out who the genius behind the new company K-Solutions was and was doing an exposé.

Somehow, though, she knew that it was not any of that. Allowing Clark to drag her into the living room, she froze before the TV.

“If you are just tuning in, something truly extraordinary has happened today in Metropolis. A potential catastrophe that could have cost hundreds of lives was averted at the very last second by, as incredible as it sounds, a flying woman.”

Martha watched as the footage ran. TV cameras had filmed the launch of the plane, as well as the explosion that occurred just moments later. She watched as the crippled plane fell towards the city, saw the crowds of spectators that were directly in its path. She watched as suddenly a shape shot upwards from the crowd and flew to the rescue.

The camera zoomed in as best as it could. It was too far away to get a good look at the savior’s face, but there was no denying that this was a woman. A woman flying without any visible means of propulsion. A woman somehow stabilizing a giant airplane on her shoulders and somehow bringing it in for a landing. It was all there on TV, millions of people were seeing it right at this very moment.

“Sadly we do not have a better picture of the flying woman than this,” the reporter said, even as a frozen image of Karen was shown. Someone not familiar with her would only be able to tell that she was blonde, Caucasian, and female, nothing more. But to her family, there was no doubt.

“See? That’s mom,” Clark yelled, sounding incredibly excited and proud. “She saved that plane and all those people!”

“Yes, she did, Clark,” Martha said, putting her hands on Clark’s shoulders. “Your mommy saved all those people.” And everyone saw her doing it, she added in her mind.

Karen, her sweet little Karen. To the world at large she was her niece, but to Martha she was her daughter in all but blood. No matter that the girl had already been a teenager when she had arrived here, Martha had taken her as her own almost from the get-go. Little Clark, too, of course. But whereas Clark was a pretty normal kid (for now, at least), Karen had been special right from the start, and not just because she had started developing astounding powers the moment she set foot
Sweet little Karen. So strong, yet so deeply wounded. Martha could not even imagine how much strength it took to even get up in the morning after having seen one’s entire world die. Clark did not remember, but she did. She remembered losing everyone and everything she had ever known and held dear and she had to deal with the inevitable guilt of surviving while everyone else died.

Most people would have been broken by this, but not her. Martha knew that Karen had fixated on Clark and her mission to keep him safe, it had been her lifeline to keep going. But her life did not revolve solely around the boy that the world believed to be her son. He was her number one priority, no doubt, but she was doing more than just keeping him safe. She was using those amazing powers of hers to protect others. She was using her smarts to improve the lives of people by inventing new technologies (based on Kryptonian tech for the most part, but fully realized using local materials and concepts). And she was doing all of it in complete secret.

Martha had lost count of the number of disasters that were mysteriously averted, of accidents that miraculously harmed no one, of people speaking of an invisible guardian angel keeping them safe. For nearly a year now Karen had been on the move almost every day, working to make the world a better place without anyone ever knowing it was her.

Until today.

“Martha?” a familiar voice asked from the door. Karen was standing there, long blonde hair windswept and tussled, face and clothes covered in soot, and looking a bit shell-shocked.

“Oh sweetheart,” Martha said, moving towards her.

“I think I messed up, Martha,” Karen said, gratefully sinking into her embrace.

*****

“There simply was no way to do it and not be seen,” Karen said some time later as the two women sat side by side on the bench outside the farm. Karen had showered and changed her clothes and relaxed a bit on top of the barn, soaking up sunlight. That always helped her calm down. “I couldn’t just let all those people die.”

“I know, sweetheart,” Martha said, one of Karen’s hands clutched in her own. “You couldn’t have done anything different.”

They fell back into comfortable silence. Jonathan was inside the house, entertaining Clark, doing his best to convince the young boy to keep quiet about his mom’s heroic deeds. The Kents had long ago divided responsibilities for their two alien children between them. Jonathan knew how to handle a young boy, as it seemed boys would be boys anywhere in the universe. And Martha’s responsibility was to be there when Karen needed someone to be strong for her for a change. Which was just fine, because Martha was her mom, pure and simple, no matter what blood or documents said.

“This won’t go away,” Martha said after some time. “You know that, right?”

“Of course,” Karen answered, eyes staring out into the distance. “People miraculously escaping a flash flood? Forgotten a few days later. A flying woman carrying an airplane to safety? That’s going to stick in the news cycle a bit longer.”

“What will you do?”
Karen didn’t speak for quite some time, but Martha could practically hear her thinking. Karen was a genius, it was as simple as that. Not just because she had grown up in a society hundreds of years more advanced than Earth’s, though that helped, of course. Her true genius was in how she would always find a way to make things work, no matter what. Kryptonian technology was so different from Earth that meshing the two should have been impossible, but she had found a way. Remaining unseen for over a year while saving thousands of lives should have been impossible, but she had found a way. Martha knew she would find a way to handle this situation, too.

“I won’t stop protecting people,” she finally said. “I can’t. I promised.”

Martha nodded knowingly. She had held Karen more than once as she emerged from a nightmare, reliving the final moments of Krypton and screaming her promise to keep Kal safe, no matter what. And keeping Kal safe meant, for her, to keep the world Kal now lived on safe, too. If there was one thing that defined Karen more than anything, it was that she always kept her promises.

“If doing it in secret is out,” she continued, “I guess I’ll have to find a way to do it in the open.”

She looked over at her aunt / mother / mentor / friend and smiled. “You wouldn’t happen to remember where we stashed the bodysuit I wore when I arrived here?”

*****

Perry White was standing on the balcony of his apartment, cigar in hand, and looked out at the city below. The city looked the same as ever, but somehow everything was different. The world had changed; he felt it in his bones. It was a whole new ballgame from just yesterday. Yesterday everyone had known without a doubt that there was no such thing as flying people. Everyone had known that there was no way to catch a crashing plane in mid-flight and lower it safely to the Earth. Everyone had known that there was no such things as superheroes outside the comic books. That had been yesterday. And the only thing older than yesterday’s news was yesterday’s certainties.

The special edition of the Daily Planet was lying on the small table beside him, the headline he had already seen in his mind yesterday now printed for all the world to see, his name directly underneath it. He could not quite suppress a smug grin that the name he had created had stuck. Everyone was calling the flying lady Superwoman now. Simple, yet so very fitting.

Most of the pictures he had taken from the observation platform had been garbage, out of focus, way off the mark. He resolved never to make fun of photographers again, this was a lot harder than it looked. Thankfully two of the pictures had come out okay, now adorning the front page as well. One showed Superwoman in mid-flight, heading towards the plane. The other showed her lowering the plane onto the runway. Neither picture showed her face, but Perry did not need them to.

He had stood right next to her when she took off and he would never forget that face as long as he lived. From the moment he had finished the article he had dove into research, determined to find out more about this mysterious woman. And he had a pretty good working theory already that also happened to explain the look he had seen on her face.

For the last year or so there had been a veritable deluge of stories about averted disasters, mysterious last-minute saves, and people miraculously surviving accidents that should have killed them. There had always been stories like that, true, but not in those numbers. It was almost like there was some kind of guardian angel out there, doing its best to keep people safe. A guardian angel that preferred to remain invisible.
Until the day she couldn’t, because hundreds of people would have died.

“That’s a very filthy habit, you know?”

Perry started so bad he almost toppled over the balcony railing, which would have had him following his cigar down to the street. The voice had come out of nowhere, taking him completely by surprise. He twisted around, his heart hammering a mile a minute, and there was someone standing there at the other end of the balcony who had definitely not been there a second ago.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you quite so badly.”

It was her, there was no doubt. The same face, the same blonde hair, the same statuesque physique. Instead of wearing casual street clothes, though, said physique was now covered by a nearly skin-tight blue suit that looked like spandex but shimmered like chain mail. Red boots and gloves added color to the assembly, as well as a red cape that hung around her shoulders. And right there on her (quite ample, he couldn’t help but notice) chest was a diamond-shaped symbol with a big S inside of it.

“Lady, you just cost me five years of my life,” he said, finally getting his heartbeat back to normal. “Then again, seeing as I would have no life left at all if not for you, I guess I can forgive you.”

“You’re all heart,” she deadpanned, but with a smile on her lips. God, she looked beautiful when she smiled.

“So...” he began, the words he could so easily put on paper somehow escaping him at the moment. He still had trouble believing that this woman existed at all. Why she would have chosen to visit his balcony was far beyond his understanding.

“I hope I am not keeping you from anything, but I wanted to ask a favor of you,” she said, taking the initiative.

“Well, you saved my life. I’d say you can ask me for just about anything this side of my firstborn.”

He stared at her, not quite believing what he was hearing.

“So...” she asked, mirth shining in her blue eyes.

“Or is this a bad time?” she asked, mirth shining in her blue eyes.

“Are you kidding me? Every single reporter on this entire planet would pay big money to interview you. It’s the Pulitzer prize right there.” He paused, looking at her. “Why me?”

She shrugged, making even that casual gesture look majestic somehow. “You were there. You already wrote an article about me. I hear you are one of the best. And it seems the name you came up with is sticking anyway.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, looks like that. I don’t think you need to put a big S on your chest, though. You’re flying around and bench-pressing airplanes. People will know you are Superwoman without you having to display it.”

She looked down, chuckling as well. “Yeah, I know it looks like a big S. It is not, though. It’s the crest of my family.”

She looked him in the eye, smiling. “It stands for hope!”
So Perry White, cynical investigative journalist, who had long ago resolved that things were NEVER as good as they seemed, sat down with the flying woman who had saved his life and wrote down her story. All the while thinking that maybe, just maybe, this one time things might actually BE as good as they seemed.

*****

End Chapter 2

**Author’s Note:** I’m trying to remain somewhat consistent with the ages of various characters here. For the most part things will match up with Clark’s age, meaning that people like Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and Lana Lang are still kids at this point in the story, while Perry White is an adult, but not yet in charge of the Daily Planet. As for the other superheroes, I’ll go case by case. Wonder Woman is an ageless immortal in most continuities, but I’m not yet certain how I’ll play people like Bruce Wayne or whichever version of Green Lantern I’ll end up using. We’ll see how it goes.

As for Superwoman’s costume, imagine her new costume from the Supergirl TV series (season 5), just with gloves added.
People Who Are Not Stupid

Chapter Summary

Where we meet Lex Luthor, Lana Lang, the gossipmongers of Smallville, and Clark does something stupid.

Chapter 3: People Who Are Not Stupid

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*****

Lex Luthor was not stupid.

One did not become the richest man in Metropolis and one of the richest men in the entire world by being stupid. He had built a billion-dollar enterprise up from nothing, he was the CEO of a company that employed thousands of people, and patents that he had developed were in use all over the world. He was a genius, actually, and not shy about telling people so. So no, he was certainly not stupid.

From his penthouse in Lexcorp Tower, the tallest office building in Metropolis, he looked out across the city. His city; it belonged to him alone. Which was why he could do whatever he wanted, no matter what the pesky laws might say. He was rich, thus he was above the law, it was as simple as that.

It had not even been that big a deal in the first place. Aviation technology was but one of many areas where Lexcorp was leading the market. So making sure than an up and coming competitor would not be able to establish themselves should have been a minor operation at best. He freely admitted that the new navigation system in that airplane was very, very good. The engineer in him admired the elegance of the design. But it wasn’t HIS design, so really, who could blame him if he wanted to make sure that it never really got on the market?

The plan had been so straightforward as to almost be laughable. Sabotage the plane’s engine, making it crash, then blaming it on the new navigation system. Sure, any engineer worth his salt would say that a faulty navigation system would not make an engine explode, but with the plane splattered across half of Metropolis and a few hundred people dead in the crash, no one would have listened. The company would never have recovered from this public relations disaster.

But the plan had not worked. All because some comic book superheroine had chosen that exact moment to step into the limelight. Was this a joke? Was some cosmic deity playing a prank? The world gains a superhero just in time to sabotage his plans?

With the plane mostly intact, investigators had easily found remnants of the explosive device that had taken out the engine. It was now officially an act of sabotage, treated like a terrorist attack. Of course the investigation would end up going nowhere. Lex Luthor never got his own hands dirty, there was no way to trace anything back to him. He was out a bit of money, that was all. And money was something he had more than enough of.
No, it was the principle of the thing. He had wanted that plane to crash, and it hadn’t. All because of that... that Superwoman, as the press was calling her. That wouldn’t do, no! It really wouldn’t do!

Still, Lex Luthor was not stupid. This Superwoman clearly was extraordinary. Someone with powers far beyond mortal men. His usual methods for dealing with people that defied him – knowingly or not – would certainly not work here. He doubted someone with this level of power was susceptible to bribes or threats. And given that she was able to lift burning airplanes above her head, he doubted a bullet to the back of the head would work, either.

No, he needed to be smart about this. Being a genius, that was something that came naturally to him.

“Memo to the research department,” he dictated into his computer. “Put all other projects on hold. I want to know everything there is to know about this Superwoman. I want pictures, I want information about her comings and goings, I want to know the extent of her powers, everything!”

He nodded to himself, certain that his orders would be carried out post haste. He paid the highest salaries in the business, ensuring that he had the smartest, most thorough, and most ruthless people in the world on his payroll. Pressing a button on his computer, he called up an image of Superwoman.

“It’s really very simple, my dear,” he told the image. “You will either work for me, or I will remove you. One way or another.”

Satisfied with himself, he turned off his computer and headed towards his private apartment. Time would tell whether Superwoman would become an asset or yet another unfortunate casualty along the way. In the world of Lex Luthor, there were but these two categories.

Everything else would be stupid.

*****

Clark Kent was not stupid.

He might still be a young schoolboy, but that did not mean that he was unaware of the things going on around him. Especially the things people in Smallville were saying about his mom.

“She was 12 when she got pregnant with him,” one of the ladies in the drugstore had whispered to another as Clark and Lana walked past them. They probably thought that he couldn’t hear them, but his hearing was a lot better than that of anyone else. Except his mom’s, of course. She could hear fleas sneeze. Did fleas sneeze? He would have to ask Lana about that.

“I heard she still refuses to tell anyone who the father is,” the other woman whispered back. “Probably some kind of juvenile delinquent who was in foster care with her. Why else wouldn’t she tell anyone?”

Clark walked faster, putting some distance between him and those horrible women. Sure, they didn’t know he could hear them, but that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt. They shouldn’t be talking about his mom this way. Making it sound as if she had done something wrong. His mom was a hero, she was Superwoman, the greatest hero in the world. The news said so, the papers said so, everyone said so. He just wasn’t allowed to tell anyone that Superwoman was his mom, which was so unfair. It sucked!
“Are you okay, Clark?” Lana asked, hurrying to catch up with him. They were walking back home together from school, as they did most days, seeing as their homes were both a bit out of town and not too far away from each other.

“Those hags were gossiping about mom again,” he said, angrily kicking a stone down the street. Neither he nor Lana noticed that it flew quite far.

Lana looked back instead, clearly wondering how Clark had understood what the two ladies had been whispering about, but then shrugged. She put her arm around her best friend’s shoulders, falling into step with him.

“Don’t pay attention to them, Clark! Your mom’s the coolest! I wish my mom would dress like her and not like some... old person!”

Clark smiled. Lana was one of the few people who wasn’t freaked out by his mom being so much younger than all the other moms in town. It was one of the reason she was his very best friend in the entire world. Really, what was it with people freaking about his mom being so young? But of course that wasn’t the worst of it.

“They... they talked about my dad, too,” he said, looking down.

Lana squeezed his shoulder, well aware that this was a sore topic for Clark. It wasn’t like he didn’t have a very dad-like person in his life. His uncle Jonathan (grand-uncle, actually, but that made him sound old and wrinkly, which he wasn’t) was cool and certainly ticked all the boxes a dad should. Just yesterday they had thrown a football back and forth and the day before uncle John had let him help fixing the tractor.

And Clark loved his mom, he really did, but that she never ever spoke a word about his actual dad hurt. It wasn’t like he could actually miss someone he had never met in the first place, but It was the principle of the thing. Shouldn’t he know about his dad? And he had asked. He had asked her quite often. But he always got the same answer.

“Your dad was a good man, Clark”, she would say. “And I promise I’ll tell you about him one day, when you’re a little older.”

All well and good, but when would he finally be “a little older”? And come to think of it, when would he finally be old enough to start flying? Flying was the coolest thing ever, mom had taken him flying quite often. But he was supposed to fly under his own power soon, wasn’t he? When? When would he finally be old enough? It was so unfair! It sucked!

“I wish I could help you, Clark,” Lana said, still with her arm around his shoulder.

Clark looked at her. She was his best friend in the whole world. She told him everything (even things he didn’t really want to know, but it was part of the whole best friend thing). Was he really a good friend if he didn’t tell her everything in return? No, he wasn’t. Best friends told each other everything, that was the rule. And if his mom didn’t like it, well... well, no one said she had to know, right?

His decision made, he just hoped that he wasn’t about to do something really, really stupid.

*****

Lana Lang was not stupid.

She had been Clark Kent’s best friend since they had met on the first day of Kindergarten. She had
met his family more times than she could count (and she could already count quite far). She considered his mom to be one of the coolest people on the entire planet, so much cooler than her own mom. And she was well aware that there was something strange about Karen Kent.

Her parents had told her the story of Clark’s mom, of course. Well, probably not the entire story. She was still a kid, after all, and adults tended to not tell kids everything, she had figured that out quite some time ago. But she did know that Karen, Clark’s mom, had still been a kid herself when she had become Clark’s mom. She had only been 12, which was just a few years older than Lana was now. Lana could not imagine becoming a mom at all, never mind in just a few years. And while most people around town really liked Karen (and the Kents in general), there were always some people who whispered behind her back about how scandalous it all was.

But Clark’s mom being really, really young was not the strangest thing about her. For example, Lana still didn’t really know what Clark’s mom did for a living. She worked from home, she’d been told, but what exactly was she working? Nobody really seemed to know. Also, Lana knew that Karen often brought take-out food with her when she came home. Chinese, for example. There was but one Chinese restaurant in Smallville and it didn’t have any of the food Karen had brought the last time Lana had been over. Lana knew this because she had really liked the green curry duck and had tried to make her parents buy it for her.

So yes, Lana was aware that there was something strange about Karen Kent. Something much stranger than her having been a mom at age 12. Probably even stranger than her ability to find green curry duck in rural Kansas. Lana could never have imagined how strange, though.

“You’re going to get us into so much trouble, Clark,” Lana complained.

“Just wait, it’ll be worth it, I promise!”

For some reason Clark had led Lana to a remote corner of the Kent farm where an old water tank was rusting away. It looked like it had been here for a century or so. Clark then showed her that there was a tear in the tank, just big enough for a child to climb inside. Which they did. The inside of the tank stunk really badly.

“Why are we hiding in this smelly old thing? Why can’t we just hide somewhere else? And why are we hiding in the first place?”

“We’re hiding because that’s the only way I can show you what I want to show you. And we’re hiding in here because mom won’t see us in here.”

Lana was even more confused now. “Clark, there are dozens of hiding places here on the farm. Most of which don’t stink.”

“Hiding places from Uncle John and Aunt Martha, maybe. Believe me, this is the only place around here where mom won’t see us!”

Okay, this really didn’t make any sense to her. He almost made it sound like his mom had some kind of super-vision or something. She wasn’t even on the farm, they had checked. She was off somewhere (despite supposedly working from home), Clark didn’t know where. He did know, though, that she always came home in time for dinner unless there was some sort of emergency. And for some reason he wanted Lana to see her come home. Lana really didn’t understand.

“Just keep an eye on the barn,” he told her. They could see the building through the tear in the tank. They didn’t have to wait long. Clark squeezed her hand and pointed at a dot that was coming down from the sky. A dot that quickly grew... into a person? Why was a person falling from the
sky? No, not falling, floating. Floating down gently as a feather. A person that... wore a red and blue suit?

Lana would have cried out in surprise if Clark hadn’t swiftly moved his hand over her mouth. Right there before her was Superwoman. THE Superwoman, the hero from TV. The one they said was saving people all over the world. She was there, blue and red suit, cape, everything, just floating down. Lana had never seen her in person before, but there was no mistaking her. The big S on her chest was clue enough. And the flying, of course. Especially the flying.

Lana had never before noticed that the Kent farm’s barn had an open sky light, but it had and Superwoman floated into it, disappearing into the building. Only a few seconds later the barn door opened and someone came out, someone not Superwoman. It was Karen Kent, Clark’s mom, dressed in Jeans and a flannel shirt, her long blonde hair up in a ponytail and the glasses she always wore set on her nose.

It took Lana almost a full minute (or so it felt) to wrap her young mind around what that meant. Karen Kent was Superwoman! Her best friend’s mom was Superwoman!

Clark’s hand was still on her mouth, which was the only thing stopping her from babbling like crazy. Even when Karen had reached the main house he left his hand in place, a finger in front of his lips. Right, his mom was Superwoman! Which meant she could probably hear a flea sneeze on the other side of town. Did fleas sneeze?

Clark made them wait another hour (probably closer to five minutes, but it sure felt like an hour) before he finally took his hand off her mouth and motioned for them to climb out of the tank. He looked over to the house, seeing that his mom was now in the kitchen and talking to her aunt.

“Told you it was worth it,” he said, grinning.

Lana, finally able to speak, didn’t know what to say. It was all she could do to stop herself from squeeewing uncontrollably.

“Your mom is Superwoman!” she finally said, forcing herself to whisper, clenching her little fists so tightly she was probably leaving marks in her palms.

“Yeah, she is. Isn’t that cool?”

Cool? No way, cool was now officially way too weak a word for the awesomeness that was Clark’ mom. She was Superwoman. SUPERWOMAN!

“This is so awesome!” Okay, there was a little squee in there. But who could blame her? It was SUPERWOMAN!

“But you can’t tell anyone!”

Lana blinked, looking at her best friend as if he had just told her that that water was wet.

“Of course I won’t tell anyone,” she said, slapping him on the shoulder. “Do you think I’m stupid or something?”

*****

Kara-El was not stupid.

While she was barely into her twenties, she had already gotten a lot of experience when it came to
parenting. Martha and Jonathan were her primary ideals, of course, given that they had done most of the heavy lifting during Clark’s early childhood and had also served as her own surrogate parents. She also had plenty of memories of her own parents to draw on, though they were somewhat less of a help here on Earth. No nanny robots, for starters, who could always keep an eye on the kids. Maybe she should build some of those?

Anyway, Kara knew exactly what was going through Clark’s mind. Oh, she never doubted that he loved her, but she also knew that there were some elements of resentment there. He regularly saw her performing super-powered feats, both on TV and in person, and couldn’t help but be jealous that his own powers were still in their infancy. He was so proud of being the son of Superwoman, yet he was not allowed to tell anyone about it. And then there was the fact that she was keeping so much from him.

Clark still believed that Kara was his mom and she dreaded the day she would reveal to him that it wasn’t so. The more complicated part was the identity of his father, of course. The imaginary human father that had gotten Karen Kent pregnant at the tender age of 12 did not exist, after all, and Kara didn’t know how to tell Clark about Jor-El without revealing the entire truth. Plus, she really didn’t think it fair to tell him about Jor-El and leave out Lara, his real mother. So instead she told him nothing, promising to do so when he was older. Yes, she was fully aware how unsatisfying an answer that was to a child.

Clark did have reasons to be a bit resentful of his supposed mom, she respected that. Which was why she allowed him some small acts of rebellion now and then. She was aware that he sometimes snuck off into the woods to try and practice his still nascent powers. She kept an eye on him and pretended she didn’t know about these excursions. She was also aware of the old rusting water tank at the edge of the property, which contained enough lead that her vision powers could not penetrate it. She was actually rather proud of Clark that he had correctly figured that out and so she allowed him a refuge where he was safe from his mother’s ever-present gaze.

She was also very glad that he had found such a good friend in the Lang girl from the next farm over. The Langs were good people (despite Mrs. Lang’s inability to completely hide her misgivings about Karen’s early motherhood) and Lana was happy, grounded, and just lots of fun to be around. She was a regular fixture at the Kent farm and Kara was a bit smug that the girl thought her so much cooler than her own mom. Well, Mrs. Lang did tend to dress like she was already in her sixties.

Right now, though, Kara feared that she had let the reigns slack a little too much.

“Your mom is Superwoman!”

The words were whispered, but to Kara’s hearing they might as well have been shouted. She tended to tune out most of the noises and conversations around her, both to respect other people’s privacy and not get overwhelmed by the sheer amount of sensory input, but the mention of her nomme de guerre caught her attention immediately. She also recognized the voice.

“Crap!”

“Karen Colleen Kent,” Martha immediately admonished her. “What have I told you about that kind of language in my house?”

“Sorry, Aunt Martha,” she said automatically, “but we have a bit of a problem.”

Her gaze found the source of the words and she saw Clark and Lana standing next to the old water tank. It didn’t take a genius to figure out what had happened. Kara was relieved to hear Lana
immediately promise not to tell anyone, but that didn’t change the fact that Clark had deliberately broken her most cardinal rule.

“I really hate this part of parenting,” she sighed, moving towards the door.

She waited until Lana had left, keeping an ear on the girl just to make sure that she didn’t immediately blab to her parents. Most of her focus was on Clark, though. When the boy turned around to head back to the farm, he almost ran into the unyielding body of his mother, who was hovering half a foot off the ground just behind him and looked very angry.

“Clark Joseph Kent!”

Clark swallowed hard, apparently quite aware that he had done something rather stupid.

*****

End Chapter 3

Author’s Note: Lex Luthor in this story is based on the version appearing in the post-Crisis Superman comics, meaning he is an utterly corrupt businessman, a good deal older than both Clark and Kara, and has never even heard of a town called Smallville before. Lana Lang is also based on the comic book version, certainly NOT on the extremely annoying character portrayed by Kristin Kreuk in the Smallville TV series. Lana’s parents are alive and well, no meteor showers in this Smallville.

Sorry for this chapter being a bit short on action, but Lex really insisted on being introduced early in the story and I wanted to showcase Clark’s thoughts about his current state of life, too.
Going public as Superwoman definitely had its advantages, Kara thought. For one she didn’t have to be so careful about not being seen anymore. Most people were really happy to see her, cooperated with her during emergencies, and most of the law enforcement agencies she had so far encountered in the various countries she operated in seemed pretty content to have her help out, too. Sure, there were inevitably some people who resented her, felt threatened by her, even some idiots whose main problem seemed to be her gender. Overall, though, being out in the open as Superwoman was working pretty well so far.

Except for one thing: the super villains.

It was a term Perry White had come up with, of course. Having written the first story about her, then following up with the interview she had given him, seemed to have turned him into the official authority for naming things. And since she was Superwoman, the super hero, naturally the new breed of criminals that seemed to pop up in her wake were now called super villains. She really didn’t like the term.

Some people were blaming her for the emergence of super villains and sometimes she wondered if they were right about that. How many giant mutant apes had there been before she came? How many madmen turning children toys into murder weapons? How many killer robots and people turned into monsters by failed science experiments? Was her presence somehow provoking these things? There was no way to tell and she would not just stop helping people just to see if it might make the villains go away again, but sometimes she wondered.

For a time it had almost been fun, actually. Especially since most of the super villains were men. So many of them seemed to regard the existence of a super-powered woman as a personal affront. So they tried to defeat her using big high-tech guns or atomic-powered exo-suits, mutant abilities and sheer misogyny. And they were always so put out when she shrugged off their attacks, tore their toys apart and laughed at their antics.

Then, though, the more dangerous ones began to crawl out of the woodwork and it stopped being fun.

“What’s the matter, broad? Too much man for you?”

Kara took a step back, hand involuntarily going to her chin. Her chin that hurt. Not much, granted,
but given that she was supposed to be invulnerable, even a little pain was somewhat extraordinary.

“From what I can see, buddy, there is not much about you that’s still man!”

It was what had attracted her to this bank robbery in progress in the first place. Not that she gave “normal” crime a miss usually, but in most cases the police was more than adept at handling things like bank robbers and petty thieves, so she tended to only get involved if things threatened to get out of hand and innocents were caught in the crossfire. But this particular bank robber was not usual. He actually was some kind of robot. Or a cyborg, more precisely, as a quick scan with her X-Ray vision had shown that his brain was the only thing about him that was still organic. Everything else was machine, covered by a crude rubber skin that would allow him to pass for human from afar, but would not fool anyone who gave him a closer look.

It was not her first robot. Ever since she had gone public as Superwoman, there had been quite a few robots. She actually liked going up against robots as opposed to humans, as there was no need for her to keep her full strength in check. After all, a blow from her could easily take a human’s head off. Robots, on the other hand, she could tear apart with gusto and not feel bad about it.

This was the first one she had met with a human brain, though, which complicated things a bit. So she had approached, calmly walked into the bank, and asked him to surrender. He hadn’t, of course. Very few of them ever did. Most tried to shoot her despite her being bullet-proof being common knowledge. This one here, though, threw a punch at her chin. A punch that actually gave her pause. It was a somewhat unsettling feeling.

“Still more than enough man to deal with you!” the metallic man said, rushing forward to hit her again. He was moving pretty fast, faster than a normal human, faster than one would expect half-a-ton of man-shaped metal to move.

Kara was no fool, though, and quickly dodged the punch at super speed. Only to notice that her super speed wasn’t as super as she was used to. Still enough to dodge the punch, mind you, but she had planned to move a lot faster. Something was wrong. Something that was apparently connected to this metal man in front of her. Thankfully the human brain inside it did not seem to be the sharpest knife in the drawer.

“Stand still, you...,” he began, but she was tired of playing and eager to discover the source of her problems. She quickly scanned his metal body with her X-Ray vision once more, her scientific mind quickly cataloguing the critical systems needed to keep his brain alive. There was something lead-shielded in the center of his torso, probably the power source, and the rest of the body seemed to follow a more or less human layout, too. Which meant that there was nothing in his arms and legs that he needed to survive.

Her first burst of heat vision took off the arm that had been swinging for her, which caused the metal man to lose his balance. Before he could regain it, she repeated the process and sheared off the second arm.

“Don’t worry,” she said, smiling. “I am sure ’tis but a scratch!”

“What?” he asked, confused. Man, did no one watch the classics anymore? She was an alien and knew more about this planet’s cultural heritage than this idiot, it seemed.

While the guy was still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that he was now quite literally disarmed, Kara quickly fired two more bursts of heat vision and took off his legs just above the knee joints. The metal man crashed to the floor and tipped over onto his back.
Shall we call it a draw?” she asked him, standing above him.

“You filthy B*****!” he screamed, followed by many more profanities, but there was nothing he could do. Which gave Kara time to study him up close. Something about this metal man was weakening her, she was sure. She could almost feel her sense of discomfort growing with every step she took towards him. Scanning him with her X-Ray vision once again, she found nothing unusual in his construction, the only thing she could not get a good look at was his lead-shielded power source. She figured whatever powered him was probably radioactive.

“Not a good idea to take a look with so many people around then,” she mused.

Several cops had approached by now, seeing that Superwoman had well and truly disarmed the bank robber who had shrugged off the bank guard’s bullets just a minute earlier. They stared at the sparking stumps of arms and legs that clearly revealed his mechanical nature.

“What is that thing, Superwoman?” one of them asked, putting away the cuffs he had held in his hands. They were kind of useless here. “Another robot?”

“Not quite,” she said. “There is a human brain in there, so I can’t just reduce it to spare parts. Mind if I take it to S.T.A.R. labs for analysis? Maybe they can figure out how to render this guy harmless without killing him.”

“Fine by me, Superwoman,” the cop just said, taking out his radio. “I’ll let the station know to pick up robot guy here from the lab!”

She gave him a grateful smile that seemed to make his day and quickly grabbed the impotent metal man under one arm. She almost winced, being this close to him was really, really uncomfortable, but she shrugged it off. Time to get some answers.

Taking to the sky, she shot across town to the building containing the local branch of S.T.A.R. labs. Since going public as Superwoman she had developed a pretty good working relationship with the research company, who specialized in analytics and reverse engineering exotic technology. The fact that K-Solutions was one of their contributors and a frequent cooperators was just a side benefit.

A few hours later she stood outside a radiation-shielded room and just barely managed not to show how sick she felt. The lead-lined glass window in front of her allowed her a good look at the source of her discomfort. A glowing green rock imbedded in the torso of the metallic man. She was sure that, had she been in the room, she’d be writhing in pain on the floor.

“We managed to trace his origins, Superwoman,” the scientist next to her said. Dr. Emil Hamilton was someone she had worked with before, both as Superwoman and (though he did not know it) as Karen Kent, owner of K-Solutions. He was as intelligent a human as she had ever met, if a bit scatter-brained at times.

“A few years ago we received a patent from a Dr. Vale for a full-body prostheses. He called it Metallo. The idea behind it was to save the lives of patients whose body were far beyond recovery, but whose brains remained intact. It never went anywhere, though, as the good doctor could never find a power source strong enough to run it and small enough to fit inside.”

“It appears that has changed,” Superwoman said. “What is that thing powering him?”

“We don’t know, to be honest. It appears to be a xeno-mineral, doesn’t resemble any element found on Earth. It’s probably from a meteor or something. Dr. Vale must have come across it by
“Do you have his address? I’d like to ask him about it.”

He shook his head. “Sorry, Superwoman, but I fear the good doctor is dead. The police have found him in his home a few days ago, beaten to death. They also found another body there, belonging to a petty criminal called John Corben. They said the body’s head had been cut open and... well…”

“Let me guess,” Superwoman sighed. “The brain was missing. I think we found it, along with the good doctor’s murderer.”

She looked at Dr. Hamilton, hoping the scientist did not notice the beads of sweat on her face. She really needed to get away from this stuff soon, but she could not just leave it lying around, either.

“Have you found a way to remove the rock from him without killing him? I’m thinking an unknown radioactive material like this should not be left in the hands… or chest… of someone criminally inclined.”

Hamilton nodded. “Certainly not. Our engineers are currently adapting a generator to serve as a replacement power source. It will certainly be a lot bigger and not fit into his chest, but it will keep him alive until the authorities can figure out what to do with him. Then we can remove the meteor rock and hopefully do some further analysis on it.”

Superwoman simply nodded, moving away from the window. “Please keep me posted.”

*****

Dr. Hamilton had indeed come through for her and let her know once the meteor had been removed. Superwoman had taken the time to search the premises of the late Dr. Vale, but had found no further traces of glowing green rock there. Once S.T.A.R. labs had stored the meteor away for future research, it had been the easiest thing in the world for her to quietly remove the container from there and spirit it away.

She felt a bit guilty about simply stealing the rock from S.T.A.R., but given its properties, she had seen no other choice. An analysis done by her far superior Kryptonian technology quickly revealed what she was dealing with. As incredible as it sounded, this rock was actually a radioactive piece of her lost home world Krypton. The only explanation she could come up with was that some pieces of debris had been caught in the wake of their ship and been brought along to Earth.

Which meant there might well be more of these rocks somewhere on the planet.

She had quickly sealed away the piece of Kryptonite, as she had started calling it in her mind. Her computers were programmed to keep a look-out for any sightings of glowing green rocks and alert her immediately. She would very much prefer if no one out there ever learned that there was a xeno-mineral out there that could hurt Superwoman. That could hurt Clark. No one was allowed to hurt Clark.

Thinking back, Metallo was the first time she had faced a super villain who had actually had the capacity to hurt her. If he had been smarter or even been aware that his power source was poisonous to her, taking him down could have ended up being far more difficult.

Yes, Metallo had been the first super villain capable of hurting her. Sadly he had not been the last.
Rudy Jones had originally been a janitor at a S.T.A.R. labs warehouse in Pittsburgh, before he had stumbled upon a canister with toxic waste. For some reason exposure to said waste did not end up killing him as one would expect, but instead it mutated him into something other, something monstrous. Something very, very dangerous.

This new creature, which quickly gained the name Parasite, was apparently capable of syphoning off the life energy of other beings simply by touching them, draining them to the point of death. On further consideration, Kara should have been a lot more careful in approaching him, but she had been more concerned with stopping him from draining even more people.

She had arrived at the facility just as he was about to drain one of his coworkers, so without thinking too much about it she flew in and tackled him away from his victim. She had only touched his skin for a fraction of a second, but a moment later she felt like someone had sucker punched her at super strength and she almost stumbled.

The Parasite, on the other hand, seemed to grow bigger.

“Wow, this is good,” he said, looking at his hands. “I’ve never felt such power before.”

Kara took a step back, now very much aware that this was one enemy she should keep her distance from and not slug it out at close range. Sadly the Parasite refused to cooperate in that regard. Moving at a speed that rivalled her own, he was suddenly right in front of her and managed to grab her by the shoulders.

“You glow!” he growled. “I want that glow!”

Kara felt like every single muscle in her entire body had turned to jelly. Where the Parasite’s hands touched her, her skin burned like fire. Right before her eyes the creature seemed to grow even bigger and its eyes began to glow.

Pushing past the pain, she planted her boot against his chest and pushed off with all her remaining strength. They went flying apart, the Parasite crashing into a wall and being buried by rubble as the wall collapsed on top of him. Kara barely managed to remain on her feet. She felt weaker than she had ever felt in her entire life. It was not a good feeling at all.

“Need to end this quickly,” she muttered. Thankfully she was standing right next to the warehouse’s loading dock and the sun was shining in from outside. She could feel her strength returning, if slower than she would have liked.

“I want that glow,” Parasite screamed, breaking free of the rubble. His eyes burned like fire and a moment later Kara had to dodge a burst of her own heat vision.

“Yeah, I can see why villains hate it when I use that power!” She quickly got back to her feet. “Okay, big boy! You want the glow? Come get the glow!”

She ran outside into the sunlight, the Parasite following her at a speed that was pretty close to her own. Thankfully she was still a bit faster and exposure to the sun made her faster still. Thankfully the area had been evacuated the moment Rudy had started mutating, meaning that there were no other people around. The Parasite ran after her and... no, he wasn’t running. He was flying after her.

“This is getting ridiculous,” she muttered, taking to the air herself to stay ahead of her foe.

“Give me the glow!” the creature screamed, far too close behind her for comfort. For the first time in a long time Kara felt the icy grip of fear, but she quickly pushed the feeling away. So that creep
could hurt her by touching her? Big deal, she just had to make sure that he couldn’t touch her, nor anyone else.

“Just follow the glow!” she yelled, flashing towards a construction site close by. The Parasite was directly behind her, using the power of flight he had stolen from her. Thankfully he didn’t really have any clue how to use that power. So while she weaved through the maze of girders without any difficulty, the Parasite was not so lucky.

A loud series of bangs and a big cloud of dust later the Parasite was pinned beneath a huge pile of metal girders. Kara fired off her heat vision while he was still stunned, melting the girders down into a single metal mass, making it solid again with a burst of arctic breath that fixed him in place. Touching down a good distance away from the creature, she rested her hands on her knees and took deep breaths she normally didn’t need.

“Okay, let’s hope that his power fades as quickly as he gains it.”

For a moment the huge mass of metal shivered and groaned, causing Kara to take a step back and shift into a fighting stance. Then the movement ceased, though, and Kara sighed in relief.

“Now I just need to figure out a way to get you out of there and into a prison cell without touching you in the process.”

*****

Beating the Parasite had been a chore and a definite lesson in humility, too. Strangely enough, though, Kara did not consider him her most dangerous enemy yet. No, that particular moniker was going to a man who did not have anything resembling super powers. A man whom the public at large certainly did not consider a villain, either. A man whose very presence made her skin crawl and not in a good way.

*****

“Ah, Superwoman. I see the world’s greatest heroine has saved the day once again!”

Lex Luthor was a man in his mid- to late forties. The very expensive suit he wore could not quite hide the fact that he carried quite a bit of excess weight. What little hair he had left was red, though he was almost completely bald. There was a charming smile on his face, but the smile never reached his eyes. His eyes were cold. So cold that she had to suppress a shiver.

Kara knew that Lex Luthor was the richest man in Metropolis and one of the richest men in the world, period. His public image was that of a philanthropist. He regularly donated to multiple charities, invested in the public infrastructure, and gave out stipends as if they were candy. He was a genius engineer, too, and considered one of the brightest minds of his generation.

There was another side to him, though. One that was only talked about in whispers, for no one wanted to be overheard. Word on the street was that no one crossed Lex Luthor twice. Rumors abounded about people who simply vanished after going up against him. Accidents happened to entrepreneurs that could maybe have become serious competition for him. All rumors and unsubstantiated accusations, of course. Officially Lex Luthor was Mr. Clean.

Case in point their current situation.

“Well, Mr. Luthor, I am sure you are happy to have this battle suit back once again,” she said. “One shudders to think what might have happened had this terrorist gotten away with it.”
Lexcorp had held a public presentation of their newest piece of military hardware, a suit of powered armor that was supposed to give a single soldier enough power to take on a battalion. The engineer in Kara could not help but appreciate the elegance of the design, it was a good five years ahead of just about anything else on Earth, possibly more. The fact that the suit allowed its wearer to fly, have enhanced strength and shoot laser beams could kind of be considered a compliment in a weird sort of way, too.

During the presentation the test pilot of the armor had suddenly opened fire on the crowd, blowing up several cars and injuring dozens of people. Thankfully there hadn’t been any fatalities, but there certainly could have been, had Superwoman not been close by.

Somehow she got the feeling that it had not been a coincidence.

“We have found the actual test pilot tied up behind the stage,” one of the policemen said, gesturing towards a man in underwear currently being checked out by paramedics. “Apparently someone slugged him from behind. Probably our perp.”

Superwoman looked around, taking in the devastation of what had been a very short battle. The “terrorist” (she couldn’t help but add the air quotes in her mind) had seemingly been concerned with nothing but causing as much panic and damage as he could. When Superwoman had arrived on the scene, he had immediately opened fire on her.

The battle had been over ten seconds later. She had been surprised by the suit’s flying ability, otherwise it would have been five.

“I’ll make sure he receives the best care possible,” Lex Luthor said. “I take care of the people who work for me.”

There was that look again. He was looking her up and down in a manner that could have been sleazy (and she knew sleazy looks), but was far too cold and calculating to be a simple matter of checking out her curves. No, Lex Luthor was not interested in her body, she was quite certain. His interests were of an entirely different matter.

“You seem to be suffering a string of bad luck recently, Mr. Luthor,” she told him. “The battle suit today, that shipment of weapons I recovered a month ago, and I believe that experimental robot that shot up downtown was based on one of your designs, too, correct?”

“What can I say?” he simply shrugged. “When you have the best toys in town, there are always those who wish to take them without paying for them.”

“Not to mention using them for criminal purposes,” she added, her arms crossed in front of her chest.

“The world is filled with bad people, sadly,” he agreed, nodding. “But speaking of my recent string of bad luck, I will certainly invest in beefing up my security. As a matter of fact, I would be very interested in hiring the very best security one can find on this planet. I am a very generous employer, as I am certain you’ve heard.”

She needed a moment to realize that he was making her an offer. Lex Luthor wanted to hire Superwoman. Then again, that was not really a surprise now, was it? She had gotten the distinct impression that his “string of bad luck” had in fact been a series of tests. Clearly someone was interested in what she could do, the extent of her powers. Not that there was any way to prove that, mind you.
“Are you offering to hire me, Mr. Luthor?” she asked, wanting to make certain.

“All the best people in the world work for me, Ms. Superwoman. And from what I have seen, there are few, if any, who are better than you.”

Her first impulse was to laugh out loud. The second impulse was to sneer at him. Did he really think she would ever work for someone like him? Never mind that she was pretty sure he was involved in numerous criminal acts, she would never ever sell her powers to the highest bidder. She was about to tell him exactly that and then fly off in a bout of righteous indignation.

She didn’t, though. Because quite suddenly she remembered a conversation she had overheard as a teenager back on Krypton. It had been roughly a solar cycle before the planet’s destruction. Her uncle Jor had recently figured out what was going to happen and had gone before Krypton’s ruling council, trying to convince them of the impending doom. They had laughed him out of the building. Afterward he had met with his brother Zor, her dad, and neither had been aware that she had been close enough to overhear them.

I think you went about this the wrong way, Jor. I believe you, never doubt that, but I know how you can get when you are absolutely convinced that you are right. You basically just threw the facts in front of them, facts you had to know they would have a hard time accepting, and got angry when they didn’t immediately believe you, right?

You are a brilliant scientist, Jor, but you don’t understand people. These people have been ruling Krypton for ages. They are used to always getting their way, always being right. They will not just accept something like this. They can’t, it’s too far out of their world view. It makes them angry and they will take their anger out on you.

The two El brothers had argued for quite some time, though in the end it had been academic. The Council was never going to believe Uncle Jor and so he and dad had begun working on their plan B, the escape ships. Only things had happened too fast.

Forcing her mind back into the present, she looked at Luthor again. He was an arrogant man, no doubt. A man very used to getting his way, either through money, charm, or intimidation. He had set up these tests without shedding a single thought about who might get hurt in the process and now that he apparently found her worth his while, he was going to buy her. The thought that she might not be for sale had probably never entered his thoughts.

If she simply brushed him off, she would no doubt make an enemy for life. She couldn’t imagine a man like him taking rejection well. And while he was but a normal man, he did have access to a world of resources. He could make life very difficult for her in numerous ways and who knew how many people might be caught in the crossfire.

She could never work for him, of course. But maybe it was a good idea to, as the saying went, string him along for a bit? Just long enough to maybe find the proof needed to put him behind bars.

“I am not currently looking for employment, Mr. Luthor,” she finally said, giving the man a big smile. “But I will keep your offer in mind.”

His smile was fake, but not entirely. He had expected her to accept his offer, she could see that, and wasn’t happy with her refusal. But the second part of her sentence seemed to have placated him somewhat. He fished a card out of his suit jacket and handed it to her, taking the opportunity to capture her hand in his. He bowed slightly and kissed the back of her hand.

“Let me know if you change your mind,” he said, now smiling broadly again. “The offer shall
remain open.”

She inclined her head with a smile she hoped looked sincere, managing to slowly draw back her hand and not wipe it on her cape. Luthor turned around, walking away, and she looked at the card he had given her.

She would burn it with her heat vision the moment she was out of sight. Probably her glove along with it. Then she’d take a long, long shower.

*****

End Chapter 4

**Author’s Note:** While Superman has a lot of great A-class villains (Luthor, Brainiac, Darkseid, Mongul, Parasite, Mr. Mxyzptlk), I don’t particularly care much for most of his more down-to-Earth villains like Toyman, Prankster, Silver Banshee, Hellgramite and such. So they will only be mentioned in passing here, if at all. Sadly Supergirl never did have any interesting villains, usually just borrowing some from her cousin.

As for Metallo, it always irked me a bit that he is considered to be such a danger to Superman. Sure, he’s got Kryptonite, but he’s also an Earth-built robot. If Superman would just keep his distance and slice him apart with heat vision instead of getting close enough to be poisoned, he’d go down in seconds. Much like Batman, Metallo being a danger to Superman utterly depends on Superman fighting really, really stupid.
Where the world's most powerful super heroes, Superwoman and Wonder Woman, the World's Finest, meet for the very first time.

Chapter 5: World's Finest

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Kara had never had a best friend growing up. Oh, she had had friends. Growing up on Krypton, there had been a number of girls and boys she had been close with, mostly due to the fact that they had lived in the same neighborhood. None of them had been so close that she would have called them her best friend, though. Not like Clark and the Lane girl, who seemed attached at the hip most days. She had never had that back on Krypton.

On Earth the situation had been even more complicated due to her passing Clark off as her own son. Smallville was, as the name implied, quite small and of course the story they had created to explain her and Clark had made the rounds quickly. The other teenagers around town had been weirded out by her already being a mother, while the other mothers around town had been weirded out by her still being a teenager. Her needing the better part of a year to get a handle on her powers before she was confident enough to regularly interact with other humans had only added to the off-putting weirdness of Karen Kent.

Things had become better in recent years. She was an adult now, so it became easier for the people of Smallville to ignore how young she had been when she had supposedly had Clark. She was friendly with most people in town, she regularly participated in social events around school, and while most people didn’t know what she was doing for a living, the fact that she had quite a bit of money to spend certainly hadn’t hurt her standing, either, of course.

Still, she didn’t have anything resembling a best friend. She was, of course, very close with Martha, but Martha was more of a mother figure and mentor for her. There had been a few times in the past when she had slipped up and called Martha “mom”, which the older woman had never minded. Quite the opposite, in fact. Kara could not really convince herself to do it regularly, though. She refused to do that to Alura.

Kara did not lead an isolated existence by any measure, but the requirements of keeping the different parts of her life so sharply separated made it hard to let anyone in close. Many people admired her as Superwoman, but she was the untouchable hero who quickly vanished once the emergency was over. In her life as boss and owner of K-Solutions, quite a few people appreciated her intellect and engineering abilities, but most of them had never seen her in person, as she preferred to walk out of the public eye. Her social life was taking place mostly in Smallville, but again, she had to keep people at arm’s length to a certain degree.

So yes, Kara was feeling like she could really use a best friend, a confidant, someone with whom
she could share everything. She would never have imagined that said friend would magically appear from a hidden mythological island in the Mediterranean, though.

*****

Rao, she was tall. That was the first thing that went through Kara’s mind when she finally had the chance to take a closer look at the warrior woman that she had unceremoniously joined forces with a few minutes ago. A horde of strange looking warriors, looking as if they had sprung directly from an old Hercules B-picture movie, had rampaged through the city of Boston. Superwoman had already been on her way there when she had heard the news that someone was fighting them. Someone described as a flying super-powered woman.

She had alternated between the fear that another super villain had risen and the hope that this woman might somehow, some way be a fellow Kryptonian. She had never told anyone this, but in some distant corner of her heart she kept the hope alive that she and Clark might not be the only survivors of the doomed planet, not the last of their kind. That maybe there were others out there, that some had heeded the El brothers’ warnings and had escaped on their own.

The woman in Boston had turned out to be no Kryptonian, though. While she was clearly super-powered, her powers were just as clearly different from Kara’s. And she was certainly not a super villain, either, for she protected the innocents from those weird warriors. Kara had quickly begun helping her and the other woman had accepted her help with an acknowledging nod and a smile. Together they had quickly defeated the rampaging warriors who, to Kara’s amazement, then seemed to melt right back into the Earth.

“Well fought, sister,” the other woman said, giving Kara a smile that seemed to light up the entire city. Kara was aware that she herself was quite the looker by human standards, but Rao, next to this woman she felt like an ugly duckling. “Thank you for your aid.”

“No thanks needed, I...” she trailed off, because the other woman grasped both of her forearms and proceeded to kiss Kara on both cheeks. “Ah... I mean... what was I saying?”

Now the other woman frowned, as if not expecting her reaction. “Have you been living in man’s world so long, sister, that you have forgotten our customs?”

Kara blinked, trying to form a coherent response. “What?” was the only thing that came out, though.

It took them both sitting down on top of a nearby building and talking for a while to clear up the confusion. Kara learned that the other woman’s name was Diana, Princess of Themyscira, a hidden island of warrior women called Amazons. Kara further learned that Diana had won a contest among her own people and been selected as their champion and emissary to man’s world, her mission to promote peace and stop the machinations of Ares, God of War. Kara wasn’t quite ready to accept the existence of the Greek gods at face value, but she could not see any deception in the other woman’s eyes. Diana was so natural and sincere, Kara couldn’t believe she was lying about any of it. Besides, the appearance of those warriors - apparently called Spartoi and grown from dragons’ teeth - was kind of hard to ignore.

Diana had initially believed her to be a fellow Amazon, which was not that far of a leap, Kara had to admit. How many different kinds of super-powered women could there be, after all? So Kara told Diana her own name (the Kryptonian one) and that she was from a different world and had come here as a child. Kara didn’t tell her everything, of course. No mention of Clark, no mention of her life in Smallville, but it still felt so good and natural to talk with Diana. She enjoyed it.
The two women quickly bonded, given their somewhat similar situations. Both were strangers in a strange world, so to speak. Diana’s home was alive and well, of course, and she could return there whenever she wanted, but that didn’t change the fact that she felt somewhat alone and isolated in man’s world. Kara could certainly empathize. They talked for hours, the time passing with neither of them really noticing, and when they finally parted Kara impulsively gave Diana a contact number where she could reach her. It was officially a number registered to K-Solutions, but any call to it would be routed to Kara’s personal phone through an untraceable setup of Kryptonian technology.

Diana gave her a big hug goodbye as they parted. Kara stiffened at first, unused to getting hugs from anyone except Martha, Jonathan, and Clark, but she did end up hugging Diana back. It felt right somehow.

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Their second meeting was only a few weeks later and instigated by Diana calling her. It had been too cute, actually, as Diana was still unaccustomed to using a phone. Someone called Julia had apparently helped her figure it out. Diana had called to ask her for a favor, actually. The Amazon was apparently afraid that her fighting skills would deteriorate in man’s world, as she had none of her sisters present to train with her. She hoped that Kara would be willing to train with her occasionally.

The idea actually appealed to Kara. With her powers it was almost impossible to find anyone she could train with. Clark was slowly beginning to display powers and she was coaching him through it, but it would be a few years yet until he was anywhere near her level. Not that she really needed training, her powers kept her in peak physical condition and at her strength level she didn’t really need martial arts. Still, it might be fun to train with Diana.

The idea that it might be fun vanished just a few minutes into their first training session.

“You need not hold back against me, Kara,” Diana said, having just put Kara on her back for the third time in a row. “I know you are very strong, but so am I.”

Kara groaned, getting back to her feet. Diana thought she was holding back? Sure, she was not outright trying to kill the other woman, but that hardly constituted holding back. Diana moved in ways Kara had never even imagined and certainly had a very hard time keeping up with, despite having the edge in speed and strength.

“I am not holding back, Diana! Not everyone here was trained in martial arts since she was a little girl!”

This actually seemed to give Diana pause, as if the thought was foreign to her. “You have never received any combat training? Truly?”

Kara shook her head. “I grew up a civilian, Diana, not a warrior. And after I arrived on Earth and my powers began to develop, I easily outmatched everyone I met.”

Diana stepped closer to her, nodding in understanding. “I see. You are so much stronger than anyone else in man’s world, you have never felt the need to learn any but the most basic martial skills. It is understandable, I guess.”

“Yes, I... “ Kara didn’t get any further because suddenly Diana had moved and without really understanding how it had happened, Kara was flat on her stomach, her arm twisted behind her back, and Diana’s knee on the back of her neck. She tried to escape from the hold, but leverage was
fully on Diana’s side and the Amazon was almost as strong as she.

“Understandable, but still a mistake,” Diana said, her voice as sweet and even as ever. “Sooner or later you will meet an opponent just as strong or stronger. Than you will need skill to survive, not just brute strength.”

“Point... taken!” Kara groaned out. “Care to let me go now?”

Diana did not care to let her go. From that particular hold, yes, but she then proceeded to throw Kara around their training area - a deserted clearing in the woods somewhere outside Boston - as if she were a rag doll. Kara tried everything to get even a moment’s breather, but Diana was relentless in her assault. Kara’s advantages in terms of strength and speed were ruthlessly negated by the Amazon’s far superior skill level and Diana did not pull her punches, either. Kara was sure she would be bruised all over... well, for a few minutes anyway, before her regenerative powers restored her. Still, it hurt. Not even fighting the Parasite had hurt this much.

When Diana finally let up, Kara simply collapsed onto her back, her eyes stinging with tears of humiliation. Diana squatted down next to her, somewhat sweaty and out of breath, but looking far too pristine for Kara’s liking. She had managed to land maybe two or three hits on the other woman, no more. And those damn bracelets of hers even reflected her heat vision, when she had finally resorted to using it. To no avail, mind you.

“I am sorry for this, Kara,” Diana said after a moment. “But I truly fear for your safety, as it’s clear that you have given far too little thought to developing your fighting skills.”

“I would have taken you at your word,” Kara said angrily. “There was no need to beat me to a pulp!”

“Really?” Diana asked, raising an eyebrow. “You are the mighty Superwoman, world-famous heroine. I have read up on you. You have encountered, what, two or three people on this world that were truly dangerous to you and you beat them all in a matter of minutes anyway. Would you really have taken this seriously just on my say so?”

Kara grumbled, sitting up slightly so her body rested on her elbows. “Okay, maybe you’re right and it would be a good idea for me to get better at fighting, but the next time you’ve got a point to make, make it with words, okay? Friends do not beat each other up!”

“Huh, I guess things are different here than back on Themyscira,” Diana said, shrugging. Kara was not sure whether the Amazon was having her on or not, but when Diana rose and offered her a hand, Kara took it and allowed herself to be pulled to her feet. Thank Rao the sun was high in the sky.

“So, twice a week until we get you up to speed?” Diana asked her, smiling brilliantly. Kara simply groaned.

*****

Kara’s first visit to Themyscira happened a few months later. There had been a big battle of some sort where Diana had faced off against Ares, the God of War. Kara had only been involved on the sidelines. Diana had said something about Ares joining forces with Hades, God of the Underworld, thus gaining control of the dead. To be honest Kara wasn’t sure how much of that she really believed, but there had been this huge army composed of rather dead-looking Greek warriors and mythological creatures attacking Washington DC. Kara fought to keep the city safe, while Diana apparently confronted Ares directly and defeated him.
Diana had been gravely wounded in said battle, though, and been taken back to her home island to recover. Kara had quickly started to worry about the lack of news regarding her friend until she had finally gotten a phone call from Julia Kapatelis, Diana’s friend and mentor in man’s world. Julia had told her to come to Boston harbor. There she had met Julia and her young daughter Vanessa, and they had all gone on a ship together. A ship that looked like it had sailed directly out of a movie set in ancient Greece, manned by a crew comprised entirely of staggeringly beautiful warrior women.

“You are the one called Kara?” one of the Amazons asked her, which caused Julia to look at her in surprise. Okay, so one more person knew her Kryptonian name now, she guessed. Nothing to it. Vanessa seemed utterly distracted by the Amazons, who were expertly steering the ship out to sea.

“That would be me. Is Diana all right?”

“She is recovering nicely. She will have to remain on the island for a bit longer to recover fully, but she has asked us to bring her friends from man’s world for a visit. You should feel honored; we do not usually allow outsiders onto our soil.”

Kara was a bit put off by the Amazon’s stern demeanor, but she guessed that was to be expected after living in isolation for so long. She herself had needed quite a bit of time to trust anyone apart from the Kents. She still didn’t trust easily.

“Thank you,” she simply said, bowing her head. “I look forward to seeing your home, Diana has spoken of it often.”

The journey on the ship was surprisingly short (magic, Kara figured) and when they finally approached the island (after going through a curtain of mist that tingled uncomfortably on Kara’s skin and was impenetrable to her vision powers) Kara quickly realized that Diana’s words had not done the place justice. Themyscira was a veritable paradise, a lush green island with long shores, vast forests, and a hauntingly beautiful city built in ancient Greek architectural style. Even Kandor, Krypton’s most beautiful city, would have been hard-pressed to rival this place’s splendor.

The Amazons took them into the city and towards the biggest building there. Well, Diana was supposed to be a princess, right? It would figure she would live in some sort of palace here.

“Diana,” Vanessa squealed, the girl quickly ignoring the beautiful surroundings when she spotted Diana coming down the steps of the palace to greet them. Diana immediately hugged the girl, at the same time giving Kara and Julia a smile.

“Thank you for coming, my friends, and welcome to Themyscira!”

Kara awaited her own turn for a hug, she was glad to see that Diana was all right. She could make out the faint traces of healing wounds on her friend’s arms and legs, but Diana was walking with confidence and seemed well on her way to recovery, thank Rao.

“I am glad to see you, Diana,” Kara said, holding her close. “You really scared me there for a minute and not hearing anything about your condition for days on end was not helping.”

“I am fine, sister! Even more so now that all my friends are here.”

The following days were the closest thing to a vacation Kara had experienced since she had gone public as Superwoman. She had worried at first about being cut off from all communication, but the Amazons had shown her how to navigate the mystic barrier that sealed off the island. Her phone, augmented by Kryptonian tech, picked up a signal if she just flew out to sea a few miles
beyond the barrier’s reach. So she could keep apprised of happenings in the world outside and talk
to her family, just to check if everything was all right.

She met Diana’s mother on that first day. Queen Hippolyta was a stern woman at first glance, but
quickly warmed up the moment she stepped out of the role of ruler and was simply the mother of
her friend. She immediately welcomed Kara into her home. Kara could see how worried Hippolyta
was about Diana having been hurt, but so very proud of her at the same time. Kara figured she
would probably end up doing much the same when the time came for Clark to go out on his own
and be the hero she knew he could be.

Diana and Kara spent most of her time there together and Diana showed off her home. They went
swimming in the ocean, they rode the huge Amazonian horses along the beaches, and just
generally enjoyed each other’s company. Kara had never felt so relaxed in her life. Even so, she
would probably not get used to the Amazonian dress code anytime soon. Togas were one thing, but
the Amazons had few taboos when it came to public nudity, especially during leisure time. Seeing
Diana walking up to her fully naked had been a bit of a shock that first time. She was still not used
to it.

She quickly learned that pretty much every single Amazon on the island considered Diana to be a
niece or baby sister. Something to do with Diana being the only child born on the island, the others
all having been born in ancient Greece and not aging ever since. So Kara met quite a few of them
during her days there, all of them excited to see the outsider that Diana had apparently described as
“as worthy of the title Amazon as any of us”. It also led to quite a few friendly bouts of fighting,
making Kara very, very glad that she had trained hard under Diana’s tutelage these last few
months. She still wasn’t a match skill-wise for most of the Amazons, but she was just skilled
enough that her vast edge in speed and strength allowed her to win more fights than she lost. Of
course it also helped that the average Amazon was nowhere near as strong as Diana and unable to
fly, either. Anyway, the Amazons quickly warmed up to Kara and basically adopted her as one of
their own.

When the time came for them to leave, there was a huge farewell banquet thrown in honor of the
outside visitors. Julia and Vanessa had also been accepted by the Amazons, it seemed, so there was
no animosity there. The celebration went well into the night and the two mere humans quickly fell
asleep on the boat that took them home to Boston. Kara left under her own power after promising
to visit again soon.

As the island vanished into the mystic mists behind her, Kara could not help but smile. It had only
been a few months, but she was certain that she had found a life-long friend in Diana. The woman
had fought by her side and invited her into her home, made all the more special by said home
usually being closed to all outsiders. Kara really wanted to return the favor. Of course this led to
problems all of their own.

Did she want to risk telling Diana about Clark?

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It took her another few months to work up the necessary courage and even then only after several
talks with Martha and Jonathan. They trusted her judgement, they said. If Kara thought Diana was
trustworthy enough to meet her family, Clark included, then they had no complaints. Also, they
were probably somewhat excited to meet the heroine the media called Wonder Woman.

When the day finally came, Kara met up with Diana in Boston. The Amazon was dressed in casual
clothing that didn’t really manage to hide her height and amazing beauty, but should work well
enough for a lazy day in Smallville, Kansas. Together they flew high above the clouds until they
finally reached the fields of her home. With Kara quickly making sure that the coast was clear 
(which now regularly included checking the lead-lined water tank for eavesdroppers), the two 
dropped down and walked towards the Kent home.

“It’s beautiful here,” Diana said, looking around in awe.

“Well, it’s not Themyscira,” Kara hedged, well aware that her home could not match the exotic 
paradise that was Diana’s island.

“Of course not. There is no place on Themyscira so... vast and open. The fields around here seem 
to go on forever, like oceans made of plants. It’s amazing!”

Kara looked at her friend, who was gazing around with wide eyes. Beauty is in the eye of the 
beholder, she reminded herself. For someone who had spent most of her life on a relatively small 
island with hills, forests, and endless beaches, the vast flat fields of the American Mid-West 
seemed to hold an exotic beauty all their own.

“Karen, there you are,” Martha said, coming out of the house to greet them. “And you must be 
Diana. Karen has told us so much about you!”

Diana gladly hugged Martha back, at the same time looking at Kara and mouthing “Karen?” at her. 
Right, she hadn’t really explained the multiple-names thing to Diana yet.

“Welcome to our home, Diana,” Jonathan said, having followed his wife out of the house. “We are 
glad to have you with us.”

“I am glad to meet you as well,” Diana said, shaking his offered hand. “I was looking forward to 
meeting the people who have shaped Kara into the wonderful woman that she is.”

Kara blushed, even as she mentally steeled herself for what was to come next. She trusted Diana, 
she really did, but there was one aspect of her life where she would have to lie to her friend. It had 
nothing to do with Diana and everything to do with Clark, who was even now exiting the house and 
coming towards them. When the time came to tell the truth, it was Clark who deserved to hear it 
first. Not Diana, not anyone else, only him. Until that day, he would be her son as far as anyone but 
her, Martha, and Jonathan were concerned.

Then again, after all this time, was it really a lie anymore? She had been Clark’s mother for nearly 
a decade now. He had been her son far longer than he had ever been her cousin. She remembered 
the way Hippolyta looked at Diana and realized that she was looking at Clark the same way. So 
maybe it wasn’t really a lie at all. At least not when it came to how she felt about him.

“There is one more person I really want you to meet, Diana,” Kara finally said, walking over to 
Clark and putting her arm around his slim shoulders. Her boy was gazing up at the towering 
Amazon before him in awe.

“This is Clark,” she told her friend. “My son.”

Diana’s eyes widened, looking back and forth between the two of them for a long moment. Her 
gaze clearly said that Kara would have some explaining to do later on, but then she smiled and held 
her hand out to Clark.

“Great to meet you, young Clark,” she said. “The son of my sister-in-arms is family to me as well!”

Clark could only nod with a very goofy smile on his face.
“Let’s head inside, ladies,” Jonathan said. “Time for the world’s finest heroines to enjoy a good old Kansas lunch!”

Kara walked into her home arm in arm with her best friend, ready to enjoy a great day with her family.

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End Chapter 5

Author’s Note: Wonder Woman as she appears in this story is mostly based on the George Pérez reboot of the character from 1986, with some elements from the Gal Gadot version thrown in for good measure. Diana is a lot older than Kara, but has so far lead a rather sheltered life on Themyscira and is new to man’s world. She can fly under her own power, no need for a jet. I am not yet sure whether I’ll go with the classic made-from-clay origin or have her be a child of Zeus like in the movie, but it will probably not be important for this story anyway.
Shadow of the Bat

Chapter Summary

Where the world-famous superhero encounters the vigilante of Gotham as he throws someone off a roof.

Chapter 6: Shadow of the Bat

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It was the biggest news story since... well, since the last heroic feat performed by Superwoman, probably, which had been but a few days earlier. The world’s favorite superhero had lifted an entire ocean liner out of the water and brought it safely to Metropolis harbor and had then proceeded to disable the armed pirates who had boarded it. The pirates had planned to rob everyone on board and then sink the ship, but now they were all in police custody.

Superhuman feats performed by an alien woman aside, though, the biggest news story was the return of Gotham City’s favorite son, Bruce Wayne. The sole heir to the Wayne Foundation had lost his parents at a very young age, a story that had been in every newspaper back then. Upon turning 18 he had completely fallen off the face of the Earth, disappearing from the public eye for seven long years. Now he was back, though, and ready to take control of one of the largest private fortunes in the world. The business world was abuzz and Gotham City’s social scene was positively ablaze.

On a completely unrelated note, a rumor started making the rounds in Gotham about a shadowy, inhuman figure that preyed on criminals. Scared Crooks had started calling it the Bat!

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Kara was not pleased. As a matter of fact she was in a very bad mood. She had planned to stay in Gotham for an afternoon only, no more. Just long enough to meet with a potential investor and talk about K-Solutions, an investor that wanted to meet the woman behind the business face to face. She didn’t like face to face meetings, at least not when it came to her role as a business owner, and had only grudgingly accepted. Only for the investor to cancel their meeting at the last minute and reschedule for tomorrow.

Sure, she could easily have flown back home for the night, but a hotel room had already been arranged for her to compensate for the rude cancellation, so it would have looked somewhat suspicious if she never turned up there. So against her better judgement, Karen Kent was spending the night in Gotham.

She really didn’t like Gotham. There was just something about this city, apart from the stink, that unnerved her. It was too dark, too dreary. The gothic architecture was not her thing at all, either. She did not like gargoyles, which seemed to line every roof top here, and the city seemed to be filled with far more than its share of misogynist bastards, too. Just walking through the hotel lobby
and up to her room had seen her being propositioned three times, five if you counted the sleazes who just winked at her while waving bundles of cash around.

She had spent half an hour on the phone talking to Clark and another half hour chatting with Diana (having finally convinced the Amazon to carry a phone), but now she was bored. So she finally took out her super suit, put the “do not disturb” sign on her door, quick-changed, and flew out the window too fast to be seen.

Gotham looked even drearier from above, she had to say. Just flying around for a few minutes had her spotting no less than three crime scenes, too. Deciding to be somewhat discreet, she fell back on her skills from before her public outing. None of the criminals involved ever saw more than a blur, but their guns vanished, some were left knocked out, and all victims got away scot-free. She almost smiled. Being Superwoman was awesome, but she kind of missed the whole mysterious savior bit on occasion.

As she passed over yet another gothic-looking building, she suddenly spotted something that piqued her interest. There was a man dressed like a bat running across the rooftop, obviously in pursuit of a shady-looking guy in something resembling a ninja costume. Now wasn’t that interesting?

*****

The Batman was not pleased. He had hoped to have more time to establish his presence in Gotham before things came to a head. He had hoped that he’d able to weed out at least some of the corruption in City Hall and the police department, so that he would not have to fight on two fronts. Sadly it seemed time was not on his side. The figure fleeing from him was clearly a member of the League of Shadows. It could hardly be a coincidence that they showed up here only a few weeks after his own return to the city.

Chasing after a trained assassin was harder than chasing down common crooks, but in the end he was more skilled, more familiar with the terrain, and had the better tools. A short time later he had the man tied up in rope and a quick grip into his mouth had removed the suicide capsule every League operative usually had. The odds of getting anything out of the assassin weren’t good, but it was worth a try.

“What are you doing here?” he growled at the tied-up man. “What is your mission?”

“Our mission is the same as always,” the other simply growled back. “You will not stop us!”

“You are a fool then! R’as is dead!”

“R’as al Ghul can never die,” the assassin screamed at him. “The Demon lives forever!”

Getting fed up, Batman quickly hoisted the man up and positioned him near the edge of the roof. The assassin might have been prepared to take his own life via a painless poison in his tooth, but the thought of a twenty story drop towards a messy meeting with the pavement might loosen his tongue regardless.

“Last chance,” he growled. “Tell me why you are here!”

The assassin just glared at him, keeping quiet. Shrugging, Batman shoved him off the roof. His hand quickly went to his grappling hook, as he fully intended to catch the man before he splattered on the ground, but as it turned out someone else was faster.

“Now that is taking things a bit too far, mister!”
The angry-sounding voice belonged to a woman. A woman who was floating before him in mid-air, seemingly unconcerned with gravity, and with the tied-up assassin dangling from one of her hands as if he were a light handbag. She was dressed in a form-fitting blue and red suit he had seen many times on the news and her red cape and long blonde locks were moving in the wind. She was certainly cutting a very impressive figure, no doubt about that.

“The famous Superwoman,” he said, managing to sound unconcerned despite being very, very concerned. He had read up extensively on the famous superheroine who had been all over the place, saving the world, for the last few years now. He actually admired her a bit, seeing as how her powers would have made it easy for her to set herself up as ruler of the world or worse, but she was instead using them to protect innocents. The problem was, though, that he doubted she would consider masked vigilantism a good thing.

“Is this a regular thing for you?” she asked, indicating the man still dangling from her hand.

“Throwing people from rooftops?”

“Only dangerous assassins,” he answered, sounding nonchalant even as he subtly scanned the roof for the quickest possible getaway route. He did not have time for this, not with the League of Shadows in town, probably ready to resume their plans for the city. “And I would have caught him before he hit the ground.”

Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him and he could practically feel the X-Rays as she attempted to look through his cowl and see the face underneath. And here Alfred had called him paranoid when he had included a thin layer of lead in the newest design.

“I’m sure you would have tried,” she said, dropping the assassin back onto the roof and touching down herself. Standing in front of him, he noticed that she was pretty tall for a woman, though still shorter than him. Quite beautiful, too, but that was neither here nor there. She held herself with an extremely confident pose, hardly surprising, and the way she stood showed that she had had at least some rudimentary combat training. That was a bit surprising. He would have figured someone with abilities like hers would not see the need for combat skills.

“Are we going to have a problem here?” Batman asked, his mind still trying to come up with some kind of plan to outmaneuver someone with what amounted to god-like powers. She smiled at him, but Batman recognized it as the exact same kind of smile that he himself smiled when faced with criminals that really had no idea how outmatched they were. He didn’t like being on the receiving end of it.

“Well, I am currently thinking of taking you and your friend here to the nearest police station and let them sort things out. So you tell me whether or not we have a problem!”

Batman took half a step back, at the same time dropping the flashbang he had taken out of the belt pouch on his back. He figured someone with enhanced senses like her might actually be more susceptible to sensory overload than a mere human. Turning away from the exploding flash and shielding his ears, he didn’t wait to see whether it had worked, he started running towards the roof edge and leapt out into the open.

He soared through empty air, his arm snapping back to throw a line towards a nearby roof and swing to safety. Hopefully he could lose her among the buildings. He never got the chance, though, because suddenly something resembling a steel vise closed around his left ankle and simply yanked him upwards. Superwoman floated leisurely behind him, looking none the worse for wear, and still smiling as she held him up.

“Not bad,” she said, nodding appreciatively. “Didn’t even notice the flash bang until you dropped
Batman’s mind quickly flipped through the tools he had with him, dismissing them all within the span of a second. He had some explosives in his belt, but those were far more likely to hurt him than her. Well, maybe there was one thing that might work on her, given her reputation. Honesty.

“If you take me to the cops, I’ll be dead before dawn,” he told her, managing to sound somewhat calm despite hanging upside down in mid-air, held by an alien flying woman. “The entire Gotham City police apparatus is corrupt to the core, the same goes for City Hall. You take me in, you’re condemning an innocent man to death.”

He couldn’t be sure, of course, but given how enhanced her senses had to be, there was a good chance she’d be able to tell if he was lying. The frown on her face seemed to say that she was at least thinking about his words.

“You should have lead with that one,” she finally said. A moment later they were back on the roof and she let him drop. He’d had softer landings, but at least it wasn’t twenty stories down to the pavement or into a police cell.

“So tell me... oh, just a second.” She walked over to the assassin, who was about two thirds of the way out of his restraints. A single flick of her finger sent him down to the ground, very much unconscious.

“Okay, so you bought yourself some time, Mr... what do you call yourself anyway?”

“I’m Batman!” he said, causing her to laugh out loud.

“Really? Batman?”

“What about it, Superwoman?”

She laughed again, but waved her hand in a placating gesture. “Okay, point taken, sorry. So, Bat... sorry, I can do this: So, ... Batman! The police in this town is corrupt, I understand. So you are, what, trying to fix that by working outside the law?”

“Yes,” he replied. His mind was still spinning in a dozen different directions at once, trying to figure out how to get out of this situation. There was still a very good chance he’d end up taken to the police – if not in Gotham, then elsewhere – and there was little he could do to stop her if she decided to do so.

“And him?” she gestured toward the unconscious assassin. “I heard something about a League of Shadows, a demon, and a mission? What’s that all about?”

He considered how much to tell her. Someone with her powers could certainly be a tremendous asset, but the League of Shadows was all about working under the radar. Superwoman appeared about as subtle as a sledgehammer. He didn’t see how to get out of this without sharing at least some information, though.

“They’re a secret society of assassins. They were led by a supposedly immortal maniac called R’as al Ghul, who considered himself responsible for keeping the world in balance.”

“Supposedly immortal?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“He died about a year ago. I was hoping the League would fall apart without him, but it seems they have reconstituted.”
“And their mission?”

“I only know that R’as was planning to destroy Gotham City, which he considered a breeding ground for corruption and suffering. I fear they might try and go ahead with it even without him there to lead them.”

Superwoman nodded, apparently believing him. This was a new thing, he mused. He had prepared himself for fighting his war using fear as his primary weapon. Apparently honesty could also be a powerful tool, at least when it came to people who were impervious to all other weapons.

“Okay then,” she said. “I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt. What’s the next step then?”

****

Kara had to admit, she was impressed by this Batman guy. Unlike most other men she confronted, he hadn’t attempted to beat her, but only to get away as fast as he could. It spoke of a logical mind that was well aware of its limits. When it became apparent that fleeing was not an option, he had immediately switched strategies and appealed to her sense of justice. Successfully, she mused.

Monitoring his heartbeat and breathing rate, she was pretty sure he was telling the truth. Her powers weren’t a fool-proof lie detector, but not many could lie to her. Besides, if he was right and someone was indeed trying to destroy an entire city, this sounded like a job for Superwoman. Plus her Bat-sidekick, she snickered internally.

She watched as Batman quickly searched the assassin for any clue and she could feel his pulse quicken as he found something in one of his pockets. It was a small vial, filled with liquid. He opened it and took a careful sniff.

“What’s this?” she asked. She could smell the distinct odor from here, but couldn’t place it.

“The League of Shadows uses an extract made from Blue Poppies as a testing tool for their adepts. It overstimulates the amygdala and causes an intense fear reaction. This seems to be a highly refined version of it.”

“Weaponized fear? That’s something new. Okay, so you want to destroy a city and you have a liquid causing extreme fear. How do you distribute it among the populace? Drinking water?”

He looked up at her, apparently taken aback a bit. Yeah, Batman, she mused. The big blue-eyed blonde is more than just a pretty face.

“The city’s water supply would be a logical place,” he answered. “The main line goes from the treatment plant near the coast through Arkham Island and is distributed near Wayne Tower.”

“You have the city’s water pipe network memorized?” she asked.

“Among other things,” he said, getting up. “How fast can you go carrying a passenger?”

She smiled. “Just watch me!”

****

Batman had to admit, he was impressed by Superwoman. She was clearly quite intelligent, very adept at using her truly amazing powers, and seemed to have a strong sense of right and wrong, too. Which was good, for he hated to think how dangerous someone as powerful as her would be without it. Being picked up as if he weighed nothing and flying through the air took some getting
used to, but it certainly beat all other methods of transportation currently available to him. He really needed to invest in a jet.

The conclusion of their joint mission was anti-climactic, though. Following along the water line, they quickly found a group of League assassins who had broken into Arkham Asylum. Several barrels of the fear toxin had already been placed in the asylum’s cellar and the main water line had been dug up. It would have been just a matter of hours.

Batman was rather certain he could have managed to take down the League assassins himself, but it would have been hard and taken quite some time. Having a Superwoman on one’s side, though, tended to shorten most battles quite a bit.

There had been a single moment of tension when one of the assassins had thrown a capsule of the fear toxin at Superwoman when she had been busy knocking out half a dozen of his fellows. The liquid had splattered onto her face and for a moment Batman had panicked, his imagination showing a fear-crazed Superwoman rampaging through Gotham.

“Oh, please,” she simply said, wiping the liquid off with a look of disgust. “I can drink vodka by the galleon and not feel a thing. You think a little poison is going to affect me?”

And that had been that. Half an hour later they were back on the rooftop where they had first met. The assassins had been tied up expertly and left to be found by the police, a letter addressed to Lieutenant James Gordon along with them. There were at least a few honest cops in Gotham, after all.

“I guess I won’t take you in today then,” Superwoman finally said. “Please try to make sure that I won’t have a reason to do it in the future, either.”

“There won’t be,” he said. “I... thank you for your help. This could have gone much worse without your assistance.”

She nodded, giving him another of her brilliant smiles. As he turned to leave, though, she called him back.

“Yes?” he asked.

“Just one thing. You said this al Ghul guy was dead, right? How certain are you that he is?”

“He fell through the floor of a burning building right in front of me,” Batman replied. “No one could have survived that. Why are you asking?”

“Well, you remember those assassins telling us that we hadn’t won anything and that R’as al Ghul would return to kill us all?”

“Yes, so?”

She shrugged. “Well, it’s not really an exact science, but... they were not lying, Batman. They fully believed they were telling the truth. They believe he lives.”

Now it was her turn to leave. “Besides,” she added, “you know at least one person who could have survived that. Just something to keep in mind.”

She vanished into the night sky, leaving Batman with some rather uncomfortable thoughts.

*****
Having finished her rather surprising team-up adventure with the self-proclaimed Batman, Kara finally had the opportunity to take care of her actual business in Gotham City the following morning. She was meeting her potential investor in his office and then she would finally be able to fly home.

She was dressed in a sharp-looking business suit, her hair in a tight bun, glasses that slightly shifted her eye color on her nose, and wearing make-up that subtly changed the look of her cheekbones. She also wore five-inch heels to appear taller (and thank Rao for invulnerable feet). The result was a smart-looking young businesswoman that maybe bore some resemblance to the famed flying superhero, but not really all that much.

“Go right in, Ms. Kent,” the secretary said, motioning for her to enter.

Karen Kent walked into the office of Bruce Wayne, who was looking for up and coming new businesses to invest his very large fortune in. She had barely entered, though, when her enhanced senses recognized the heartbeat and scent of the person on the other side of the desk. Stopping in her tracks, she wanted to be really sure and raised her hand in front of her eyes to simulate him wearing a mask covering the top half of his face. Yeah, she definitely remembered that chin.

“Huh,” she just said.

Bruce Wayne, still tired from a long night with very little sleep, frowned at the strange behavior of the woman entering his office. Then he froze, studying her face. Could it be…? He imagined her with open hair, no glasses, different make-up, and wearing flats.

“Oh,” he just said.

The two of them remained standing, looking at each other from across the office.

“So…,” Kara finally began. “Should we… I don’t know… pretend that this didn’t just happen?”

Bruce opened his mouth, then stopped, really not sure what to say. “I… well…”

“You know, you sound far more eloquent when you wear the mask!”

“Do you want my money or not?” he growled.

*****

End Chapter 6

Author’s Note: I considered making Bruce Wayne the same age as Clark, but eventually decided against it, as I wanted to Trinity of Wonder Woman, Batman, and Super(wo)man intact for my story. So this Batman here is roughly the same age as Karen and still green behind his bat ears, too, having only just started out. Food for thought: Ben Affleck is 11 years older than Henry Cavill and Michael Keaton was 38 for the first Batman movie, while Christopher Reeve was only 26 in the first Superman movie. So the age difference I’m putting between Bruce and Clark can actually be considered canon. Batman is mostly based on the DC Animated series Batman, but with some elements from the Batman Begins movie thrown in.

As for Bruce and Karen meeting so early and figuring out each other’s identities so soon, well, I really wanted to avoid that whole Batman vs. Super(wo)man thing. Despite their different personalities, they make much better friends and allies than enemies. Oh, and there will definitely NOT be any sort of fight between them in this AU that requires the super-powered alien who could kill people with a stern glance to be super stupid.
Perry White was not sure what exactly had possessed him to agree to this. Well, there was this bothersome fact where he would have died as a young man if not for the actions of a fellow soldier by the name of Samuel Lane. They had been in deployment together and the bullet that had been earmarked for one Perry White’s head had just missed him due to a tackle by his squad mate Sam. They had been friends ever since.

Well, friends was pushing it maybe. They argued over pretty much everything. Sam Lane had stayed in the military and risen through the ranks to become a general at the Pentagon. Perry had quit after his first tour and became a reporter, one that loved digging up government secrets, illegal actions, and corruption. It made them natural enemies of sorts, despite also being friends, kind of.

So when Sam had approached him with the words “Perry, I would like to ask a favor,“ he really should have known better.

“Do you think I’ll get to meet her? What is she like? Is she really as nice as everyone says? Can she really set things on fire with her eyes? How old do you think she is? Is she really an alien?”

The barrage of questions was never-ending and Perry was beginning to develop a severe headache. He really should have said no. Heck, he should have said yes when they offered him the job of editor-in-chief last year. He hadn’t felt ready to take a step back and let others do the reporting for him back then. He sure felt ready now, though. Editors-in-chief didn’t have to deal with interns, after all.

Lois Lane! 14-year-old spitfire, military brat, now the newest intern at the Daily Planet, and apparently the world's biggest Superwoman fan. At this point Perry was uncertain whether she actually wanted to be a reporter one day – Sam had actually asked him to do his best to nip that notion in the bud – or if she simply wanted to get close to arguably the best source on Superwoman publically known, meaning himself.

“Lois!” he thundered, interrupting her barrage. “Didn’t I ask you to bring those layouts to the print department?”

“Oh, I already did that, Mr. White, all done. Now, when you interviewed Superwoman, did you...”

“LOIS!” he thundered, actually managing to make her shut up for a second.

“Lois, a good reporter must ask questions,” he told her sternly. “But it is important, and I can’t stress this enough, to actually pause a moment here and there to listen to the answers!”
The girl blushed. “Oh, yeah, sorry Mr. White. I know I’m kind of excited, but I really...”

“You’re a really big fan of Superwoman, yes, I think everyone here in the bullpen knows that by now. I think everyone in the entire building knows it by now.”

She blushed even harder, making him feel a tiny bit bad about putting her in place. Just a smidgen, maybe.

“You are aware, though,” he continued, “that I don’t have Superwoman’s contact details or anything, right? I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, that’s all!”

“But that’s not true,” Lois protested. “There were dozens of reporters at that launch, I read about it! You were the only one with the presence of mind to snap pictures of her. And you came up with her name, too! And you’re always the guy she goes to when there is something she wants to tell the press!”

“Which is exactly my point, Lois,” he told her. “She comes to me, not vice versa. I’ve met her maybe half a dozen times in the entire time she’s been active. I’ve written lots of stories about her, sure, but most of them without any sort of personal contact with her. So if you are only here because you hope to get an autograph...”

“What? No, no, no! That’s not it at all! Or... okay, I admit it was part of the reason why I bullied daddy into calling you, but I really do want to become a reporter! I really, really do, I promise! And I want to learn from the best!”

Perry looked at her skeptically, causing her to give him the most charming smile he had ever seen on an adolescent. Maybe there was something to this girl after all. After all, how many people had ever managed to get General Sam Lane to do something he didn’t want to do? And Sam had made it clear that he really, really didn’t want this daughter to become a reporter.

Which was a good enough reason all on its own, he figured, to give the girl a fair shake.

“Okay, I’m gonna take you at your word on that one,” he told her. “But keep the chatter down, will you? You’re here for eight weeks and there is no guarantee we’ll even see Superwoman fly across town in that time. Journalism isn’t just about superheroes, you know? So you...”

“Heads up, everyone!” someone yelled from across the bullpen. “There is some sort of super villain with only a skull for a head tearing up downtown! Superwoman is already on the scene!”

Lois squealed so loudly that Perry was sure he’d end up with a tinnitus.

“You are not coming,” Perry told her, getting up and grabbing his jacket. “Your father will water board me if he finds out I’ve taken you into an ongoing fight with a super villain!”

“Oh please, Mr. White! Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeease!”

*****

There were days when Kara figured that she could easily halve her troubles just by shutting down S.T.A.R. labs. Sure, the research company had done a lot of great work in the last few years when it came to figuring out how to contain super villains, shut down harmful technology, and be of assistance to Superwoman in general. On the other hand, though, it had been one of their facilities that had seen the creation of the Parasite, one of Kara’s most dangerous foes. And now this.

“His name is Joseph Martin,” Inspector Henderson told her. Metropolis somehow seemed to be a
hub of superhuman activity these days for reasons no one had yet figured out – some tried to blame it on Superwoman, but she operated all over the world and wasn’t even in Metropolis that often – so the city had created a Special Crimes Unit for dealing with it. Henderson was its commanding officer and Superwoman had worked with him before.

“What happened to him?” she asked, observing the obviously confused man from afar. To the naked eye it seemed as if Martin was little but a walking skeleton, but that was nonsense of course. Skeletons couldn’t walk, for starters, due to the lack of muscles. Quickly skipping across various spectra, Kara could easily see that Martin’s body was very much intact, but it appeared something had caused his flesh to become invisible.

“Some kind of lab accident, apparently. He was there for some sort of check-up and got blasted with radiation when some gizmo or other malfunctioned. You’re gonna have to ask the eggheads for more details there. Anyway, it turned his skin invisible and he’s gotten really strong. Also, the Geiger counters are going crazy around him, so we’re trying to keep him away from people.”

“Has he hurt anyone?”

“Mostly he seems to be confused. He’s been stumbling around for some time, did some property damage, but I figure that’s mostly because he doesn’t know his own strength. He was in that movie theater over there for a few hours, which gave us the time to evacuate the surroundings. We really need to bring him in, Superwoman. He hasn’t technically done anything illegal yet, but he’s a danger to everyone around him.”

She nodded, easily seeing how someone giving off potentially deadly radiation could not just be allowed to run around.

“I’ll try and talk to him,” she said. “Radiation doesn’t hurt me, so I’ll be fine.”

Henderson nodded, even as she heard one of the cops whisper something along the likes of a pretty blonde woman being more likely to calm him down than someone in full radiation protection gear. She sighed. Well, it was one of the nicer things she had heard with her super hearing from men discussing her appearance.

A brief flight took her three city blocks over and she touched down on the other side of the street from where Joseph Martin was currently standing. The radiation seemed to have bulked him up quite a bit, as his clothes stretched over invisible flesh. The fact that he seemed to have nothing but a skull for a face was kind of unnerving.

“Mr. Martin,” she said, slowly walking toward him. “May I have a minute of your time?”

He turned around to look at her, pressing his back against the wall. He seemed skittish, almost like a wounded animal. She would have to be very careful about this.

“Who are you?” he asked. “And who is this Martin you mentioned?”

“That is your name, Mr. Martin. You are Joseph Martin. Don’t you remember? You were in an accident.”

“Accident?” She really wished that she could see his actual face. A skull didn’t really lend itself to interpreting facial expressions. “No, you are trying to confuse me!”

“I am trying to help you,” she said, walking closer still, her hands raised and palms open to show that she meant no harm. “You are sick, Mr. Martin.”
“My name is not Martin,” he yelled at her. “I am… I am the Atomic Skull!”

Atomic Skull? Where had she seen that name before? Her eyes quickly flicked over to the movie theatre Henderson had mentioned a minute ago. Right there on the marquee it said “Adventures of the Atomic Skull!”, which was apparently an old movie serial. He had been in there for a while. Maybe the movie had left a lasting impression on his confused mind?

“Very well, Atomic Skull it is,” she said, looking to calm him down. “I really want to help you. You might not know it, but you are giving off radiation that is dangerous to other people, possibly yourself, too.”

“No, you are lying!” He became more agitated. “You... I know who you are! You are Doctor Electron, my arch enemy! You are trying to trap me!”

Great, now he thought that she was a super villain. That really could have gone better.

“Please, I…” she began, hoping to calm him down again. She never got the chance to finish the sentence, though. She had been ready for a fight since the moment she touched down, just in case. She had kept her eyes on Martin’s fists (skeletal fists), having been told that he had acquired super strength. What no one had mentioned, though, was that he wasn’t just giving off radiation. He was apparently also capable of BLASTING off radiation in the form of intense energy bursts.

The blast, seemingly emerging from his mouth, hit her dead center and immediately sent her flying. Her flesh seemed to be on fire, it actually hurt, and she didn’t have time to counteract with her own flying power before her back hit something solid. Something solid that cracked ominously.

“This just isn’t my day,” she muttered, looking up and seeing the wall she had crashed into beginning to crumble.

*****

Perry White just knew he was going to burn in hell for this. Sam Lane would kill him, pure and simple, and afterwards he would burn. What had he been thinking, allowing a 14-year old to come along on a story involving a super villain? Maybe it was really time to give up the reporter beat and accept that promotion, he was obviously losing it.

Granted, it hadn’t sounded that dangerous at first. The so-called super villain had actually appeared to be but a confused guy. Sure, a guy with a skull for a head, but still. Arriving on the scene, he had seen Superwoman calmly talking with the SCU cops. While all of them seemed tense, none of them were full-blown “super villain planning to destroy the city” tense, so maybe this would all turn out to be harmless. Lois would get to see Superwoman on her first day as an intern and it would all wrap up nice and easy. He really should have known better.

The police kept them too far back to see anything, but Perry knew how to get the scoop. The building behind them was an office building. Big windows all over. He quickly ran inside, barely aware that Lois was hot on his heels, and a minute later they were six stories up and got a good look at the action. Just in time to see the skull guy blast Superwoman with some kind of energy beam.

Seeing as the universe clearly wanted to see him burn in hell, it was not really a surprise that Superwoman was blasted straight towards them. She crashed into the side of the building directly below and the entire structure trembled. The big viewing window they had been looking through cracked and shattered a moment later. And Lois, who had had her face pressed to said window but a second earlier, was falling forward into empty air.
Perry swore he could feel his heart stop, even as he ran forward. He was far too slow to catch her, he knew that before he took his second step. Almost as if in slow motion he watched her fall, a scream beginning to emerge from her lips.

Suddenly there was a red and blue blur and Lois was gone. Perry’s heart began beating again, for he had seen that blur before. Carefully stepping to the edge of the open window, he looked down and sighed in relief. Lois was down there, unhurt, safely in Superwoman’s arms.

Great Caesar’s Ghost, he was getting too old for this!

*****

One of the many reasons Kara really didn’t like super villains was that she always seemed to encounter them right in the middle of a city. Meaning property damage, meaning innocent bystanders, meaning she didn’t dare go all out with her powers. Occasionally it also meant girls falling out of windows.

She heard the window shatter and also heard the beginning of a scream. Looking up, she saw a small shape tumble out of a window destroyed by her impact. Shrugging off the after effects of a rather painful radiation blast, she quickly flew up and caught the girl before she had even started falling properly. A moment later they were back on the ground.

“Wow,” the girl gushed, looking up at her with wide eyes. “You’re Superwoman! This is so awesome! Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

“It was my pleasure, but you really need to...” she caught the movement from the corner of her eye and quickly positioned her body between the girl and yet another energy blast coming her way. She was braced this time, but it still hurt. Rao, it hurt a lot.

“Superwoman!” the girl yelled, sounding really loud.

“Get to safety,” Kara managed, right before the next blast came. This one hurt even more.

“I will not allow you to harm the innocents, Doctor Electron,” the self-named Atomic Skull thundered, firing off yet another blast at her. Damn it, these things hurt, but she couldn’t dodge. There was the girl and a score of other bystanders too close by.

“You are the one endangering the innocents,” she yelled, putting out her hands to at least keep the blasts from hitting the rest of her body.

“You can’t fool me! I am the Atomic Skull, protector of the innocent. You will not harm that girl, nor anyone else!”

“She saved my life, you moron!” the girl yelled at him. Damn, she was loud. “She is the hero here, you are the bad guy!”

The Skull paused, apparently taken aback. “What? No, you are confused, girl. I am...”

Kara didn’t give him the time to get over his puzzlement. This had gone on too long already. The moment he let up with his blasts, she flashed forward at her top speed and aimed both her fists at where she estimated his chin to be.

The Atomic Skull went flying end over end and crashed to the ground right in front of the movie theater he had apparently taken his name from. Kara hadn’t hit him full strength, not knowing how durable he really. She quickly followed him, seeing that he was apparently still conscious and
trying to get back up again.

“Oh no, you don’t!” She hit him again, a little harder than the first time, and this time he stayed down.

“Get him wrapped up, quickly!” someone yelled. A moment later several cops in radiation gear were by her side and quickly spread a heavy lead-lined blanket over the Skull’s body. Right, she remembered. Walking radiation hazard.

“I think we are good,” one of the cops said a moment later, checking a Geiger counter. “He’s still a hazard, but the levels are safe in the short term.”

“You beat him! That was so awesome!”

The girl was running towards her, making Kara’s already aching head hurt even more with her shrieking. She seemed to hit frequencies only dogs and Kryptonians could hear.

“Thank you,” Kara said, walking away from the Skull so as to keep the girl from getting too close to him. “And thank you for distracting him there at the end, it gave him me the chance to take him down. Just please don’t make a habit of getting involved in super villain fights, all right?”

“LOIS!” she heard a familiar voice. Looking up, she saw Perry White running towards them, shouldering past the cops that surrounded the scene. “Lois, are you all right?”

“I’m great, Mr. White,” the girl said. “And look, I got to meet Superwoman and help her, too!”

“A friend of yours, Perry?” Kara asked the out-of-breath reporter, who looked as if he was alternating between wanting to hug the girl and wanting to strangle her.

“I’m Lois Lane,” the girl said, not waiting for Perry to make the introductions. “I’m going to be a reporter, just like Mr. White!”

The girl’s enthusiasm was endearing, Kara had to admit.

“Your dad is going to kill me,” Perry finally said. “If my body is found, go and arrest Sam Lane, will you? He will have done it!”

“I’ll remember that,” Superwoman promised. Seeing the approaching reporters, she spontaneously decided to have some more fun at her reporter friend’s expense.

“How about a picture together with Metropolis’ newest star reporter?” she asked the photographers, who eagerly raised their cameras. Kara made Lois stand next to her (not that the girl needed much convincing) and smiled for the pictures.

“I hate you,” Perry grumbled.

“Nah, you love me,” she winked at him.

****

Lois was sure she was going to pass out from happiness when she got her first look at the Daily Planet’s front page the next day. Right there was the picture showing her standing next to Superwoman, the hero smiling at her.

SUPERWOMAN DEFEATS ATOMIC SKULL, the headline read. And directly underneath there was a subtitle, saying DAILY PLANET INTERN HELPS SAVE THE DAY. They were talking
about her. She had helped save the day.

Looking up, she saw Perry White staring at the same headline with a very sour expression on his face.

“What’s the matter, Mr. White? It’s a great story, and thank you so much for putting me in there, too.”

“The subtitle wasn’t my idea, kid! Lloyd, that bastard, put that in there. He wants to punish me for not agreeing to take over his job. Man wanted to retire last year. But the joke’s gonna be on him.”

“Why?” Lois frowned, not understanding.

“Because I can’t become editor-in-chief if your dad kills me. So...”

“PERRY WHITE!” a voice boomed across the bullpen. All eyes turned to see a big man with greying hair, dressed in a general’s uniform and looking angry enough to spit nails. Spotting Lois and Perry, he quickly strode across the floor, everyone hurrying to move out his way.

“Here we go,” Perry muttered.

Lois was somewhat aware of her father, General Sam Lane, chewing out Mr. White for endangering her, but she was far too happy to pay much attention to be honest. She had met Superwoman. Superwoman had thanked her for helping her. It had been the best day ever.

“Lois Lane,” she muttered happily. “Superwoman’s Pal!”

*****

End Chapter 7

Author’s Note: I realize Lois Lane may be somewhat out of character here, but remember that she is still an impressionable teenager and instead of meeting a handsome male superhero as an adult, she is meeting an inspirational female superhero she has read about for several years now. She won’t stay a squealing fan girl, I promise! And yes, she is a few years older than Clark. Margot Kidder was four years older than Christopher Reeve and Amy Addams is nine years older than Henri Cavill. Sure, Kate Bosworth is younger than Brandon Routh, but we all wish to forget about that movie anyway, right?
Chapter Summary

Where Clark asks more and more questions about where he comes from and Kara is afraid of giving him the answers.

Chapter 8: Family

Disclaimer: All things Supergirl/Superman belong to DC. No infringement is intended.

*****

“Wow,” Lana breathed, her eyes wide. “That’s really impressive, Clark!”

Clark Kent, age 11, was currently hoisting a huge tree trunk over his head that had to weigh several hundred kilos at least. He was wobbling a bit, probably more due to balancing issues than anything else, but managed to keep the huge weight aloft.

“Thanks, Lana! Don’t tell mom, though. I want it to be a surprise!”

Lana nodded. Ever since she had learned that Clark’s mom was Superwoman, things had been a little tense between her and the elder Kents. Clark had told her a day later that his mom had caught them talking and was aware that Lana now knew her secret. Clark had ended up confined to his room for the remainder of the week, only allowed out for school.

Karen had drawn Lana aside later that same day after school and emphasized that she was not mad at Lana for knowing, but that her secret needed to stay a secret. Superwoman had enemies, after all, and they would not hesitate to go after her family and friends if they knew about them. Lana understood and had kept the secret faithfully ever since. She really did not want to see some of those robots and super villains she had seen Clark’s mom fight on TV to pop up in Smallville, after all.

Not soon after, Clark had confided in her that he was also developing super powers, just like his mom. They were kicking in slowly, though, far too slowly for his liking. Apparently his mom’s powers had started developing in puberty, as far as he knew, so it was not surprising his were starting to show up now, too.

Lana was certainly impressed, possibly a tad jealous, too. It also got her thinking.

“How have you ever wondered where these powers are coming from?” she asked Clark once he had put the trunk back down again. His strength still came and went, apparently, so he did not want to risk injuring himself (or her) should his powers suddenly give out.

“What do you mean?” he asked back, wiping his hands on his Jeans. “I inherited them from my mom.”

“And where did she get them from? It’s not like Mr. and Mrs. Kent have super powers,” she pointed out, then hesitated. “They don’t, right?”
“No, they don’t,” Clark admitted, frowning. “I don’t know. Maybe it was some sort of... what it’s called? Mutation? Something that started with mom.”

“Could be,” Lana admitted as they started walking back towards the Lang farm. “Or maybe she inherited it from her mom, your grandmother. Could be from that side of the family.”

Clark’s face darkened and Lana almost regretted bringing up what she knew was a sore topic for Clark. Still, her curiosity was stronger.

“She still refuses to speak about her time before coming to Smallville?” Lana asked.

“Yeah,” Clark growled. “I get that it probably wasn’t a good time for her. Her dad, uncle Jonathan’s brother, died before she was even born. And losing her mom when she was barely older than we are now must have been really bad.”

Lana nodded. The idea of being orphaned, of losing both her parents or even just one, was too horrible to contemplate. She might get annoyed with her parents sometime, but the thought of simple losing them from one second to the next... no, she certainly would not want that to happen to her or anyone.

“But couldn’t she tell me some things at least?” Clark asked, getting worked up. “Surely there must be some good stories about grandma. I’ve never even seen a picture of her. Uncle Jon has pictures of grandpa Sam, surely she must have some of her?”

“Have you ever tried looking her up yourself?” Lana asked. “You know her name, right?”

“Sure, it was Alya Jones. You think... you think we can find something?”

Lana shrugged. “Doesn’t hurt to try.”

Ten minutes later they were in Lana’s room at her home and booting up her computer. Calling up a search engine, Lana typed in the name of Clark’s grandma. Only a very small number of hits appeared, though.

“Here, that’s an archived newspaper article. It... oh...” Lana trailed off.

She could feel Clark tense beside her as he scanned the article. It spoke about a terrible accident with multiple vehicles involved and three people dead. One of the victims had been one Alya Jones, single mother. Thankfully there were no pictures.

“I guess we can scratch the idea of mom inheriting her powers from her mom, right?” Clark said, his voice heavy. Lana simply nodded. If Ms. Jones had had super powers, she certainly wouldn’t have died in a car crash. It seemed the super powers had indeed begun with Karen Kent.

“Sorry, Clark,” she said, feeling bad. “I didn’t want to...”

“Don’t worry, Lana,” he cut her off, his hand on her shoulder. “I knew I wasn’t going to find any happy stories here, given what I already knew. I just want to know... anything, really.”

He fell back into the chair, rubbing his hands across his face. “It’s just so... so unfair! I should be told about my family, right? That’s not unreasonable or something, right?”

“No, of course not. But I’m sure your mom has a good reason for...”

“I know,” Clark interrupted her again. “I know she isn’t doing this just to be mean or anything. She
Isn’t like that! But... I just..."

Lana scooted closer to him, seeing tears shining in his eyes. “I love mom,” he said, voice quivering. “I really do. And I love Uncle John and Aunt Martha, too. I have the best family on Earth! But... it’s like there is this big black hole in my life and... and maybe what’s hidden in there is something really bad, or maybe it’s something really boring, but... how I am supposed to know if nobody tells me anything?”

Lana hugged him, wishing there was something she could do. “Have you ever asked your Aunt and Uncle?”

“Dozens of times,” Clark sniffed. “The answer is always the same. ‘This is something you should ask your mom, Clark!’ Which I have tried, but she always says she’ll tell me when I’m older.”

“Well, at least she says she WILL tell you one day, whenever that will be. That’s better than nothing, right?”

It was a thin silver lining, Lana was aware, but she was really trying here. Ever since she had learned the secret of Clark’s mom, she had tried to wrap her mind around it all. She had always liked Clark’s mom, probably because she was still young enough to act like a kid herself at times, not stiff and boring like most of the adults around town. And Lana had been a huge fan of Superwoman even before she learned that she was really Karen Kent. She doubted that there were many girls in the world who weren’t. Most of them, of course, were not aware of the many contradictions.

Lana had read the world-famous interview Superwoman had given Perry White of the Daily Planet shortly after her first appearance. She had read it half a dozen times at least. So she was aware that Superwoman had told the world at large that she was actually an alien from another planet. After finding out that Karen Kent was Superwoman, Lana had one day gathered all her courage and had asked Clark’s mom about that.

“Are you really an alien, Ms. Kent?” Lana had asked, finding the idea pretty cool, but weird.

“Why do you... oh, you mean because of the interview, right?” Clark’s mom had said. “Don’t worry, I said that to throw people off my track. If people believe I’m an alien, they will never even consider that I might have a civilian identity and a family somewhere. Why would an alien live in Smallville, Kansas, right?”

It was a perfectly reasonable explanation and Lana had believed it without reservation. Recently, though, she had begun to doubt. Oh, not that she thought that Karen Kent might be an alien, but her powers - and especially the lack of powers in the rest of her family except Clark - made her consider the notion that she might not actually be a Kent by birth. Maybe she was adopted. Maybe there was a family with super powers out there somewhere.

For Clark’s sake, she really wished there was. Also, it would be really, really cool.

*****

“Clark over at the Langs’ place again?” Jonathan asked, stepping out onto the porch next to Karen

“Where else?” Karen answered, chuckling. “Those two have been inseparable as far as I can think back. He is in her room right now; they’re working on her computer.”

“They are getting to that age where Clark hanging out in her room all the time might start to get a little awkward, you know? He hasn’t even gotten the talk yet.”
Karen frowned, looking at him. “Didn’t you tell me you gave him the talk last year? When he ‘accidentally’ looked through the wall into the girls’ shower in school?”

Jonathan chuckled, shaking his head. “I gave him the talk that my dad gave me about girls, yes, but that’s not what I meant. I meant the other talk.”

Karen nodded, understanding. “Oh, that talk!” She turned away from him, looking out across the farm.

“He is asking more and more questions,” Jonathan said.

“I know,” she sighed.

“Don’t you think it’s time he got some answers?”

Karen turned to look at him, her teeth worrying on her bottom lip.

“I had planned to tell him already by this point, but then he went and told Lana about me being Superwoman, despite knowing very well that he was not supposed to. I... it made me doubt.”

“Lana is a sweet girl,” Jonathan told her. “She is keeping your secret.”

“I know, I really like her,” Karen replied. “But you know we lucked out with her. If he had told someone else, someone who might have told others without even thinking about it...”

“I understand,” Jonathan said. “But that was a while ago. Clark is growing up faster every day and he is mature for his age.”

“I know and It’s probably way past time to tell him,” she admitted, wrapping her arms around herself. “But...” she trailed off.

Jonathan stepped next to her, putting his arm around her shoulders. “What?” he asked, already suspecting the answer, but urging her to speak the words out loud. He had long ago learned that Karen was not someone you could just tell the right answer to. She needed to figure it out for herself.

“Why is this so hard?” she asked in a small voice, leaning against him.

“Telling him? It was always going to be hard, we knew that going in.”

“No, not... well, that too, but I meant in general. All of this! Why is this so hard?”

Jonathan nodded, understanding. “Being a parent, you mean? Well, nobody ever said it would be easy. And it shouldn’t be, because it’s the most important job in the world and needs to be done right.”

“Am I doing it right?” she asked, sounding so very young.

“Karen,” he said, grabbing her by the shoulders and turning her to look at him. “You have done an amazing job with Clark. He’s such a great kid. Never doubt that you are a great mother!”

“But that’s just the thing, isn’t it?” she said, looking away from him again. “I am not his mother, not really. And when I tell him that...” her voice died and he could see the tears glistening on her face.

“It was never supposed to be like this,” she suddenly growled, jumping down from the porch. “I
was 13, damn it! Just 13 years old! I was just a kid myself!”

Jonathan followed her down from the porch, watching her as she angrily paced back and forth. He didn’t move to intercept her, though, figuring that this was something she needed to get off her chest.

“I knew something was up, I had seen how worried dad and Uncle Jor had been, but I never suspected…” she stopped pacing in front of the barn, where Jonathan had left the old, worn-out tires he had taken off the tractor a few days ago. He had planned to take them for recycling next week. Kara grabbed one of the huge tires and tore it to shreds with her bare hands.

“And then the ground starts shaking and they tear me out of bed and tell me, hey, Kara, guess what! Krypton is dying! Time to get into your rocket ship and leave for an alien world! How was I supposed to react to that?”

She picked up another tire and tore it into confetti as well. “And by the way, we only got the one rocket and that means it’s just going to be you and your baby cousin. So from here on out you can’t be a kid anymore, you need to take care of him!”

The remaining two tires quickly followed and with nothing further to destroy, Karen just sunk down to her knees amidst a sea of shredded rubber, tears still glistening on her face.

“Couldn’t they have just built a bigger rocket?” she asked. “Just big enough for maybe just one more person? Just one more? So it wouldn’t all be up to me?”

Jonathan squatted down beside her. “Why didn’t they build a bigger rocket?” He knew why, of course. Karen had explained it all to them years ago, but it seemed she needed to hear herself explain it one more time.

“They couldn’t,” Karen sniffed, angrily wiping at her tears. “The hyper drive’s energy requirements grow exponentially the bigger the ship is. Building multiple smaller ships was the only way to do it with the power sources they had access to.”

“And the other ships weren’t ready, because it happened too fast,” Jonathan added.

“Even putting two people in the one rocket had been risky,” Kara went on, her eyes unfocused as she stared at events long past. “It only worked because Clark... Kal was so small. The life support systems were barely strong enough to sustain the two of us. Adding an adult would have killed us all.”

Jonathan hugged her again and she gratefully sunk into his embrace. “Your parents loved you, Karen. I am sure they would have come with you if there had been any way, but the most important thing in the universe for them was to make sure that you were safe, no matter what. I would have done exactly the same. And you would do the same for Clark.”

He felt her nod against his shoulder. “Of course I would. I wouldn’t even have to think about it. But... Rao, this is going to sound so unfair to them, but dying for someone is easy. It’s fast, it happens in the blink of an eye. I feel like they... they just pushed the much harder job on me and never even asked if I was ready for it!”

Jonathan understood. “No one is ever really ready for that, Karen. I know it was so much harder for you than for anyone else, all things considered, but it’s the same for any parent. You are right, it’s a much harder job to live for someone else. Day by day, week by week, year by year. You worry every day, you have to be there every day, it’s hard.”
“I never even thought about being a mother before,” Karen muttered. “Not sure I even wanted to be one. Pretending to be his mom seemed the best way to ensure that no one tried to separate Clark and me, but...”

“But now you are not pretending anymore, are you? You haven’t for quite some time.”

Karen nodded again. “He is my son, Jonathan! I love him so much! And I am so scared that... when I tell him the truth... do you think he...?”

“You listen to me, Karen Colleen Kent,” Jonathan said, making her look him in the eye again. “Clark deserves to know where he comes from, he deserves to know the names of his birth parents, but none of that will change that he is YOUR SON! You raised that boy, you were there for him every day for the last 11 years. There might well be some angry words when he learns the truth, but he is your son by any definition that matters and that will never, ever change, you understand?”

“How can you be so sure?” she asked in a small, vulnerable voice.

“Because we are family, all of us. Maybe not by blood, maybe the documents are all forged, but that does not matter. Because just as sure as Clark is your son, you are my daughter! And I know you feel bad when you slip up and call Martha mom or call me dad, we fully understand that and it’s okay. But you are our daughter. The day you fell from the sky was the happiest day of our lives and we would not exchange it for anything. Even if we can never, ever publicly acknowledge it, we are proud to be the parents of the greatest woman this world has ever known. Just as we are proud to be the grandparents of the boy that will never, ever cease to be your son, no matter what!”

Jonathan realized that this was something that he had needed to get off his chest, too, for quite a while now. He and Martha had always been aware that Karen had a bit of a self-esteem issue when it came to their family. They knew that some small part of her felt that the Kents had only taken her in because of Clark, no matter how often they told her otherwise. They knew that she struggled with reconciling her feelings for her family here on Earth with the loving memories of her parents back on Krypton.

Maybe now she would finally understand that she was loved. That she deserved to be loved, both by her parents, both sets of them, and by her son.

Karen looked up at him for a long moment, then she cuddled against his chest and hugged him hard enough to make his ribs protest. “I will tell Cark soon, I promise! Thank you... dad!”

*****

End Chapter 8

Author’s Note: I’ve intentionally left out the exact years where these events happen, as I don’t want to be get too tied down. I referenced Jonathan’s older brother dying in Vietnam, but that’s about it. Lana and Clark are doing research on the Internet here and Kara and Diana are using mobile phones in earlier chapters, but given that Kara is introducing advanced tech to the world behind the scenes, those things might well have come along earlier in this world than in our own. So we’ll keep it vague.

Clark will be told the truth soon, I promise. I just really enjoy writing the dynamic of the Kent family and their secrets, though, so you will have to indulge me a bit longer. The scene between Kara and Jonathan is partially inspired by my favorite scene from the entire Smallville series between Jonathan and Clark where Clark finds out that his real father sent him to Earth as a conqueror. John Schneider really killed it in that scene as Jonathan Kent when he told Clark that it
didn’t matter and that he was his son, no matter what. I hope I managed to capture some of that emotion here, too.
Chapter 9: In Darkest Night

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For as long as anyone could remember, the members of the Green Lantern Corps had served as the protectors of the space ways and keepers of law and order in the universe. The mighty Guardians of the Universe had divided known space into 3,600 sectors, usually centered on galaxies, and each sector was assigned a Green Lantern, usually selected from a native species.

Sector 2814, which centered on the galaxy human astronomers called the Milky Way, had been the beat of Green Lantern Abin Sur for a long time now. For well over a century, as humans would measure time, he had worn the powerful Green Lantern ring. The ring, product of a science so advanced that it might as well be called magic, was able to turn its wearer’s thoughts into reality, giving shape to them in green light. Many called it the most powerful weapon in the universe and only those who were able to master their fear were worthy to wear it.

In his long stint as a Green Lantern, Abin had saved so many lives, prevented so many catastrophes, that he could hardly count them all. It were not the faces of the people he had successfully saved that appeared in his dreams at night, though. It was his failures that haunted him, few as they might be.

One such failure, it seemed, was about to come back to haunt him.

The planet called Earth by its inhabitants was not one Abin visited regularly. It was a primitive world in a rather out-of-the-way sector of space. Few stellar catastrophes happened here, no interstellar powers competed for this quadrant, space-faring outlaws sought more profitable gains on more advanced worlds. He had been here only about half a dozen times in his entire Green Lantern career, if that, usually when tracking someone or something. Today, though, was just supposed to be a peaceful flyby, nothing more.

It would turn out to be a far from normal day, though.

“Search parameters triggered,” the soothing voice of his power ring rang in his mind. “Traces of Kryptonian technology identified.”

Abin froze upon hearing those words, not quite believing what he was hearing. Kryptonians? Could it really be after all these years? Unbidden the memories surged from the back of his mind.

*****

11 years ago:
Abin Sur, Green Lantern of sector 2814, would forever curse the fates or gods or whatever other powers might have been in play that day for delaying him on the planet Orestes for so long. Maybe if his ring had picked up the disturbance sooner, maybe if he had been here a day ago, a week, maybe then he could have done something. But a solar flare had threatened to rip away Orestes’ ozone layer and he had been stuck in place for hours, using his ring to shield an entire hemisphere from utter destruction. All the while another planet was in peril, even more innocent lives in danger.

He had visited the planet Krypton numerous times in the past. From the recordings left by his predecessors, he was aware that the Kryptonians had once been a space-faring race, rulers of a vast empire in this region of the Milky Way. As it happened often, though, their empire eventually collapsed under its own weight. Colonies were abandoned for lack of resources, expansion was halted, stagnation set in. The once mighty Kryptonian empire disappeared and its progenitors returned to their own planet.

For as long as Abin Sur had been a Green Lantern, he had only known the planet Krypton as a very insular place, its people not interested in the events of the larger galaxy. They seemed content to stay on their own world, even though their technology easily allowed for interstellar travel. During his last visit here, many years ago, he had noticed a troubling development in that the Kryptonians had begun mining energy directly from their planet’s core. Still, they were highly advanced and would certainly see the error of their ways before it was too late. Or so he had thought.

Surrounded by the green nimbus of energy that kept his body safe from the ravages of space, he streaked towards the dying planet as fast as his formidable will could propel him. His ring was scanning ahead, feeding the data it picked up directly into his mind, and it told him that he was far too late. Krypton’s core was already collapsing, a chain reaction had already begun, and the planet was breaking apart even as he watched. Continents crumbled, oceans boiled, dust obscured everything from view. Krypton was in its death throes and there was nothing even the most powerful weapon in the universe could do to change that.

Refusing to accept it, Abin poured every erg of his will into the ring on his finger, willing it to go faster, to find some way of saving these billions of lives. The green light blazed brightly around him, preventing fragments of the crumbling world from hitting him, and he still sped towards the center of the destruction. He sent a beam of green energy ahead of himself, hoping to somehow contain the uncontainable, knowing he was already too late.

The planet’s abused core exploded outward, fusing matter into energy, irradiating everything it could touch. Not even the fabled Green Light could contain the raw fury of a dying world. The ring’s automatic feature quickly redirected all its power towards protecting its wielder, surrounding him in an impenetrable aura, preserving his life. And Abin Sur watched, safely protected, as a world he had walked numerous times in the past simply died.

He had failed, it rang out in his mind again and again. He had failed.

Cruel fate would also have it that Abin Sur was on the entirely wrong side of the dying planet, so even his mighty power ring completely missed the small space craft that successfully escaped the calamity.

*****

Ever since that day, Abin Sur had kept a look out for survivors of the planet he had failed to save. The Kryptonians had been a space-faring race in the distant past and had retained the technology, even if they refused to use it. Surely some had seen the doom coming and fled. Surely some had survived despite his failure.
He had never found anything, though. Not until today.

“Can you identify the source?” he asked his ring. “Is it active Kryptonian tech or just some leftovers from their colonizaton era?”

He had come across quite a few old Kryptonian colonies in his time. All of them had been dead, empty, long since gone to dust. Occasionally there had been remnants of Kryptonian technology, but all of it had ceased working eons ago. All that remained of the once great Kryptonian empire.

“Energy signature indicates active power source,” the ring told him.

Could it really be true? After all this time, could he have really found some survivors? He had to be sure.

“Home in on the source,” he commanded and shot down towards the surface of the planet. The ring guided him towards the planet’s northern pole. Whatever it had picked up was somewhere among the ice. It made sense, really. Earth was a primitive world. Surely if there were Kryptonian survivors here, they would hide their presence from the natives.

He finally spotted his destination. If one didn’t know exactly what to look for, one would easily mistake it for just another ice berg. Abin Sur had seen Kryptonian crystal construction before, though. It was clearly a base of some sort and it was clearly active.

“Any signs of life?” His ring scanned the structure, even as he became aware that he was being scanned in turn. No Earth-build sensor would be able to pick up a Green Lantern in stealth mode, but Kryptonian tech was more advanced. Clearly he had been spotted, which was just fine with him.

“No biological life within the structure,” his ring said, threatening to make his hope crash and burn. Was this just some left-over outpost then? An old computer waiting for the return of its makers, not knowing they were all dead?

“Alert,” his ring suddenly called for his attention. “Object approaching at supersonic speed. Impact imminent!”

Before Abin Sur even had time to react, he was suddenly yanked out of his own flight path by something incredibly fast and strong. They travelled at least a hundred miles or more before Abin could even begin to orient himself again and by this time his attacker had let go of him, sending him tumbling through the air and onto the frozen ground.

When he finally regained his bearings, he found himself face to face with a floating woman. A woman with eyes burning an angry red and something he recognized as a Kryptonian family sigil on her chest.

“You are not welcome here!” the Kryptonian, for what else could she be, growled at him.

The open hostility somewhat took him aback, but he had been a Green Lantern for a long time and being met with suspicion was nothing new.

“I mean no harm to you or this world,” he said calmly. “I am Green L...”

“I know exactly who you are, Abin Sur!”

Okay, he had not expected that.
Kara-El certainly remembered Abin Sur. Growing up on Krypton, there were certain things one inevitably picked up, even as a child. Kryptonians were suspicious of other worlds and other races. They had been space travelers once, but it hadn’t worked out so well for them, so now they happily stayed on their own world and everyone else could just happily stay on theirs, thank you very much. There was no outright xenophobia as such, Kryptonians didn’t hate aliens or wished to exterminate them, there was just this general agreement that everyone would be far better off sticking to their own kind and their own business.

The one exception to that unwritten rule was the Green Lantern Corps, the legendary protectors of space. Even Kryptonians had to admit that the members of the Corps did good work and were to be admired for their deeds. More than 300 years ago, when Krypton’s moon Wegthor had exploded due to a botched weapon test, it had been a Green Lantern who had saved the planet from the fallout.

When Kara was a child, almost everyone on Krypton knew the name of Abin Sur, the Green Lantern responsible for their sector of space. He had been on Krypton several times in the past, had prevented catastrophes and saved lives. Kara had never seen him in person, but she recognized his face from newscast and pictures. Kryptonians regarded him as a hero, despite his alien nature.

When her planet had crumbled around her, she had very briefly hoped that the great hero Abin Sur would swoop in to save them all. No hero came swooping in, though. Krypton died.

“I know exactly who you are, Abin Sur!” she growled, anger surging forth at seeing the face of the hero who never showed.

He was obviously puzzled by her reaction. “I fear you have me at a disadvantage,” he said after a moment. “If we have met in the past, I must admit I do not remember.”

Kara scoffed. “I didn’t expect you to. You have probably forgotten there ever was a planet called Krypton.”

She saw him flinch upon hearing the name of her home world. “You truly are a Kryptonian then?” he asked, his face filling with something that almost looked like joy. “I have searched for so long...”

“Congratulations then,” she interrupted him. “You have found the Kryptonian, your search is over. My name is Kara-El, last daughter of Krypton.”

“Last?” he asked, his face filling with sorrow. It only made her more angry. What right did he have to feel sorrow for the death of the world he had not saved?

“My world died, Green Lantern, in case you missed the memo. My entire race died. Every last one of them. There are none left but me.” Hell would freeze over before she told this guy about Clark’s existence.

“I know about Krypton’s fate,” Abin Sur said. “You have my deepest sympathies. For years I had hoped that some had escaped Krypton’s end. I looked for your kind all over the galaxy. It... I am sorry to hear that you are the sole survivor.”

“Nice words, Green Lantern. Feel free to leave now and don’t bother coming back. This planet already has someone to protect it. Earth doesn’t need a hero who’ll only turn up a decade after he was needed.”
*****

The Kryptonian’s words cut deep. He could easily see her anger and a part of him very much felt like he deserved it. He had failed to save Krypton, there was no denying it. But still, his sense of pride would not allow him to shoulder the entire blame.

“That which destroyed Krypton was not a threat from outside,” he said. “I shall carry the guilt of not being there in time to save your people for the rest of my days, but in the end they caused their own demise.”

She had already begun turning away from, but now she stopped and raised an eye brow at his statement. “So we had it coming, is that it? Is that why you were not there, Abin Sur? Does the great Green Lantern only save those he deems deserving?”

“I WAS there on that day,” he yelled, immediately taken aback by his own vehemence. “And I did everything I could to try and save your world!”

“You were there?” she asked him, the fierceness of her anger burned like fire. “You were there when the ground shook and tore open? You were there when the sky began to burn? When the oceans boiled? When the crystal towers collapsed and my people died by the millions because a few old men were too stupid to accept the truth of what was happening? Tell me how you were there, Abin Sur, for I certainly did not see you when my parents put me in a rocket, hoping against hope to save me. There was no green light there to save them or anyone else. So where were you, Abin Sur?”

“I WAS THERE!” he insisted again, all his guilt unloading itself in the form of anger. “I flew to Krypton as fast as I could! I did EVERYTHING I could. I wanted to save your people!”

“THEN WHY DIDN’T YOU?” she yelled back.

Quite suddenly his anger faded, for he recognized that the anger of the woman before him was not really directed at him. She was angry at the fates, the gods, or whatever other powers had been at play that day, just like him. She was angry at an uncaring universe that allowed the shortsightedness of a few to seal the fate of an entire world.

“I failed,” he simply said. “I tried my best, and it was not enough on that day. I am deeply sorry.”

Standing in front of her, he slowly slid the Green Lantern ring from his finger. His uniform faded away, to be replaced with the civilian garb he wore when he was off duty and back on his own home world. The green nimbus around his body winked out and he stood before her as a defenseless man.

“I failed in my duties as a Green Lantern. If you wish to enact retribution for my failure, I will not keep you from it.”

He saw numerous emotions pass across her face. Surprise, anger, fury, sorrow, and finally just a bone-deep tiredness. The woman, Kara, was certainly much younger than him, but for a moment she seemed to feel just as old as he often did these days.

“Put your ring back on, Abin Sur,” she finally said, wrapping her arms around her body and turning away from him. “You have an entire space sector to protect. You can’t do that without that ring!”

He did as she told him to, the Green Lantern uniform manifesting on his body once again. He was uncertain about his own feelings. For so long he had hoped to find survivors of Krypton, but he had never really thought what to say to them when he finally found them. Had he hoped for absolution?
Had he thought that the guilt he still felt 11 years later would somehow vanish? He didn’t know. The only thing he had found today was a survivor who, it seemed, was still reliving that dark day, just like he did.

“Is there anything I can do for you, Kara-El?” he finally asked when the silence seemed too oppressive. “Any service I can perform?”

*****

A few hours later Kara looked around the bridge of the space ship Abin Sur had taken her on. The technology was unfamiliar, but she was able to guess at most of the functions easily. She just wondered why it existed in the first place.

“I thought Green Lanterns didn’t need space ships to travel through space?” she asked the question that had been on her mind since their arrival here.

“They don’t,” Abin said, having sat down in the command chair. There was a set of manual controls, but he didn’t touch them, apparently steering the ship directly via his power ring. “But patrolling an entire sector means long journeys and I occasionally prefer sleeping in an actual bed.”

She just nodded, not able to think of any other topic for small talk. She wasn’t even sure what she was doing here, to be honest. Rao, this entire day was turning out very strange.

Realizing how much anger she still carried with her for the destruction of Krypton was sobering. She had thought she had dealt with most of it, left it behind her. Seeing Abin Sur, someone who had been regarded as a hero back on her old world, had apparently caused many feelings to well up from deep inside. She had barely recognized her own voice as she basically blamed him for Krypton’s destruction.

She already been primed for a fight, she realized, almost looking forward to unleashing her strength against the Green Lantern. Then he effectively disarmed her by disarming himself in the face of her wrath. It wasn’t him she had wanted to hurt, after all. The people she really wanted to hurt, the people who had laughed at her father and uncle and ignored their warnings, thus dooming billions, were long dead.

When the Green Lantern had offered her his services as penance, she had immediately jumped on the opportunity without thinking about it for any length of time.

“Take me to Krypton,” she had said.

So he took her to his ship, fired up the engines, and then they were off, streaking through hyper space. Towards… what? What did she expect to find? What could she possibly find out there? Abin Sur hadn’t asked. Maybe it would have been better if he had. Maybe it would have forced her to think of an answer.

The journey didn’t take long, the Lantern’s ship, powered by the fabled green ring, was very fast. Eleven years ago Kara’s ship had needed several weeks to cover the distance between Krypton and Earth. Abin Sur needed but a few hours for the same distance. They didn’t talk much during the entire time. Not at all, actually.

“We are there,” he finally said, tearing her from her thoughts. Kara’s eyes found the ship’s main view screen and looked at what was left of her home.

The giant red sun, Rao, was easy to identify. It looked different from space than when seen through an atmosphere, of course. There was no more atmosphere to be found, though. From her astronomy
lessons in school she remembered that Krypton’s system had been home to six planets. Now, though, there were only five.

A massive debris field lay ahead of them, circling the red sun. An eerie green glow seemed to infuse every single piece of rubble, familiar from a piece of rock she had recovered from the torso of a cyborg. Kryptonite! Millions of tons of radioactive Kryptonite. All that was left of her home, all of it lethal to her.

“Don’t fly any closer, please,” she told Abin Sur. She was sure that the ship had radiation shielding, but she didn’t really see the need to test them today. It was bad enough that she could already feel her powers weakening, the absence of the yellow sun light slowly draining her cells. She didn’t need Kryptonite poisoning on top of it.

“I admit I have not been here since that day, either,” Abin Sure said, having brought his ship to a halt.

For a good long while the two of them simply stood there on the bridge of his ship, staring at the graveyard in front of them. For a time Kara imagined she could still see the planet, the pieces fitting back together. The red sun would rise over the crystal towers, which were whole and intact. People would be milling in the streets, her family among them. There were no quakes, no fissures, no dust clouds blotting out the sun. Just Krypton, whole and alive. But it was a lie, a phantasy. Krypton was gone.

Finally Kara turned around.

“Please take me back to Earth,” she said. Back home, she added within her mind.

“How you found what you hoped to find, Kara-El?” he asked, even as he turned his ship around and brought them back into hyperspace.

“I don’t know, Abin Sur. Have you?”

The Green Lantern contemplated her question, then seemed to decide upon an answer. “Not what I hoped to find, no. But maybe what I needed to find.”

She considered this, then nodded. “That sounds about right, yes.”

A few hours later she was back on Earth and her eyes followed Abin Sur as the Green Lantern steered his ship away from Earth again. With her eyes no longer clouded by anger, she had seen the guilt on his face and she believed his words. Maybe meeting her would bring him some amount of peace.

This encounter had been strange, sobering, and possibly cathartic for her as well. Seeing the remnants of her first home world had hurt, yes, but in a way it had also been liberating. Krypton, the planet, was gone, never to return. She had always known this, of course, but knowing and accepting were two different things.

Krypton lived on, though, here on Earth. It lived on in her, it lived on in Clark, the last children of Krypton. And it was time that Krypton’s last son knew about his heritage.

*****

At the very edge of the debris field that had once been the planet Krypton there was something that was not part of the debris. It was a piece of technology, constructed after the destruction, and left here for a very specific purpose. It was a satellite, well-hidden even from the power of a Green
Lantern, and its purpose was finally fulfilled.

“Kryptonian life signs detected,” was the message that the satellite began to broadcast. On its metallic surface three circles, arranged in a triangle, briefly glowed as the message was sent. Then the satellite fell silent again.

*****

End Chapter 9

Author’s Note: I have not yet decided which human Green Lantern to use in my story, but given the time frame, it was pretty clear that the first GL Kara would encounter would have to be Abin Sur. Abin having been on Krypton before it died is canon. It’s also canon that a Green Lantern tried and failed to save Krypton, but it was not Abin Sur. I changed this for my story, though. And if you recognize who or what that bit at the end refers to, then know that it is the version from the DC Animated universe.

As for the time frame regarding the destruction of Krypton, there are many different versions of how long the rocket of Kal-El (and Kara) travelled between the planet’s death and its arrival on Earth. Some versions say but days, others say years. I’m going with Kara’s ship having travelled but a few weeks at the most, simply for expediency. So Krypton died when Kara was 13 and there is no time skip due to her and Clark having been frozen in stasis for years or anything.
Clark Kent was 12 years old when he finally learned the truth.

The day had started like any other day. He got up to find his mom on top of the barn, watching the sunrise as she always did. Lately he sometimes joined her. He couldn’t fly on his own yet, but he was getting quite proficient at leaping and could easily jump up to join her (and without tearing half the barn’s roof down in the process. That had only been the one time and never since!) They had then joined Uncle John and Aunt Martha for breakfast before Clark headed to school and his mom headed out to either save the world as Superwoman or invent some amazing new gadgets. The only thing that was slightly different was that his mom told him to keep his evening free, as there was something she wished to talk to him about. He didn’t think too much about it, to be honest.

The day progressed like any other day, too. Eventually school was over and Lana and he headed home. They did homework together at her place and then he finally headed over to the Kent farm. His mom would be home in time for dinner as always when there wasn’t an Earth-shaking emergency and then they would have their talk, whatever it was to be about.

Today, though, there was an Earth-shaking emergency.

When mom didn’t come home on time, the Kents immediately turned on the TV, figuring that someone would be reporting on Superwoman’s latest adventure. They didn’t have to search long, one of the news channels was already on the case.

“... fighting the super villain known as the Parasite, who seems to have grown to gargantuan proportions!”

Clark saw Aunt Martha stiffen in fear. Clark dimly remembered hearing about someone called Parasite before, mom had taken him down a few years ago, he thought. It hadn’t sounded like a big deal then, but Clark knew that his mom was not always telling him everything, especially the dangerous stuff.

Clark knew that his mom was not entirely invulnerable. She was incredibly strong and tough, yes, but there were things out there that could hurt her (and him, too), such as that glowing green stuff she had told him to look out for. He also knew that Aunt Martha always worried, but some days she worried more than others. Right now, she looked as worried as Clark had ever seen her.

“Not that creature again,” Clark heard her whisper.
“Amazingly, Parasite actually seems to have the upper hand,” the reporter said. “Superwoman appears to be weakening every time he gets close to her.”

The Kent family watched in agonized silence as the fight played out on TV. The purple creature called Parasite seemed to be growing larger and more powerful, even as Superwoman tried to keep a distance and pelted him with pieces of debris and the occasional car, too. The battle seemed to last hours, though only a few minutes had passed in actuality.

“... Superwoman has managed to pin the creature under a ton of rubble, I don’t think he’s getting out of that one. Chalk up another win for... wait, something is wrong. Superwoman is swaying, she... oh God, she’s collapsed.”

With the Parasite apparently subdued, the reporters were moving closer to the scene and the picture now showed Superwoman, his mom, on her hands and knees, struggling to remain upright. All three Kents gasped at the same time, finally getting a good look at her.

“Dear god, are you seeing this back at the studio? Superwoman, she... she looks like she has been starved within an inch of her life.”

Clark began to panic. His mom was always strong, always tough, she could beat anything. But now he was seeing her on TV, looking so weak that even staying on her hands and knees seemed too much. Her blonde hair hung lifeless, her skin was ashen and wrinkled. Her uniform, which usually fit her like a glove (and Clark had NOT needed to hear how many boys at school loved looking at pictures of his mom in her super suit) hung loose on a body that seemed practically emaciated.

“Parasite must have gotten to her before she buried him,” John whispered, his fists clenching so hard Clark could hear his bones creak.

“Oh sweetheart,” Martha gasped, trying to stifle her sobs.

“Paramedics are on the way,” the reporter said, “but I am uncertain how much help they can be.”

Clark had stopped listening, his eyes fixed on his mom. He had never seen her weak, she was always so strong. She was always there for him, no matter what. She could be on the other side of the planet, but when he needed her, she was always there in a flash.

“She just needs some sunlight,” Jonathan said suddenly, though he sounded like he was trying to convince himself. “I’m sure that will help her recover!”

“It’s evening in Metropolis,” Martha said, barely keeping herself from crying. “There won’t be any sunlight until tomorrow morning. She... I don’t think she...”

Clark was only twelve, but he understood. He knew that his mom and he got their powers from the sun. He could feel it every time the sun rose, every time it touched his skin. Standing in the sunlight for ten minutes was better than an all-you-can-eat buffet. Uncle John was right, his mom just needed sunlight and then she would be all right.

There was no sun in Metropolis right now, though. And his mom looked so weak he didn’t know whether she would make it through the next ten minutes, never mind the night. He had never been more afraid in his life.

“We need to tell them,” Martha said, frantically looking for the phone. “We need to tell them to get her into the sunlight!”

“There isn’t anyone who’ll believe us,” John said, looking just as frantic. “And how they are
supposed to get her into sunlight? No vehicle would be fast enough.”

And suddenly things clicked in Clark’s mind. His mom needed to get to sunlight, right now. And except for herself, there was only one other person in the world who was fast and strong enough to make that happen.

He didn’t stop to ask Martha and John for permission, because he could not afford for them to say no. He knew it was dangerous. His powers were still unreliable, unstable. He could run very fast and jump very high, but he couldn’t fly yet. He was strong, but his strength still sometimes came and went. His senses were better than any humans, but he didn’t have full control over them yet, so he sometimes lost focus. But mom had trained him. With every new power, every new increase in strength, she had been right there and taught him how to use it, how to control it.

“One day soon you’ll be a hero, too, Clark,” she would tell him.

“The day is now, mom,” he said to himself and started running.

The landscape blurred past him and Clark had to remind himself not to go too fast, otherwise he wouldn’t be able to avoid obstacles. This would be so much easier if he could fly. Also, he didn’t know exactly where Metropolis was, only the general direction. So he ran along the highway road, easily overtaking even the fastest cars, following the signs saying East. He focused on his vision and his eyes gazed farther and farther. There were more signs, some of them now saying Metropolis. He ran faster, not caring that his clothing began to smolder. A large city was ahead of him, a sign saying “Welcome to Metropolis”.

The harbor wasn’t hard to find, he just headed for the ocean. There was still devastation everywhere, the fight against Parasite had done quite a bit of property damage. Clark didn’t care about any of it. His eyes sought only one thing, his mom, and he finally spotted her.

The next part would be tricky. He knew that he shouldn’t allow people to see him. He could move fast enough that he was little more than a blur, even to cameras, but he needed to time this just right. Usually there was no trouble when he occasionally collided with his mom at super speed during their training, but his mom was hurt and weakened. The last thing he wanted to do was make it worse.

Never in his entire young life had his senses been this sharp, his focus this strong. He moved with certainty, no hesitation, no doubts. His power didn’t fluctuate even once. His mom needed him and he would save her, because that’s what heroes did. That’s what his mom would do. So he blurred past the police line, blurred past the gathered spectators, fire fighters, and medics. The backlash of his passing made some of them stumble, but he didn’t hit anyone. And then he was with his mom, bending down, scooping her up in his arms, and just kept on running.

It was difficult. He was still a good deal smaller than his mom. The weight wasn’t a problem, he was already strong enough to lift Uncle John’s tractor, but the balance was off. He needed to keep running, or he would tip over and send them both tumbling. So he focused on keeping up his speed, never missing a step, even as he started a long curve that took him around Metropolis harbor, out of the city, and finally on a heading back west.

Running in a straight line and outside the city, he finally took a moment to look down at the precious cargo in his arms. He almost stumbled at the sight. His mom looked so bad he wanted to cry, more like a stick figure than her usual self. But he could see that her eyes were open, her hands were clutching weakly at his shoulders. She was alive. She was going to be all right. He just had to get her into sunlight, then everything would be fine.
He kept running west, because he knew that the sun set in the west. It had only just gotten dark in Metropolis when his mom had fought the Parasite, still twilight in Smallville, so it should still be light somewhere out west. So he kept running, faster and faster. A series of sonic booms travelled in his wake, but he didn’t care if he blew out a few windows along the way. Nothing mattered except helping his mom.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, there was light up ahead. They were catching up with the setting sun. Clark kept on running, overtaking the shadows of evening, and the first rays of sunlight finally touched him and his mom. He could feel it, could feel his skin soak up the energy. He just hoped that Uncle John was right and it would help his mom as well.

He didn’t dare look down to check, keeping his eyes on the road ahead. No time to stumble, no time to make a mistake and let the dusk catch up with them again. He needed to keep heading west, into the sunlight, no matter what. He felt his mom moving in his arms, he thought he could feel the wrinkles in her suit smooth out, but maybe it was just his imagination. No matter, he had to keep running.

Quite suddenly there was no more land under his feet. He had reached the western end of the continent, there was nothing but ocean ahead of him, nothing but water under his feet. Clark closed his eyes for a moment, fearing that he would stumble and lose control. They’d go under where the sun didn’t reach and couldn’t heal his mom. When nothing happened, though, he opened his eyes again.

He was running on the water. His feet were moving so fast that by the time they would have broken the water’s surface, they were already gone again. Wow, this was so cool. The sun was rising higher in the sky as he caught up with the day and he was running on water. How awesome was that? If not for the severity of the situation, he would have whooped in delight.

Suddenly his feet lost contact with the water and he was rising into the sky. It took him a moment to understand what was going on, but then he noticed that his mom’s arms had tightened around his body. He looked down at her, seeing her beautiful smile and blue eyes, and he could watch as the sunlight smoothed out her skin, restored her vitality. He was still holding her, but now she was holding him, too, and taking them both into the sky, closer to the sunlight that was making them both stronger.

They had often flown together. It was cool every single time, but he always felt a tiny bit jealous, too, because he could not do it on his own yet. There was no jealousy today, though. Today he was soaring through the sky with his mom and everything was perfect. Because she was going to be just fine.

“Clark, my sweet boy,” she said, smiling brightly. “Great work. Thank you!”

Clark’s own smile put the sun they were still heading towards to shame. He had done it. He had saved his mom. Everything was right in the world.

The day was not over yet, though.

*****

When they finally returned to the Kent farm after simply soaking up sunlight for the better part of an hour, they were almost barreled over by Martha and Jonathan. The elder Kents stormed out of the house and embraced them fiercely. Tears were running down Martha’s face as she closed his mom in her arms, relieved to see her alive and whole. Jonathan’s eyes were shining with wetness, too, as he watched the two most important women in his life embrace.
Looking at Clark, he walked over to him and put both his hands on Clark’s shoulders.

“That was terribly reckless of you, Clark,” he said, a stern look on his face. Clark was about to speak up in protest, but then John’s lips curved up in a smile. “You did great, kid! Thank you for bringing her home safely.”

“Please never frighten me like that again, Karen,” Martha said, still refusing to let go of her niece. “Both of you, please never frighten me like that again!”

“I’ll do my best,” Karen said, “but you know I can’t promise you that.”

For a long moment the two women looked into each other’s eyes and seemed to communicate without words. Their eyes moved over to look at Clark, before meeting with those of Jonathan. John seemed to not understand for a moment, but then looked resolute, nodding. Karen finally moved out of Martha’s embrace and walked over to Clark, kneeling down in front of him.

“I was never more proud of you than I was today, Clark,” she said. “And if you still feel up to it after all that happened, I think it’s finally time.”

“Time for what?” he asked, confused.

“Time for you to learn the truth, Clark. The whole truth!”

*****

Kara was sure that there had been other days in her life when she had been scared as much as today. The day Krypton died, of course. That was forever etched into her mind. Several days in that first year here on Earth, when she had struggled to gain control of her powers and was uncertain what the future would bring for her and Clark. Certainly some others, too.

None of it changed the fact that she was currently working very hard to keep her fear under control. Fighting the Parasite in Metropolis had been an ordeal. The creature was dangerous enough all by itself, but since it had learned to siphon off her power simply through proximity without actually having to touch her, it had become near-suicide to fight it. She had beaten it, yes, but it had taken every single bit of strength left in her.

As she had fallen to her knees, no energy left in her body, she had briefly thought that this would be it. She would never be able to return to her family. The night had just begun, the sun that could save her would not return until morning. She would die right there on the cold concrete of Metropolis harbor without ever getting to tell Clark the truth, as she had planned to do that very evening.

But then Clark, her sweet Clark, had swooped in to save her like the hero she had always known he would become. A part of her was angry at his recklessness, at risking his own safety like that, but a much larger part was so proud that she felt like bursting. She had already committed to finally telling him everything and that had only reaffirmed it. It was time.

Rao, she was so very afraid of his reaction.

The plan how to tell him had been in place for years. Martha, Jonathan, and she had gone over it time and time again. So when Clark predictably told her that he wanted to know today and not wait a minute longer, she took him into her arms and together they flew north. Further and further north until there was nothing but ice beneath them. She could hear Clark gasp when he spotted their destination.
“What is that?” he asked, breathless.

“That, Clark, is our Fortress!”

To the casual observer the Fortress looked like an iceberg, but it was actually constructed from Kryptonian crystal. Technology far ahead of anything else on Earth kept it intact despite the cold and the wind, kept it floating with the ice shelf. As Kara approached, she felt the sweep of sensors, the Fortress’ computer making sure that only the two people who were allowed here could approach.

One of the walls opened up and Kara swooped in, gently setting down in what she had come to think of as the reception area of the Fortress. Not that there had ever been any sort of reception here. She was barely ever here herself and Clark was the only other person ever to come. It was his birthright as much as it was hers.

“Did you build this place?” Clark asked, looking around with wide eyes.

“Kind of. I had the right tools, though. You’ll understand in a moment.”

She took his hand and led him down the corridor. At 12 years old, he was now reaching the age where he usually resented his mom holding his hand in public, but these were special circumstances. So he followed meekly, obviously already close to being overwhelmed.

In the chamber ahead of them was the ship. The craft that had brought them here to Earth so many years ago. After the Fortress had been finished, built in just a few hours thanks to Kryptonian construction crystals, Kara had brought it here to make sure that it would never fall into the wrong hands. The Fortress was somewhat more secure than the Kent family barn.

“Is that... a space ship?” Clark asked upon seeing it.

“Yes, it’s a space ship. OUR space ship, Clark.”

He looked at her and she told him the story. She told him of Krypton, the doomed planet. She told him of the day the planet died. She told him how there had only been one space ship ready to launch and that she had climbed onboard with him in her arms, rocketing off to safety. How they had landed in Kansas and been found by the Kents, who had been kind enough to take them in and became their family.

“So we’re… aliens? Real aliens?” Clark asked, trying to digest it all. He had always known that they were special, of course, and had asked her not too long ago why they had powers when Aunt Martha and Uncle John didn’t. He knew about the Amazons, thanks to Diana, and had once asked her whether they might be related to them. Aliens, however, had never entered his thoughts, it seemed.

“Yes, Clark. Your birth name is Kal. Kal Jor-El. And mine is Kara-El.”

He nodded, then looked up at her. “And my dad? What was his name?”

“His name was Jor-El. And...” she hesitated, swallowed, and finally managed to force the words out. “And your mother’s name was Lara.”

The silence that followed was so loud it made her ears ring. Clark just stood here, staring at her, clearly not comprehending. She could barely believe it herself, uttering these words after so many years of pretending otherwise.
“What?” he finally said.

“I... I am not your mother, Clark,” Rao, it hurt to say these words. “I am actually your cousin. Your father Jor was my uncle, the younger brother of my father, Zor-El. My mother’s name was Alura. Our fathers built the ship that took us to safety and it was Lara who put you into my arms, telling me to take care of you, even as I begged them to not send us off alone, to come with us.”

Tears were filling her eyes as she somehow found the strength to keep talking.

“I am sorry for lying to you for so long, Clark, but we thought it the best way to make sure that no one would ever try to take you away from me here on Earth. I never wanted to take Lara’s place in your life, please believe me, but you were still so young. We didn’t think you would be able to keep the secret from everyone, unless you truly believed that I was your mom.”

Clark said nothing, just staring at her, then staring at the ship. Kara walked over to a control panel on the wall and flipped several switches. Moments later the lights in the room dimmed and holographic images began to show. Images of four people in Kryptonian clothing, standing tall in a circle around the room.

“This is our family, Clark,” she said. “Those are your parents Jor and Lara,” she indicated. “And those are my mom and dad are over there.”

Clark turned where he stood, taking in the images surrounding him, still not saying a word.

“The holograms are interactive,” Kara went on. “They’re not actual artificial intelligences, but they’re programmed with everything the computers know about the people they represent and all my memories of them, too. You can ask them questions if you want.”

“Can…,” he began, stumbling over the words. “Can you give me a minute?”

Kara simply nodded and walked out of the room. Rao, how she had dreaded this day. She had done the right thing, she firmly believed that, but she had still lied to Clark, her sweet little Clark. She was unable to say when exactly she had stopped thinking of him as Kal. To her, he was Clark, had been for years. Not her cousin, Kal. He was Clark. Her son.

She stopped in the reception area, just standing there and waiting. She picked up the beginnings of the Jor-El hologram saying something to Clark, but then deliberately stopped listening, giving him privacy. Clark had wanted to know about his father for so very long, he deserved to have his privacy for it.

It had been a long day. A lot to put on a boy that was still just 12 years old. She was only 25 herself, really not that much of a difference, but she felt so much older. She still thought of herself as Kara-El most of the time. Kara who remembered Krypton. Kara who grew up the daughter of Zor and Alura. Kara who watched as Krypton died. But she was also Karen Kent, who had grown into a woman under the loving care of Jonathan and Martha. Karen, the mother of a sweet little boy who was the single most important thing in the universe to her. For the last 12 years she had been both. Kara and Karen. Super-powered Kryptonian and teenage human mother. And she wanted to be both. She WAS both.

She didn’t know how much time had passed. Half an hour maybe? She had just stood there, staring at nothing, waiting, the universe seemingly holding its breath. Finally there were footsteps, Clark emerging from the corridor behind her. She turned around, looking at him as he came towards her.

“I am sure you have many questions,” she finally said, her voice somehow sounding steady despite
the turmoil of emotions inside of her.

“Hundreds,” he said, his own voice somewhat shaky. “But for now I just have one.”

“Which one?”

He came closer, looking up at her. She knew that he would soon be as tall as her, probably taller, but for now he was still smaller. Still a child.

Her child.

“I get that you are really my cousin. I understand that. But...”

“Yes?” she asked as his voice trailed off.

His eyes met hers. “Is it okay if I keep calling you mom?”

Kara took him into her arms. “Always!”

And the universe exhaled.

*****

End Chapter 10

**Author’s Note:** I didn’t really see this last scene coming, it sort of snuck up on me. This was actually one of the first chapters I wrote and I had this whole thing worked out where Clark would go into a teenage snit, act out, yell, brood, and everything. And then this happened. It’s been eight years since I lost my mom and I guess I really miss her still. I recently saw the Aquaman movie and when Arthur was reunited with his long-lost mom, I bawled my eyes out. Do me a favor and go hug your mom if you still can.

Oh, and the scene of Clark finding out he can run over water was, of course, inspired by The Incredibles. Greatest superhero family ever to be put on the big screen, bar none.

This chapter marks the end of the first story arc, so to speak, which covered the time period from Kara and Kal’s arrival on Earth to Clark being told the truth and taking the first step towards becoming Superboy. The origin mini-series, if you will. There will be fewer time skips from here on out.
Chapter Summary

Where it turns out that learning to fly is the hardest thing.

Chapter 11: First Flight

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The Present:

There was a tremendous boom as a small but very invulnerable object impacted on the rocky ground. As the dust cleared, a shallow crater became visible, the form of a barely adolescent boy slowly getting back to his feet within it. A moment later another shape came down from the sky, far more slowly, and gently set down beside him.

“You are doing it wrong,” Kara said, shaking her head with a smile.

“Obviously,” Clark replied, angrily brushing the dirt from his clothes. “Otherwise I would hardly have hit the ground face-first.”

“You are still treating it like a jump,” Kara told him fondly. “You can’t just jump out of gravity’s reach, Clark! Our enhanced musculature allows us amazing leaps, but it has nothing to do with our ability to fly.”

“I heard this lecture before, mom,” he replied testily.

“Then you obviously didn’t listen,” she fired back, though her heart still melted every single time he called her mom. Clark knew now, after all. He knew that she was actually his cousin by birth, that his true mother had died along with their home world. He knew it all now and yet he still called her mom. There was no better feeling in the universe.

“You have gained excellent control over your strength and speed, Clark,” she told him, “but there are more aspects to our powers than just. Look at this!”

She walked over to where a particularly large rock rested and easily lifted it above her head. She then walked over to where the rocky ground slowly gave way to packed earth and grass, still with the rock over her head.

“Look at my feet,” she told her son, “and tell me what you see!”

Clark did as he was told, but the puzzlement on his face was obvious. “I don’t get it,” he finally admitted.

“I am carrying a rock that weights at least three tons, Clark,” she patiently explained, “and I am now standing on relatively soft ground.”
She raised an eyebrow at him, waiting for him to understand.

“And yet you aren’t sinking in,” he replied suddenly. “With that kind of weight, your feet should sink in.”

“Exactly,” she told him. “So why am I not sinking in?”

Clark looked puzzled again, trying to wrap his mind around it. “Because... obviously it’s something to do with our ability to fly, right? I mean, are you using your flight power to compensate for the weight somehow?”

“Close,” she told him, carefully putting the rock down again. “Our physical strength comes partially from the enhancing effect of the sun, yes, but we still can’t circumvent physics entirely. I am not lifting this rock purely through muscle power, Clark. If I did, I’d be far more likely to simply tear off a portion of it rather than lift the whole thing.”

She walked over to him and with every step she slowly rose a bit above the ground, quickly floating half a meter above it.

“The yellow sunlight charges up our cells and allows our bodies to project an energy field that constantly surrounds us like a second skin. It’s the source of our invulnerability and also what allows us to negate the pull of gravity, both on our ourselves and also – to a limited degree – on things we are in contact with.”

“Is that how you managed to lift that ocean liner out of the sea a few years back?” Clark asked, excited. “Lana told me that it should have been impossible, that the ship should have broken in half where you were holding it.”

“Exactly,” she told him, smiling proudly. “We basically expand our own energy field to negate the pull of gravity around objects we carry, in essence making them lighter. And it’s that energy field, too, which allows us to fly.”

Clark squatted down on the ground, huffing in frustration. “You make it look so easy, mom!”

“Years of practice,” she said, sitting down beside him. “You should have seen me when we first got here. A Kryptonian’s ability to absorb and use solar energy develops when we begin puberty. Yours kicked in slowly over time, but I was already a teenager coming here. I got a full dose of energy and the powers that come with it practically the moment I stepped out of the ship.”

“I wish I go the fast version, too,” Clark pouted.

Kara laughed, ruffling his hair. “Believe me, you got the better deal!”

*****

The Past:

Kara slowly got back to her feet, spitting out dirt. Her ears were still ringing from the boom caused by her collision with the mountainside. And wasn’t this a ludicrous notion all by itself? She had crashed into the side of a mountain and the first thing she complained about was ringing ears.

“This planet is going to drive me crazy,” she muttered, picking bits of rock out of her hair.

Slowly getting back to her feet, she looked at the huge impact crater she had made on the mountain. Well, it seemed that the invulnerability thing was working, more or less. She felt a bit
sore, but certainly not as if she had impacted a mountain at high speed.

“Seems you were right about that one, dad,” she mused.

Her dad and uncle Jor had uploaded their entire research into the computers of the escape ship. Everything they had known about Earth and all their theories about the effects of the yellow sunlight on Kryptonian physiology. That Kryptonians had the ability to metabolize sunlight through their cell structure was nothing new, everyone back home had known that. It was the reason the Kryptonians had still worshipped their sun, Rao, as a god despite having been a highly enlightened, advanced civilization. Rao had been a red sun, though, close to the end of its life cycle. Its light was nowhere near as potent as the one coming from Earth’s sun, Sol. So back on Krypton this ability had made the average Kryptonian somewhat stronger, faster, and tougher than your average human, but not by much.

The El brothers had speculated that Sol’s far more potent sunlight would enhance her strength and speed, as well as supercharge her senses. That was certainly true. She still had trouble controlling her senses unless she really focused, especially in direct sunlight. And she was definitely strong, very strong, which came with its own set of problems. She had broken at least a dozen doorknobs so far and was incapable of eating with utensils without destroying them. Getting the hang of that was proving to be very, very hard.

There were clearly some things, though, that the El brothers had not foreseen. Things that Kara had experienced several times now, though never on purpose. The foremost thing being that she had woken up several times to find herself floating near the ceiling of her room. Every single time she fell back down the moment she came fully awake, so for a while she had considered it a dream. Then Martha had seen it, too, though, which meant it was real. Somehow, some way, she was able to fly.

She squatted down to think. Clearly jumping was not the answer. She could jump extremely high by now (though her landings still had plenty of room for improvement), but no matter how hard she struggled, she didn’t stay up there. Which was logical, of course. Clearly her ability to fly had nothing to do with muscle power. There had to be more to it.

She closed her eyes, trying to relax. There were some things she had noticed during the past few months as she tried to get a handle on her powers. She was easily lifting things that should tip her over, given that her weight was only marginally higher than the average human teenager’s was. So clearly she was doing more than simply lifting with muscle power.

Did it have something to do with her invulnerability? That was clearly the result of her cells being supercharged with yellow sunlight, given that she had been perfectly capable of getting hurt back home. She tried to focus on the energy running underneath her skin, trying to picture it. Could this energy somehow lift her up? Somehow negate the pull of gravity?

She opened her eyes again, only to let out a yelp as she found herself floating half a meter off the ground. A moment later she tumbled back down. The impact didn’t hurt, but it was still kind of embarrassing to end up on her ass again.

“Okay, so I’m on the right track, I think,” she muttered to herself, getting up to try again. She was going to fly, damn it!

*****

The Present:
“How long did it take you until you could fly?” Clark asked, having listened to her recounting. He had a hard time imagining his mom as a lanky teenager with barely any control over her powers. As far back as he could remember she had always been in full control of her abilities.

“The better part of a year,” she confessed. “I had long since mastered all my other abilities, at least to the point where I wasn’t breaking stuff or setting things on fire with my eyes, but flying eluded me for a long, long time. I did manage to float now and then, but never with any control and never more than a few seconds before I lost my focus. It was only once I began to really understand the process behind it that I finally managed to gain control.”

“So you figured it out all on your own?” Clark asked. “The whole thing with the force field and that it negated gravity? I’m not sure I’d ever have thought of that.”

“I had quite a bit of background to fall back on,” she said. “Your dad and mine had studied the phenomenon as far as it was possible without actually being under a yellow sun themselves and it gave me a lot of pointers. The actual doing, though, well, that was all trial and error. I lost count of how many times I ate dirt and damaged mountainsides before I finally had it down.”

Clark chuckled. “I’d really have liked to see that.”

“Just remember I have plenty of baby photos of you, young man,” she told him sternly. “Many of whom Lana hasn’t seen yet, too.”

Clark paled a bit, quickly changing the topic. “So... you basically meditated on the energy in your cells to get it down?”

“Basically, yes, though I’m not sure it qualifies as meditation. It was more about learning to focus on something that is part of your body. It took me a long time, as I said.”

“Any pointers for a short cut?” he asked hopefully.

She opened her mouth as if to shoot him down, then stopped, frowning. “There might actually be a way. I’m not sure it will work, but we can give it a try. Give me your hands!”

Shifting so that he was sitting directly facing his mom, Clark reached out and the two clasped hands. She closed her eyes and he did likewise.

“Now, what I’m going to do is to use my powers to make us both float off the ground, Clark. And I want you to focus on what it feels like. Try to feel the energy as it envelops you and negates the pull of gravity around your body.”

Clark nodded and tried to focus. There was a tingle running over his hands where his mom touched him, a tingle that went up his arms and seemed to slowly spread over his body. He started a bit when he felt himself lose contact with the ground.

“Focus, Clark,” his mom reminded him. “Just focus on the feeling of the energy on your skin. Can you feel it?”

“Yes,” he nodded. He did feel it. It was the slightest of sensations, so light he was sure he would have missed it had he not concentrated so hard. His mom had often taken him flying and he had never noticed that feeling before. Well, he had been too busy thinking how awesome it was to fly.

Focusing his thoughts once again, he tried to get a taste (it was the wrong sense, but he couldn’t think of a better word for it) of the feeling. The energy tasted familiar, which was a given seeing how often he had flown with his mom before. But it wasn’t just that.
Barely noticing that his mom let go of one of his hands, he focused inwards. There was energy inside him, too, he knew that. But he had never really focused on it before. It had been an academic knowledge. His cells stored energy, which gave him strength, speed, and toughness. Nothing more to it than that.

He imagined it like a nimbus of energy, a bright glow that spread outward from somewhere inside him to envelope his body. With his mom’s energy already dancing across his skin, it felt natural to “answer” with his own energy, which flowed outward and embraced its kin.

“Open your eyes, Clark,” he heard his mom say.

He did as he was told and gasped. They were soaring high above the ground, going at a speed hardly exceeding that of a bird. He gasped again when he saw that his mom was not carrying him as he had first thought, but was instead flying beside him, only the tips of her fingers touching his hand.

“You’re doing great, Clark,” she said, smiling. “Don’t lose your focus now!”

He nodded, doing his best to keep his thoughts together. He was flying. He had flown before, but always with his mom’s arms around him. This was so very different. He could feel the energy across his skin, could feel it shrug off the pull of gravity below him. It was glorious.

“Ready to try it without the training wheels?” his mom asked. “Just remember to keep your focus. Don’t bother with any fancy flying or anything yet, just keep concentrating and try to stay aloft.”

He nodded, swallowing heavily. He could do this. He could!

He let go of his mom’s hand and immediately started plummeting towards the ground. He screamed, his focus shattering, and a moment later there were arms around him, taking him back upwards. He blushed in embarrassment. He had been so sure he could do this.

“Don’t worry too much, Clark,” his mom reminded him. “I needed a year, remember? You’re going to have this down before long, I’m certain. Now let’s try this again!”

*****

The Past:

Kara shrugged off the pull of gravity and soared upwards at ever greater speed. She couldn’t help but scream in delight at the feeling, knowing she was more powerful than the massive pull of the planet behind her. She had done it, she was finally flying!

Higher and higher she soared, she could feel the air getting thinner. Soon she would have to stop, she realized, but she couldn’t bring herself to. She took a deep breath, figuring she would go as high as she could before her air ran out. The blue sky was darkening, giving way to the deep black of space, and Kara was amazed to find that she wasn’t feeling any need for air.

This is so AWESOME! she screamed inside her head, lacking the air to do it externally. Her flight was taking her farther and farther upward and she could easily see the curve of the planet behind her. She had done it, she was finally flying!

Higher and higher she soared, she could feel the air getting thinner. Soon she would have to stop, she realized, but she couldn’t bring herself to. She took a deep breath, figuring she would go as high as she could before her air ran out. The blue sky was darkening, giving way to the deep black of space, and Kara was amazed to find that she wasn’t feeling any need for air.

This is so AWESOME! she screamed inside her head, lacking the air to do it externally. Her flight was taking her farther and farther upward and she could easily see the curve of the planet by now. And what a beautiful planet it was. She finally levelled out her flight path and turned, looking back at the world that was her new home now. Hers and Kals. This was their home, for better or worse. She no longer felt the pull of its gravity, but she was tied to it nonetheless.

Kara floated high above the world, gazing at her new home, and vowed that she would do whatever it took to make sure that this beautiful world would remain safe. Earth would not share
the fate of Krypton, she promised, not if she had anything to say about it. Kal would live a good, long, and peaceful life here. She would make sure of it.

And one day she would take Kal up here with her and the last children of Krypton would watch the sun rise over the horizon of their new home world together.

*****

End Chapter 11

Author’s Note: Sorry for the relatively short chapter, but seeing as I completely skipped over Kara’s development of super powers in chapter 1, I decided to incorporate some of her experiences in this and future chapters in the form of flashbacks. There might be further flashbacks in the future to show more of teenage Kara, as I’m not really following a strict timeline for this story.
Chapter Summary

Where the world's greatest heroes meet for brunch.

Chapter 12: Trinity

Disclaimer: All things Supergirl/Superman, Wonder Woman, and Batman belong to DC. No infringement is intended.

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Two years ago:

Bruce Wayne was not a man who made brunch dates if he could help it. This was mostly because he worked at night, either on maintaining his cover as a good-for-nothing playboy or – far more often – because he was keeping Gotham City safe as the masked vigilante called Batman. So getting up before noon was not part of his usual routine.

There was nothing usual about today’s brunch date, though. This was entirely due to the people he was going to brunch with, who were far from usual themselves. As far as anyone else was concerned, Bruce Way was simply meeting a business associate. He was a major investor in K-Solutions and had never had cause to regret it, the company was turning a steady profit and pouring out innovations. So Bruce Wayne meeting Karen Kent, CEO and owner of K-Solutions, was nothing unusual in and of itself.

The world at large didn’t know, of course, that Karen Kent was Superwoman. Nor that she was one of the few people in the world who knew that Bruce Wayne was the man behind the mask of the Batman. The discovery of their respective secret identities had been an accident, sure, but a lucky one. From that day forward they had been... well, maybe not friends in the classical sense, but she was one of the few people he trusted.

Walking into the restaurant, he immediately spotted Karen. She was hard to miss, even when wearing the closest thing she ever wore to a disguise. Hair in a bun, glasses on her nose, business attire, the works. She still looked a lot like Superwoman, of course, but the best part of her disguise was that no one would ever expect Superwoman to sit in a restaurant for a business brunch in the first place. It worked, amazingly enough. Karen sat with her back to the door, but he was sure that she was already aware of his entrance.

When Karen had called him to set up this meeting, she had told him that she wanted to invite one other person. Even if he hadn’t gotten a warning from her beforehand, though, he would easily have recognized her. There weren’t that many women who were six foot six (at least) and built like Greek goddesses. She was doing her best to dress down, too, somewhat emulating Karen’s disguise. Still, for someone who knew that they were meeting Superwoman, it was very easy to recognize the other person beside her as Princess Diana of Themyscira, better known to the world at large by the name Wonder Woman.

Bruce smirked, briefly considering what the tabloids would write if anyone were to notice
notorious playboy Bruce Wayne brunching with Wonder Woman and Superwoman. The odds of that happening were slim, of course, since Bruce, too, had decided to dress down. He wore jeans and T-shirt, had his hair slicked back, and had foregone shaving this morning. The press never saw Bruce Wayne looking anything but perfectly styled.

“Ladies,” he said as he approached the table. “I hope I’m not late.”

“Of course not, Bruce,” Karen replied, rising for a brief hug and a peck on the cheek. “May I introduce my executive assistant, Ms. Diana Prince.”

Bruce raised an eyebrow. “Really? Prince?”

Diana shrugged. “It was a spur of the moment idea. Just in case someone should ask.”

“We should set you up with a more formidable cover identity, just in case,” Bruce said, sitting down on the other side of the table. It allowed him to keep an eye on the door, which he was sure Karen had known when she had kept it free for him.

He took a moment to study the two women sitting across from him, whom the world press regularly referred to as “World’s Finest”. He was sure that some people only used “Finest” to refer to their looks, but over the last two years or so the two of them had teamed up numerous times and performed heroic deeds worthy of legends. He also knew from Karen that they were close friends behind the scenes. The Batman’s team-ups with Superwoman had occurred in less public venues.

“So, Karen,” he began. “You wanted to meet. Why?”

Karen, who had known his identity for a while now, had inquired beforehand whether he was okay with revealing his identity as the Batman to Wonder Woman. Bruce had pondered the matter for quite some time, but eventually decided that he trusted Karen. If she trusted Wonder Woman in turn, that was good enough for him.

“There is no big emergency or anything, but I wanted to bounce some ideas off of the two of you. Something that has been going through my head for a while now.”

“I’m all ears,” Bruce said.

“That would be a great joke if you had your mask on,” Karen replied, giggling, causing Bruce to grown. How was it that this woman had powers befitting a goddess, but a sense of humor more befitting a high school student?

“Seriously, though,” she said. “I’ve been thinking about how the world has changed since I publically debuted as Superwoman. The number of high-tech criminals, super villains, and even mythological threats seems to grow steadily.”

“You are not thinking that it’s somehow your fault, is it?” Bruce inquired. He, too, had noticed the steep rise in extraordinary events and powered individuals. It was hard not to, as Gotham had its own fair share of them.

“I know there are some crackpots out there who think so, but no,” she replied, waving it off. “Threats like R’as al Ghul and Ares have been here a lot longer than I, many of the tech-based threats were in development before I debuted, and so on.”

“I think it’s more of a psychological thing,” Diana spoke up. “There are many extraordinary individuals in this world, both good and bad. They have always been there, but your public debut, Kara, has figuratively drawn back the curtain. People pay more attention to these things now, are
less likely to waive them away as figments of imagination. And those who have previously hid in
the shadows are bolder now, more likely to step out of them.”

Bruce nodded, following her logic. “As good an explanation as any, I guess.”

“I am thinking we need to make plans for the future,” Karen continued. “As things stand, there are
just the three of us to deal with the more extraordinary threats to the world. I don’t think it will stay
that way. As threats emerge, good people will step up to help deal with them. What I would like to
do is to lay some groundwork for that.”

“I am flattered that you are including me in the same class as Diana and yourself,” Bruce said.

“Kara has told me about your battles against R’As al Ghul,” Diana told him. “My mother
encountered the League of Shadows before our people moved to Themyscira. She knows the so-
called Demon and how dangerous he is. That you successfully thwarted his plans is a badge of
honor, Mr. Wayne, and I would be proud to stand beside you in any battle.”

Bruce Wayne didn’t blush, ever, but receiving this sort of praise from an immortal Amazon warrior
was certainly something special. “Call me Bruce,” he simply replied.

Turning his attention back to Karen, he continued “you seem rather certain that more so-called
‘super heroes’ will emerge in the future. Why?”

There was a look on her face that told him he had hit upon something immensely private. For all
that Superwoman was successfully fooling an entire world with her identity, she really didn’t have
much of a poker face.

“I have my reasons, Bruce, and I would like to leave it at that for now,” she said after a moment.
“It’s not something that will become relevant anytime soon.”

He nodded, accepting it for now. Not that there was anything stopping him from pondering this
mysterious response or doing some digging of his own.

“So what kind of groundwork are you thinking then?” he asked, leaning back a bit.

“For the moment it would mostly be keeping lines of communication open between the three of us.
We’ll also need to keep a look-out for potential threats and potential allies, standing ready to
support the latter if needed. Funding will be an issue, of course, but K-Solutions is making money
hand over fist and...”

“... and I’m not entirely without funds, either,” Bruce added, interrupting her.

“I know. I didn’t want to just assume, though.”

Karen kept on explaining and the tree of them started brainstorming. Through it all, Bruce couldn’t
quite help being astonished how much though Karen had obviously put into this already. He had a
bit of a suspicion what the underlying root of her idea was, but from the way she talked, one would
think she’d except there to be an entire league of superheroes running around sooner or later.

Bruce doubted it, to be honest. Then again, had anyone told him a few years ago that he’d be
sharing brunch with an alien and a figure from Greek myth, well... maybe he should just keep an
open mind for now.

*****
One year ago:

“Alfred, that was a truly superb meal. Thanks to you I’m going to have to invest in a bigger suit soon.”

“Thank you, Ms. Kent,” Alfred replied with an easy smile. “But I sincerely doubt that you have anything to worry in that regard. You look marvelous as always.”

Diana smiled as she watched the interplay between her best friend and the man who had been introduced as Alfred Pennyworth. Officially he was Bruce Wayne’s butler, but simply observing the two men for a few minutes showed deep bonds of affection that went far beyond a simple employer-employee relationship.

The fact that Alfred was clearly aware of Bruce’s extracurricular activities – and probably of Karen’s identity, too – only confirmed her opinion of him.


Diana still wasn’t used to hearing herself addressed as Ms. Prince, though the identity had been in place for the better part of a year now. Not that she used it that often. Most of the times she was simply Diana, Princess and official ambassador of the island nation of Themyscira. It was nice, though, to sometimes move among people unrecognized.

“Nothing for me, thank you, Alfred,” she replied, leaning back in her chair.

Kara and Bruce also replied in the negative and a moment later the plates were cleared from the table on the veranda of Wayne Manor, leaving the three heroes to their own devices.

“We should invite ourselves over more often,” Kara said, enjoying the view. “And not just because Alfred is such a superb cook.”

“You are always welcome, of course,” Bruce said, “just call ahead. I’m not here that often.”

Diana was constantly amazed how Bruce, a mere mortal man, was able to keep up the extreme pace of his double life. Triple life, actually. Apart from being a masked vigilante and a notorious playboy, he was also a well-renowned businessman, too. When did this man ever sleep?

“Anything new about that supposed archer vigilante in Star City, Bruce?” Kara asked, sinking back into her very comfy chair.

“Not much, no,” Bruce replied. “He keeps well undercover for now, it seems. The Star City Police has a detain & question order out for him, though no actual warrants. Going by what little is known about him, he seems well-trained and well-funded.”

“Sounds familiar,” Diana said, looking at Bruce with a smile.

“I have noticed,” he simply replied. “My current theory is that the archer is Oliver Queen. Queen is a millionaire heir who returned to Star City after supposedly being ship-wrecked for several years. Shortly after that, the archer began to operate. Could be coincidence, of course.”

“I’ll swing over Star City during the next week or so, check things out,” Kara said. “Maybe I can catch Mr. Queen in the act, if it’s him. Diana, any new sightings of that red astronaut guy?”

She shook her head. “Not since last we spoke.” Diana had, during a recent battle against creatures
sent by Ares’ children Deimos and Phobos, received surprise aid from a man in a red suit, who had carried advanced weaponry and a jet pack. He had introduced himself as Adam Strange, only to vanish in a bolt of energy. Diana had not seen hide nor hair of him since.

“Too bad. Anyway, that green light people saw in the sky over Siberia was Abin Sur. He intercepted a meteor shower.”

Diana knew of her friend’s encounter with the Green Lantern. The Amazons knew of the Lanterns, of course, having fought side by side with one of Abin Sur’s predecessors in ancient times. She also knew that Kara was not on the best of terms with him, given his role in the destruction of Krypton.

“I assume you did not approach him in order to establish a line of communication?” Bruce asked, knowing the story, too. “We talked about this, Karen!”

“I know,” she sighed. “It’s just... I know it wasn’t his fault, but still... every time I see him...”

Diana put a hand on her shoulder, knowing the turmoil her friend still felt every time a reminder of her lost home world came up. And there were few reminders as jarring as Abin Sur.

“Give it time,” she told her. Kara gratefully intertwined her fingers with hers.

“Any other news?” she eventually asked.

“I went over the designs you sent me;” Bruce said. “I think most of it is feasible using Earth-built technology, except for the artificial gravity and the teleportation beam.”

“I figured as much,” Kara agreed. “The concepts behind these two technologies are too advanced for Earth’s current tech base. I think it will take another decade at least.”

“You are okay with using purely Kryptonian designs then?” Bruce asked her.

She nodded. “I will not bring advanced Kryptonian tech into wide circulation on Earth, but using it for our Watchtower will certainly be worth it, I think.”

Diana, who was still a novice when it came to technology, always felt a bit left out whenever the two tech geniuses among their trio started talking shop. Nevertheless she understood Kara’s point very well. It was somewhat similar to the current situation of her own home. For the first time in over 2,000 years the Amazons were back in contact with the outside world and her mother was worried about too much exposure too quickly. Kara feared the same, so she had long ago resolved to only introduce Kryptonian technology to Earth slowly and only in terms of concepts and ideas. She had no intention to just hand out advanced technology, but she was willing to give a push here and there.

“Actually building it will take a good long while,” Bruce said. “Seeing as we want to do it in secret, we’ll have to fabricate the individual components in as many different locations as possible and you will have to do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to actually assembling it in orbit.”

“No sweat,” Kara waved it off. “Just keep me apprised of the progress.”

With the ‘business’ part of their talk over, the three of them fell into a comfortable silence, just enjoying the view and letting the excellent meal settle in their stomachs. Then Diana saw a mischievous gleam in her best friend’s eye.

“Bruce, dear,” she began, “there was this rumor I heard about the Batman carrying on a tryst with a
beautiful female cat burglar. Care to share?"

Bruce merely sighed and Diana couldn’t suppress a laugh. It was good to have friends.

****

**The Present:**

“There is something I need to take care of,” Kara began. “I have tried taking care of it on my own, but without much success.”

The Amazonian Embassy in Washington DC was their latest meeting place and Karen had immediately skipped past their usual talk about possible superhero sightings. They had fallen into the habit of eating together first, then talking shop, but it seemed today was going to be a bit different.

Karen looked Bruce in the eye, her gaze hard with just a hint of red tinting her irises. “I want to take down Lex Luthor!”

“This is because of your son, right?” Bruce asked.

He would never admit it to anyone, but the look of utter surprise on Karen’s face was something he savored. It was not often one managed to surprise a woman who could hear heartbeats and look through walls as if they were freshly cleaned windows.

“How can you possible know that?” she asked, exasperated.

“It was not much of a leap,” he admitted, smiling. “I know that Superwoman is Karen Kent and Karen Kent having a son is a matter of public record. I figured there was a better than even chance that he would inherit your super powers and you once mentioned that your powers began to develop during puberty. Your son is 13 now, so...”

“That whole world’s greatest detective thing is not just a catch phrase then,” she muttered.

“And seeing as you raised him,” Bruce continued, “I would expect he not just shares your powers, but also your values and intends to become a hero as well.”

“Two for two, Mr. Wayne,” Diana said, smiling at her best friend’s grumpiness. “Clark is a really sweet boy and can’t wait to become a superhero, emulating his mother.”

“I could wait a while longer,” Karen grumbled, then shook her head to get back in topic. “Anyway, I know I can’t keep Clark from following in my footsteps, but I CAN remove the greatest threat before that happens.”

“And that would be Luthor?” Bruce asked. He wasn’t a fool. He knew that the façade of the charming philanthrope Luthor presented to the world was a lie. The man was an utterly ruthless businessman and people who opposed him tended to end up dead or ruined. Still, with the kind of enemies Karen had faced in the past, he did not immediately understand why she considered Luthor the primary threat to her son.

“It seems strange, I know,” she said, guessing at his thoughts. “The world’s most powerful woman worrying about someone who is just a man with no super powers of his own. The problem is that Luthor is obsessed with me, has been almost since my debut. He spent the better part of a year testing me in various ways and didn’t give a damn about how many people might get caught in the crossfire. He’s behind at least half of the high-tech super villains I’ve faced in the past, but I’ve
never been able to prove any of it. He then tried to hire me.”

Bruce nodded. “I can see how the idea of a super powered employee would appeal to someone like Lex.”

“I managed to buy myself some time by pretending to think about,” Karen continued, “but that reprieve has long since expired. His actions against me are escalating and I still haven’t managed to prove he is in any way involved in anything criminal. I fear what lengths he would go to if he were to find out I have a son with the same powers as I.”

“I offered to simply remove his head with my sword,” Diana said casually, though Bruce got the impression that she meant every word, “but Kara here believes that we should try other venues first.”

“I can see the problem,” Bruce said, and he did. Sure, either Superwoman or Wonder Woman would have no problem simply flying into Lex Luthor’s apartment and killing him on the spot. They could probably even do so without leaving any sort of proof. Karen would never do that, though. As great as her powers were, though, her moral core was even stronger. It was her most admirable quality in his mind, but it also hampered her in situations like this. Diana seemed to have fewer moral qualms with taking a life if needed, but obviously deferred to her friend’s judgement in this case.

“Which is why I am hoping for your help, Bruce,” Karen said. “Clark is chomping at the bit to go out there and help people, just like I do. I can probably keep him from doing it another year or so, but he is a teenager and headstrong. I want... I need Luthor behind bars before the world learns of my son.”

“Raw power will not be the answer,” Bruce told her. “Luthor has spent decades building his economic and criminal network, taking it apart will require finesse and patience.”

“Exactly,” Karen continued. “I need the world’s greatest detective, who also happens to be one of the most astute and savvy businessmen I’ve ever met.” She switched her gaze over to Diana. “Not to mention the support of my best friend, who always has my back.”

The Amazon woman just nodded with a smile. Bruce pretended to think about it for a moment, though his decision had been made the moment Karen had opened her mouth. He was not quite sure when exactly it had happened, but these two women had become his closest friends in this world apart from Alfred. If they needed help, there was no question.

“Ohay then,” he said, leaning forward. “Let’s take down Lex Luthor!”

*****

End Chapter 12

Author’s Note: I am not fully satisfied with this chapter, to be honest, but it’s a necessary bridge for the events to follow. Basically we are seeing the groundwork for both the Justice League and the debut of Superboy here, which is not too far off. And, of course, I had to have Bruce and Diana meet at some point to fully establish my version of the Trinity.
The Woman with the Winning Smile

Chapter Summary

Where Superwoman meets Gotham's craziest super villain, though she is only sure sure about the crazy part.

Chapter 13: The Woman with the Winning Smile

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Kara took a few minutes to observe the woman sitting on a chair in front of her. She was wearing a purple striped men’s style suit, which was tailored to a female figure. A garish orange vest was worn over a bright green shirt and purple boots and gloves completed the ensemble. The woman’s shoulder-length hair was dyed green as well and her face was covered in pale white make-up, though some of it had worn off. The lower half of her face seemed to be permanently frozen in a huge smile, accentuated by bright red lipstick that had been very liberally applied, though it was now smeared a bit.

“Interesting look,” she finally said, having finished her inspection.

“I could say the same,” the smiling woman said. “The red and blue color combination would definitely not work for everybody, but it does wonders for you, honey! Really great look with your blonde locks and huge blue eyes. Big fan, by the way! Always wanted to meet the famous Superwoman. Though I could have done without the bondage elements involved, at least for the first date.”

She raised her hands, cuffed together via black handcuffs, and gestured toward where thin black rope bound her legs and shoulders to the metal chair she was sitting on. For someone who had woken up imprisoned in a nondescript room in an unknown location, though, she seemed remarkably composed. Or maybe it was just the clown look. Kara was not a fan of clowns.

“Sorry about that,” Kara said, shrugging. “Our common friend figured you wouldn’t sit still long enough for us to have a talk otherwise.”

“Ah, yes, our friend,” the woman said, her smile growing even broader it seemed. “The big bad Bat! The big strong protector of Gotham City and all its citizens. Well, some of them anyway. We had an interesting talk earlier, he and I.” Leaning forward towards Kara, the woman dropped her voice to a stage whisper. “Just between us girls, I think he might be a tiny bit crazy!”

“Funny,” Kara replied in the same stage whisper, unable to fully suppress a smile. “He said the same about you!”

This caused the woman to laugh, a long, drawn-out laugh that almost caused her to topple over with the chair she was tied to. She finally recovered, though, wiping a tear from her eye (and smearing her make-up some more). “I’m not,” she said, sounding completely serious.
“Are you sure?” Kara asked. “Both your sense of dress and your actions seem to indicate otherwise.”

“I don’t think my sense of dress differs much from yours, honey. After all, we both dress to impress, to stand out from the crowd, so people will notice. Sad but true, people don’t listen to you unless you really manage to capture their attention first!”

“You have certainly captured people’s attention,” Kara conceded the point. “I am not sure I like your methods, though.”

“Not everyone can lift cars over their heads, buttercup,” she said, shrugging. “It’d be great if I could, so should you ever care to share some of those super powers of yours, I’m in! Like I said, big fan! I’d even wear the blue and red suit, too, no matter how badly it might clash with my hair. Until that day, though, I have to use more mundane methods.”

“Like robbing a bank in broad daylight?”

“Well, ACTUALLY...” the woman began, only to trail off and descend into laughter once again.

“You done?” Kara asked after nearly a minute had passed.

“Yes, sorry. That happens sometimes. Where was I? Oh yes, well, technically I might have robbed a bank, as you said, but I didn’t take any money. I only, shall we say, unearthed some interesting pieces of information from where they were locked away in the hopes that no one would ever see them.”

“You used a bomb to blow open the vault with the safety deposit boxes!”

“Yes, but what was I supposed to do? That stupid fat security guard refused to open it for me! Babbled something about time locks and separate keys while he peed himself, can you believe that? So how else was I supposed to get in? Vault doors don’t react to pretty smiles and flashing a bit of leg, you know?”

Kara couldn’t quite suppress a smile at the other woman’s level of exasperation. Could a dangerous, bomb-wielding criminal be called endearing?

“And what was so important about that information you ‘unearthed’ that blowing up a bank vault seemed like a reasonable course of action?”

She leaned forward as far as her bonds allowed, planting her elbows on the small table between them, and cocked her head to one side. “Oh, does that mean your boyfriend hasn’t found the criminal clown lady’s loot yet? I bet that hurts his feelings, does it? He really should smile more! Smiling always helps, no matter how grim and gritty you are! Just smile, and all your problems disappear!”

Kara frowned. “Is that why you are constantly smiling? Has it made your problems disappear?”

“But of course,” the woman laughed. “Do I look like I have any problems to you?”

“Well, you are tied to a chair right now.”

“Entirely possible, but not my point! The far more interesting question is, why exactly has your boyfriend brought me here? This isn’t a police station, I know that much. Is this your private little love nest? Are you looking for someone to have a bit of extra fun with? Not that I am opposed to such things on principle, mind you, but a lady likes to be wooed a bit first.”
Kara just shook her head, not bothering to correct the woman about the boyfriend thing. “Batman actually asked for my opinion on how to deal with you.”

“Oh, is the big bad Bat at a loss, thanks to little old me? How odd! One would think a big, strong man like him would be able to deal with one little Joker.”

*****

Kara exited the make-shift interrogation room a while later to find the Batman waiting outside. The dark knight of Gotham was leaning against the wall, arms crossed, looking even grumpier than he usually did.

“Something vexing thee?” Kara asked, leaning against the wall as well in a similar pose, looking at him.

“The information Joker stole from that vault has turned up,” he grumbled.

“Indeed? Where?”

“On the evening news. Apparently, one of Gotham’s most popular and longest-serving city councilors has been running a prostitution ring for several years now. Most of the girls involved were minors. Someone anonymously sent in the ledgers for his business, which also detail who he paid off to keep his operation secret and a complete list of customers, too. The police is arresting him as we speak, I believe.”

“And we are grumpy about this because…?” Kara inquired.

Batman pushed off the wall. “This isn’t the first time she has pulled something like this. Six weeks ago she broke into the offices of a big stockbroker firm, caused almost a million dollars in property damage, all to find information about how they were paying their female employees significantly less than their male counterparts. Before that she blackmailed several cheating husbands and before that she beat a confession out of a man who had murdered his wife, leaving him tied up naked in front of the police department.”

He fell silent and Kara studied his face.

“I think I see what your problem with this woman is, Bruce,” she said.

“Do tell,” Batman growled.

“She is someone who works outside the law. She performs criminal acts without any regard to social norms, all in the pursuit of her goals. She illegally acquires information and uses it to punish criminal and unethical behavior in others. She operates by scaring people, forcing confessions out of them, and isn’t shy to use violence and damage property, either. Now who else do we both know who could easily fit into that description?”

She pretended to think very hard, even as her blue eyes fixated on him.

“It’s not the same,” he growled. “The woman is insane.”

“Well, a case could be made that a grown man running around after dark dressed like bat…”

“I do what I do to capture criminals! The people she hurts…”

“…are criminals as well, Bruce, which you well now. Maybe some of them haven’t technically
broken any laws, I give you that, and a lot of them probably don’t consider themselves criminals, either. Constantly treating women as if they are worth less is just the natural order of things in their minds. But do you agree, Bruce? Do you think the people this woman here has attacked are good people? Decent people that deserve protection?”

He didn’t say anything for a long moment, then sighed, the grim expression of the Batman sliding off his face, to be replaced with weariness and uncertainty. “I honestly don’t know what to do, Karen! That is why I am asking for your opinion. This woman is a criminal, there is no denying that. When she blew up that vault, a lot of people could have ended up hurt. Yet what she does... it’s right! It might even be necessary. But it’s still criminal!”

Superwoman nodded, understanding. “We always clash worst with the people who resemble us the closest. Tell me, what would you do if you encountered another Batman out there. Someone who operates just like you, breaks the laws just like you, but fights for justice doing it, just like you. How would you handle that?”

He sighed. “I became Batman so no one else would have to!”

“Bruce, you are not that stupid. Look at me! I have powers that allow me to literally move mountains and even I can’t stop every catastrophe, every accident, every crime. Even if I were on the move 24/7, it would simply not be possible. You did not honestly think you could wipe out crime and corruption all on your own, did you?”

Batman stayed silent for a good long while. “So what do you think we should do about this Joker?”

“Well...”

“I hope you are not going to propose that we recruit her for your planned superhero alliance?”

Kara laughed, shaking her head. “No, certainly not. And to answer your question, I’m really not sure, either. She should be brought in, yes, but I remember what you told me that first night we met. How do you think her chances will be to survive in police custody long enough to stand trial?”

“The Gotham police isn’t as bad anymore as it was back then,” Batman said. “Gordon and others have managed to clean it up pretty good. But Joker hurt or embarrassed a lot of powerful and influential people in the last half year or so.”

Kara didn’t need to add ‘just like you, Bruce’.

“She has fans, you know?” Batman told her. “She’s only been active for a few months now, but she’s already something of a folk hero here in Gotham, especially for women. There were even some who dressed like her during a recent demonstration.”

More parallels, Kara knew. There was a street gang running around Gotham, calling themselves “Sons of the Bat”, who had bat symbols painted on their faces and were dishing out their own brand of vigilante justice among the city’s criminal element. Bruce had tried to curtail their activities several times now, but with mixed results.

“I think we can agree that she is doing some good. Do you think she is doing enough good to counterbalance the damage she’s doing in the process?” Kara asked him.

“I don’t know, Karen. Am I?”

She walked over to him, putting her hand on his shoulder. “You are a good man, Bruce! Never
doubt that, ever! I wouldn’t call you my friend if I didn’t think so. And despite the many parallels between yourself and this woman in there, I don’t think you are the same where it counts.”

“Why not?”

Kara looked back towards the room. “I know what drove you to become the Batman, Bruce. I don’t know what happened to Joker, probably something equally traumatic, but the difference lies in what you just told me a minute ago.” She turned to look him in the eye. “You became the Batman so other people wouldn’t have to. You became the Batman so other people wouldn’t have to suffer as you did. You are fighting with all you have for a better world, a world where people won’t be hurt, won’t be left alone, and where children can grow up happy.”

Kara looked down. “I don’t know what happened to her, but she isn’t looking for justice. Justice might well be a byproduct for her, but her main motivation is chaos. She wants to terrorize the city, especially the male part, and have fun doing it.”

“Did she tell you that?” Batman asked.

“Not in so many words, no, but it was clear in how she acted. Especially when you were the topic. I think she might just be a tiny bit obsessed with you, Bruce.”

Batman stared at her for a moment, then actually chuckled a bit. “Is she my Lex Luthor then?”

Kara considered this for a moment. “Maybe, but only in the obsession sense. Luthor is a different kind of animal entirely. I won’t have any qualms throwing him in jail the moment we have everything we need. Joker, though? I’m really not sure. Personally I think she needs to be in therapy, not in a prison.”

Batman sighed. “You’re not going to take this off my hands, are you?”

Kara shook her head. “No, I won’t. I think this is something you need to figure out for yourself, Bruce. I am sure you will make the right decision.”

A moment later she was gone into the night, leaving a Dark Knight alone with his thoughts and no closer to a decision than he had been earlier.

*****

The woman known only as the Joker whistled a jaunty tune as she walked down a darkened alley (there was an inordinate amount of such alleys in Gotham), heading for one of her hideouts. She was twirling an open handcuff around one finger as she skipped along. As she turned the corner, though, she collided with something very, very solid.

“Oh, you again!”

Superwoman was floating half a foot in the air right before her, arms crossed across her chest and giving her very best impression of imposing scary goddess. Which was indeed a very, very good impression, but with some room for improvement in Joker’s mind.

“Can you have some of that heat vision fill your eyes without actually shooting lasers from them?” Joker asked. “That would just perfect the intimidating look, I’m sure.”

A moment later Superwoman did exactly that and even the crazy clown princess of Gotham had to admit that she was maybe, possibly, just a tiny little bit intimidated. Just a smidgen maybe.
“Are you here to take me in again? Your boyfriend did let me go, you know.”

“He did no such thing,” Superwoman said, her feet touching the ground again and the red fading from her eyes. “He might have, we’ll never know, but that explosion you arranged on the far end of town drew him away long enough for you to escape.”

Joker cocked her head to the side. “Yeah, but let’s be honest here, shall we? He wanted it that way! Just look at the way he dresses, he’s just asking for it! He’s so serious with his ‘I’m the Night, I’m Vengeance, I’m the Batman’ thing! Someone needs to tell him to smile some more!”

Superwoman grabbed the lapels of her coat and easily lifted her into the air one-handed. “Gonna take me in now, then?” Joker asked, gulping.

“I am tempted, actually, but no, I don’t think so.”

Now the Joker was not only intimidated, but surprised, too. “Really? How come?”

“Just a hunch, really, but I think your presence might actually have a net positive impact on things, Joker. I come from a world where men and women stood as equals in every way. Sadly this world here still has a long way to go in that regard. My own presence has hopefully done a bit to change that already, I like to think, but not enough. Maybe a little chaos is needed as well.”

She opened her hand, allowing Joker to drop back to the ground. She stumbled a bit, but remained standing, smoothing out her coat a moment later.

“So here is the deal, Joker,” Superwoman said. “You go on doing what you are doing. And you keep on making sure that no innocents are hurt or caught in the crossfire. Because the moment that changes, the moment I even get the faintest impression that you are losing your restraint and hurting innocent people, I will personally tear this city apart until I find you and throw you into the deepest, darkest cell I can find. Do we understand each other, buttercup?”

The Joker merely nodded, still smiling, but not feeling like laughing right now. Well, maybe a little, but the situation really wasn’t calling for it.

“What about your boyfriend?” Joker asked, even as Superwoman was beginning to turn away from her. “I get the impression he is not part of this deal? I’m fine with that, mind you. Girl power and all that, no sharing a sister’s secrets! Estrogen solidarity! But... you know... he’s so serious and all...”

Superwoman smiled. “Who knows? Maybe you can get him to smile a bit more often.”

A moment later she was gone into the night, leaving a clown princess skipping deeper into the alley, laughing and laughing. Because now a laugh was definitely called for.

*****

End Chapter 13

**Author’s Note:** the female Joker portrayed in this story is inspired by Geraldine DeRuiter’s series of tweets about how a modern take on the Joker should be a woman threatening the patriarchy. It led to a truly epic triggering of fragile male egos for whom the very notion of a female Joker seemed to be the worst thing ever in the history of stuff. It was hilarious and scary at the same time. So my hat’s off to Geraldine DeRuiter. I hope I have somewhat managed to turn her four-tweet idea into a compelling character. Oh, and just making it clear: this Joker here is NOT a gender-bent Joker from any existing version of Batman, it’s an entirely separate character. The
man who became the Joker in all those other versions of the DC universe is presumably alive and well here in my little universe, never having been immersed in acid baths or the evils of society.

Oh, and just in case this hasn’t entirely become clear in this chapter: Superwoman is different from Superman. Superman was mostly about protecting the world and keeping it as it is. Superwoman wants to protect the world, too, but also to change and improve it. She wants to push Earth towards being as advanced as Krypton while avoiding her own people’s mistakes. As of right now, Kara believes that the Joker might well be a catalyst for positive change. Whether she is right about that... we’ll see.
Chapter Summary

Where the last daughter of Krypton and the last son of Mars happen to meet.

Chapter 14: Last Son of Mars (War World – Part 1)

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For as long as humans had gazed up towards the sky, the planet Mars had been a dead world. There was plenty of evidence that this hadn’t always been so, that Mars had once sustained a live-giving atmosphere and an ample amount of water, but those days were long over. Whether or not Mars had ever had any indigenous life was an ongoing debate, but mostly an academic one.

It was not a debate for Kryptonians, though. Back in the times when Kryptonians had been a space faring society, they had learned of the once great Martian race. Long before even the Kryptonians had sailed the stars, the Martians had already been an advanced civilization. Some even said that their famed law enforcers, the Manhunters, had been the model upon which the Guardians of the Universe had based their own Green Lantern Corps.

Eons ago, though, the Martian race had fallen prey to an invasion by a parasitic alien species called the Imperium. The invasion had apparently been the end for both races, as there was nothing left to be found but ancient ruins and wrecked war machines. The Martian race had faded into the pages of history, much like the Kryptonian empire did many millennia later.

Which is why Kara had been rather surprised when her Fortress’ computers had informed her of activity on the long-dead planet. There was definitely something going on there, something involving advanced technology and energy eruptions. Given Mars’ proximity to Earth, she quickly decided to investigate, just to be on the safe side.

Kara had long ago tested the limits of her ability to fly through space. Her powers easily protected her from the vacuum and if there was an upper limit to the speed she could achieve, she hadn’t found it yet. One day she wanted to attempt breaking the light barrier by herself, but so far she had shied away from it. The relativistic effect of travelling close to light speed was not to be underestimated and she didn’t want to return from space, only to find her son an old man and the rest of her family long dead.

The only practical limitation she had when it came to travelling through space was oxygen. She had found that she could go without air for extended periods of time, but it was a drain on her as her body burned through stored solar energy much quicker to compensate for the lack of fresh oxygen. So she took a small capsule of pressurized air with her on her journey, which would allow her to take a breather every so often. Just in case there was something on Mars that required her full strength.

Shooting beyond Earth’s atmosphere was always something she enjoyed, the unfiltered sunlight in space made her feel slightly giddy. She quickly adjusted her course, her vision powers easily
spotting the red body of her target, and accelerated. Current calculations showed that a human space craft using the Hohmann transfer orbit would need approximately 9 months to reach Earth’s nearest celestial neighbor. Kara made the flight in under ten minutes.

Soaring over the empty red plains of the planet, Kara needed a few minutes to finally locate the source of the disturbance. She spotted an alien space craft of unknown design, which had set down right next a mountain. Closer inspection showed that the mountain was adorned with symbols belonging to the ancient Martian race. In fact there was a huge doorway in the mountain side, worn down by time, but still solid. Except for the hole someone seemed to have blown into it, that was. Kara set down beside it, inspecting it.

The hole was definitely new, probably caused by whomever had arrived in that craft. It seemed to have been caused by a physical impact rather than an energy weapon. Kara quickly peeked inside, but found that the mountain apparently contained enough traces of lead to impede her vision powers. She could only see the corridor ahead of her, nothing else. Well, it seemed she had to do this the old-fashioned way.

Carefully making her way inside, Kara remained on guard. Generally speaking, people who broke into ancient tombs were not all that friendly, though she resolved to keep an open mind and not seek out a confrontation if it could be avoided. Remembering a few too many Indiana Jones movies (Clark just loved those), Kara decided to be careful and floated through the corridor, just in case the ancient Martians had left some traps behind that had endured over the millennia. One never knew.

Thankfully the dark corridors of the ancient Martian ruin only impeded her vision, not her hearing. She easily followed the sounds of what was apparently someone pounding away on yet another heavy door. Speeding up her flight, she soon ended up in a rather large room. It was easily the size of a large cathedral with a high ceiling, ornate carvings on every wall, and several large doors leading away in different directions. Only one of the doors was closed and someone was currently trying to remedy that with his bare hands.

Kara hovered for a moment, observing the intruder. He was big, that much was certain, easily eight or nine feet tall and almost as wide. He was humanoid in shape, but his skin was a faded yellow, his hands only had four fingers each, and there was no hair to be found on his head. He was dressed in something appearing to be battle armor, too. Overall he was not looking too friendly, but appearances could be deceiving, especially across different species.

“Excuse me?” she said, finally approaching. Given that she was facing an unknown alien species, she switched to Interlac, the interplanetary commerce language. Despite the Kryptonians’ aversion to space travel in their latter days, the language had still been taught in schools as an elective. She hoped she wasn’t too rusty.

The intruder stopped pounding away at the door and turned to look at her. “Interesting accent, creature. Can’t say I have heard that one before. Are you native to this hunk of rock?”

It was always dangerous to try and interpret alien mannerisms and tone of voice, but Kara got the distinct impression that she the intruder did not think very highly of her.

“No more than you, I would wager,” she replied, retaining a bit of a distance between herself and the yellow-skinned giant. “But seeing as this ‘hunk of rock’ is in my immediate neighborhood, I am an interested party. What are you doing here?”

The giant gave her a long, speculative glance, before resuming his pounding on the closed door. “I am looking to retrieve an artefact that was hidden here long ago by people long dead. Now go
away, creature, I am busy!”

Kara was uncertain what to do. Apart from being very rude – though that might just be a matter of two aliens conversing in a language that was native for neither of them – the yellow giant had not done anything aggressive. Grave robbing was not something she considered proper, but given that the Martians were long dead, there really wasn’t anyone here to dispute his claim to whatever artefact he was looking for. Still, something about this guy made her skin itch.

“What kind of artefact?” she asked. “And what claim do you have to it?”

The giant stopped again, looking at her with something she was fairly sure was irritation. “That is none of your concern, creature! Now leave me be before I have to expend unnecessary time and effort for killing you!”

Okay, threatening to kill someone just for asking a few questions was definitely on the suspicious side of things. Before she could make up her mind as to what to do, though, something else happened that came as a surprise to both visitors.

“Leave this place immediately,” someone spoke in heavily accented Interlac. Kara started, none of her enhanced senses having picked up the presence of a third party before they spoke. The yellow giant seemed equally surprised. Both looked over at one of the other doorways, where a new figure now stood.

It was a Martian, that was quickly apparent. He was tall, though not nearly as tall as the giant, with long, gangly limbs and a long, almost hammer-shaped head. His skin was green, naturally, and his eyes glowed red.

“A Martian,” the yellow giant said. “Well, it looks like my information was incomplete. I was told you were all dead.”

“I know what you are here to steal, Mongul,” the Martian said. “I will not allow it!”

“You know my name, Martian? Interesting. It seems your species’ telepathic prowess has not been exaggerated.”

Mongul, as apparently his name was, slowly stalked towards the Martian, seemingly having forgotten about Kara’s presence. “If you have read my thoughts, Martian, then you know what I want. Give me the key and your race will remain non-extinct, at least for today.”

“Now wait just a minute here,” Kara said, beginning to step between the two.

Mongul’s fist lashed out at terrifying speed and hit her with the force of a meteor. With no clear idea how it had happened Kara found herself on the other side of the room, prone on the floor, and desperately gasping for breath in the almost non-existent Martian atmosphere. She tried to breathe in and the breathing hurt. It actually hurt! Fingers trailing over her body, she gasped in surprise when she found a bump on the side of her chest.

Mongul had actually managed to break one of her ribs!

Kara took a moment to gather herself, feeling panic begin to rise. She had never really been hurt since arriving on Earth. The Parasite had drained her, yes, but that had just made her weak. Sparring with Diana occasionally hurt a bit and even left a bruise here or there. Never since gaining her powers had anything actually managed to damage her body in such a way, though. Mongul had broken a rib! She still couldn’t wrap her mind around it. She was supposed to be invulnerable!
Looking up, she saw that Mongul had apparently forgotten about her again and was trying to kill the Martian. The green-skinned man, however, seemed very adept at avoiding his enemy’s fists. His body morphed and contorted in impossible ways, reminding Kara that Martians were shape-shifters. His limbs lashed out to land hits on Mongul, though those seemed largely ineffective.

Staggering back to her feet, Kara held her aching ribs as she tried to figure out what to do. Clearly Mongul needed to be stopped. If a Martian still lived, than this had progressed from “mere” grave robbing to outright theft, plus murderous intent on herself and the Martian. For the first time in living memory, though, she hesitated.

*I’m scared,* she realized, almost with a start. Well, this wouldn’t do! She was Superwoman, damn it! Mongul might have landed a lucky punch and was much stronger than she had anticipated, but she refused to let that deter her.

Quickly checking that she retained a full range of movement despite her injury, she waited until the Martian had moved out of the way of yet another attack by Mongul, leaving her a clear shot. She sped forward at the best speed she could manage in a confined space, little more than a blur to the naked eye, and drove both her fists into Mongul’s chest with enough force to split a mountain in two.

Mongul took a step back.

“Not bad, creature,” the giant said. “I almost felt that.”

Kara was so dumbfounded by the fact that this being seemed almost completely unaffected by one of her strongest blows, she was too slow to dodge his retaliatory strike. Mongul spun around at surprising speed and the back of his fist connected with the side of her head. Kara was driven into the nearest wall with enough force to actually embed her into the stone, stars exploding in front of her eyes.

She dimly heard the sounds of more fighting, apparently the Martian was back in the fray, but she could barely focus. The blow had rattled her brains but good and there was a very strange taste in her mouth. Something liquid, metallic... blood? Could that actually be blood?

Pushing the pain and panic aside, she strained to free herself from the rock wall. Stumbling to her feet, she saw that the battle between the Martian and Mongul had moved to the far side of the room. The Martian was still evading, but seemed incapable of actually hurting his larger opponent. Small wonder, Kara thought. How many beings were there in the universe that could shrug off her blows as if they were insect bites?

Deciding to avoid another blow for blow encounter, Kara zoomed forward and let loose with her deadliest weapon. Her eyes lit up and eerie red and fizzling beams of heat shot out at the speed of light. The twin beams struck Mongul and this time the yellow giant did more than take a step back. He actually grimaced in pain as the red energy beams tore apart the chest of his battle armor and left visible marks on his skin.

Mongul roared, sounding more angered than in pain, and Kara briefly noticed that the Martian was recoiling from where her heat vision had lit up the chamber, seemingly in pain himself.

“You will pay for that, creature,” Mongul screamed and dashed forward at terrible speed.

Kara managed to evade his first blow, which tore a huge hole in the ground she had stood upon a moment earlier. She let loose with her eye beams again, damaging more of his armor, but still couldn’t seem to penetrate his skin. Mongul lashed out with a kick, which she ALMOST managed
to dodge. The tip of his toe caught her in the hip and spun her around, causing her to miss with her third burst of heat vision.

She tried to keep at a distance from the clearly more powerful opponent, but the room was only so large and Mongul was far quicker than his size suggested. Thirty seconds into the fight her luck ran out as Mongul managed to corner her and one of his huge fists closed around her ankle.

Kara almost blacked out as Mongul used her body as an improvised sledgehammer and slammed her into the ground two, three, four times. When he finally let go, her vision was fuzzy and her limbs refused to move. She somehow managed to push herself up to her knees when she saw Mongul approaching from the corner of her eye. Moving on instinct, she lashed out with her right arm... only for her fist to be caught in a much larger one.

“Admirable,” Mongul said. “But ultimately futile!”

Kara screamed as he brought his other fist down and the bones in her caught arm broke like kindling. Spots swam across her vision and all strength fled from her body. She was completely helpless as Mongul hoisted her up by grabbing onto her hair, dangling in his grip like a puppet with its strings cut.

“Time to end this distraction,” he said and raised his fist.

I am sorry, Clark, she thought before everything went dark.

*****

The next thing Kara was aware of was pain! Lots and lots of it, made even worse by her almost being entirely unfamiliar with the feeling. Now, though, her entire body was screaming at her, nerves clamoring for attention, wailing to tell her that things were WRONG! Short flashes of her disastrous fight with Mongul buzzed through her mind, she relived the pain of him breaking her arm. Her lips parted as she screamed out her pain for the world to hear.

Amidst the swirling agony, though, there was a soothing voice that rang out inside her mind.

I require you to hold still, Kara-El, the voice said. Your regenerative powers will be able to deal with most of your injuries, but your broken bones need to be set, otherwise they will heal wrong.

Even through the haze of pain, Kara understood what the voice was telling her. Her cells were living solar batteries and could regenerate almost any damage, provided they received the solar energy to do so. Broken bones, however, were another matter. She dimly remembered breaking a bone back as a child on Krypton, but never on Earth. Her force-field, the source of her supposed invulnerability, had kept all force strong enough to break bones away from her. Until today, at least. Until Mongul had simply overpowered it.

She felt ghostly fingers on her arm, just above the break, and tried her best to keep still despite the howling agony. It almost felt like the fingers were moving inside her arm, which was a strange feeling in and of itself and almost managed to distract her.

This will hurt, the voice said inside her mind.

Kara screamed as something ghostly yet strong forced the bones inside her arm back into their proper position. A moment later, she mercifully blacked out again.

*****
The next time Kara regained consciousness the screaming pain from before had dulled somewhat. She still felt like every single part of her body was hurting, but it wasn’t as all-encompassing as before. She even managed to open her eyes and saw that she was now outside the Martian mountain fortress. The sun shone overhead, more distant here than on Earth, but thanks to the thin atmosphere the rays were actually more potent. She could feel her cells greedily drinking up the energy to begin the healing of her body.

Looking slightly to the side, she saw her savior squatting on the ground next to her.

“How are you feeling, Kara-El?” the Martian asked.

“Terrible,” she replied honestly. “But given that I expected to never feel anything again, I will count that as an improvement.”

She tried her best to sit up, the Martian quickly moving to support her back with one of his arms.

“Move slowly, Kara-El,” he said. “Mongul has dealt you quite a bit of damage.”

“Believe me, I am aware. I guess you picked my name out of my head, using your telepathy?” she asked, causing the Martian to nod. “Well, I can’t do the same, so what is your name?”

“My name is J’Onn J’Onnz.”

“Well, thank you J’Onn J’Onnz. I assume I have you to thank for my still being alive?”

The Martian, J’Onn, rose to his feet, looking up at the sky. “As much as I would like to take credit, I fear our joint survival is more due to Mongul’s indifference than anything else. Once neither of us posed a hindrance to him anymore, he simply moved on.”

Kara scoffed. “I’m not sure whether to be thankful or offended.” She looked at J’Onn. “So I guess he got what he came here for? What was it, this key he mentioned?”

Before her eyes J’Onn seemed to shrink, almost as if his form deflated and all hope left him. “He has succeeded, yes, and I have failed. Eons ago, long before my race fell victim to the Imperium, a dying race called the Largas entrusted us with this key. It was the crystal key of the Warzoon, Kara-El. They key to the War World!”

Kara froze in place, even as memories from long-ago history lessons on Krypton came to the forefront of her mind. The War World! The Kryptonians had never encountered it themselves, but it was a story told by numerous space-faring races across the universe, so there had to be some truth to it. The War World, a mobile weaponized satellite created by a warlike race looking to conquer the cosmos. Bigger and sturdier than a dwarf star, and equipped with weapons able to obliterate entire planets easily,

“I see you have heard of it,” J’Onn said.

“It was something Kryptonians picked up during our space travel days. Many considered it nothing but a scary story.”

“I fear it is far more than a story,” J’Onn continued. “It’s quite real. The Warzoon built the War World with the intention of conquering the entire universe with it and they might well have succeeded. Their race died out, though, their reign of terror and destruction remaining incomplete. The Largas came upon the empty War World and locked it away, so that no one could make use of its destructive potential.”

“Unless that someone has the key,” Kara concluded. “The key that Mongul took with him.”
J’Onn nodded sadly. “I have failed in my duties. As the last of my kind, it fell upon me to keep the key safe. Now I fear the entire universe may pay the price.”

Something resonated with Kara as she heard him speak of being the last of his kind. She could hear the intense loneliness in his voice, as well as the pain for having failed. She could certainly sympathize. She may not be the last of her kind, but in many ways Clark was more human than Kryptonian. He didn’t remember their home world. Only she did. Krypton lived on only in her memory. And the same was true for Mars and J’Onn J’Onnz.

Struggling to her feet despite the pain, she stood to face the last son of Mars.

“We have both failed today, J’Onn,” she told him. “But maybe there is still time to stop Mongul. If we work together.”

He looked at her. “I appreciate the sentiment, Kara-El, but I fear even the two of us together are not strong enough to face Mongul. Especially if he should already have the might of War World at his beck and call!”

“You are probably right,” Kara said, looking upwards where her enhanced vision could see the face of Earth in the sky. “Which is why we are going to need more help.”

*****

End Chapter 14

Author’s Note: The Martian Manhunter as he appears in this story is based almost entirely on his appearance in the Justice League cartoon. J’Onn’s level of power has fluctuated wildly during his various comic and TV appearances, so I’m going to stick with the version I liked best. He is powerful, but not as physically powerful as a Kryptonian. He can shape shift, become immaterial, and has limited telepathic powers, but he has a severe weakness to fire.

Mongul, on the other hand, is the pre-Crisis version, who first appeared in DC Comics Presents #27 from 1980, on which this story arc is loosely based. I freely admit that I do not enjoy writing fight scenes, but in this case I went into a little more detail because it was an important point in Kara’s development to be humbled by a physically superior opponent.
Dawn of Justice (War World - Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Where Kara unites the world's greatest super heroes to face the threats of Mongul and War World.

Chapter 15: Dawn of Justice (War World – Part 2)

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*****

Princess Diana of Themyscira, known the world over as Wonder Woman, felt a simmering rage deep inside her belly as she looked upon her best friend. In the years they had known each other, Diana had never seen Kara, her sister-in-arms, so battered and wounded. Diana still won the majority of their regular sparring sessions, but Kara’s bruises always faded in minutes and there was never any lasting damage. Not so today, as her friend’s broken right arm was supported by a cast and the bruises on her face and visible skin had yet to fade, despite almost a day having passed.

Diana swore that the creature who had harmed her sister, this Mongul, would pay dearly for every bruise, every broken bone, and every drop of blood.

“We can delay no longer,” Kara said, addressing the room.

They were currently in the only functional module of the Watchtower. For several years now Kara had worked on assembling an orbital station high above the Earth, a fusion of human and Kryptonian technology, a first line of defense for her adopted world. Bruce, the Batman, had helped with the technological and logistical sides and Diana herself had assisted with some of the heavy lifting on the ground, but most of the work had been performed by Kara herself as the only one of their trio who could fly into space under her own power. Currently the satellite was less than halfway finished, but the main module was pressurized and the artificial gravity worked as well.

It was a good place to assemble their forces for the coming war.

“Thank you all for coming,” Kara began. “I had hoped we would have more time and gather more allies, but an emergency has come up, one that threatens not just our planet but possibly the entire galaxy.”

She quickly summarized the events of yesterday, her encounter with the Martian called J’Onn J’Onnz and their battle against the alien powerhouse called Mongul. Kara did not mince words, describing how close she had come to being killed, how extremely strong Mongul was, and how dangerous this War World was. To be honest, it boggled Diana’s imagination somewhat. A satellite larger than the Earth itself? Equipped with weapons powerful enough to demolish entire worlds? Part of her refused to believe it, but she trusted her friend’s word.

Next to Kara stood the Martian, J’Onn, who had used his shape-shifting powers to appear
somewhat human. The first time Diana had seen him he had looked far more alien, now he seemed almost human except for his green skin and somewhat prominent forehead. Diana knew that he had aided Kara, helped heal her wounds, so as far as Diana was concerned he was a comrade-in-arms she would gladly have at her side during the coming fight.

Bruce Wayne, the Batman, stood next to Diana and listened intently. He had heard the story already, just like Diana, but his mind was always working, always looking for more details. Diana knew that he had to feel even more out of his depth than she did, but that didn’t stop him from contributing and wouldn’t stop him from fighting.

“Mongul has a head start on us,” Kara said, “but hopefully we can circumvent that advantage somewhat.”

She looked at the newest member of their alliance. Diana had first encountered the man called Adam Strange two years ago, but it had only been during the last few months that they had managed to get into regular contact with him. Strange was from Earth, but he wore a suit of red and white battle armor - along with a rocket pack allowing him to fly and a futuristic gun at his hip - that were clearly not of Earth design. He had gotten those while spending a large amount of time on an alien planet called Rann.

He had only told them the short version, but apparently Rann was a highly developed world, whose citizens had sworn off combat and aggression many generations ago after a devastating war that had reduced large parts of their world to rubble. So when they found themselves facing an alien threat, they had sought a champion to do their fighting for them. Strange had become that champion.

“I’ve spoken to the Sardath back on Rann,” Strange said, stepping forward, “and they have prepared a Zeta beam to teleport us to the system where J’Onn here said War World is parked. Transport will be instantaneous, but it has its limitations. Once the Zeta radiation dissipates from our bodies, we will be brought back to our place of origin automatically. They can only give a rough time frame for that, approximately thirty hours or so, given the distance and the number of people to be transported.”

“I do not think we need to worry about the time limit,” Kara told him. “If we haven’t stopped Mongul within thirty hours, odds are we will have much bigger things to worry about.”

Diana nodded, even as her eyes found the sixth and final member of their team. Even if there had been no other indication of how dire Kara thought the situation to be, the presence of Green Lantern Abin Sur spoke volumes all by itself. Kara still had trouble looking at the Green Lantern who had failed to save Krypton without becoming angry in the process. Kara had confessed to Diana that she knew these feelings to be irrational, that she knew intellectually that Abin Sur was not to blame for her original home world’s destruction, but that her feelings didn’t change with that knowledge.

“Can we expect any reinforcements from the Green Lantern Corps?” Diana asked Abin Sur.

“I have contacted the Guardians of Oa to let them know of the impending reactivation of the War World,” he answered. “I am certain they will send aid, but with the Corps spread out over the known universe, I fear we cannot wait for them to arrive.”

“We need to leave now,” Kara told everyone. “We will use Abin Sur’s ship and the Zeta beam will transport us. Hopefully we will arrive before Mongul. Let’s move, people!”

Walking towards the airlock where Sur’s ship had docked, Diana caught up with Kara and touched
her shoulder.

“Have you said anything to Clark?” she whispered. Kara’s young son was almost fully into his powers by now, but neither of them had entertained the thought of taking him along for more than a second. No doubt the boy’s time to join them in battle would come soon enough, but not today.

Kara shook her head. “No! I wanted to, but couldn’t think of anything that wouldn’t sound like ‘good bye’.”

“What about your wounds? He can’t have missed those.”

“Oh, he saw them, just like Martha and Jonathan. But as far as they know the alien who did this to me is already beaten and everything’s fine. I’m just going away a few days to recuperate, nothing else.”

Diana was not happy that Kara was lying to her family, but she could understand it. The Amazons were different, a warrior race, so while her own mother would certainly worry, Queen Hippolyta was also proud of her daughter as she went out to face so dangerous a foe. It wasn’t that long ago that Kara had finally confessed to her that Clark was not, in fact, her son, at least not biologically, but Diana knew that he was her son in every other way that mattered. Almost everything Kara did was out of the motivation to keep her son safe, so dragging him along to battle a foe as powerful as Mongul was not going to happen anytime soon.

“Let us make our families proud then, sister,” Diana said, clasping Kara’s hand in her own, “and do our best to ensure that we shall all safely return to them when the battle is done!”

*****

Batman blinked away the spots in his vision and focused on his surroundings again. In a strange sort of way he was very thankful for the training he had received at the hands of Henry Ducard aka R’as al Ghul. Learning to operate calmly while feeling intense fear was certainly coming in handy today when he found himself so very much out of his comfort zone. For all that the Batman had become a larger-than-life presence in Gotham and was considered superhuman by many a criminal, he was still just a man.

A man who had just travelled across many light years of space by way of an alien teleportation beam. A man in the company of three different aliens, a warrior princess from Greek myth, and someone who, while “only” a man himself, had been to alien worlds several times before now. No one would be able to see it on his face, but Bruce Wayne had never been so far out of his element before.

“We have arrived in the designated star system,” Adam Strange announced, shaking off the dizzying effects of the beam far more quickly. Well, he did have plenty of experience with it, Batman told himself grudgingly.

“I am scanning the system for our target,” Abin Sur announced, the Green Lantern manipulating the controls of his star ship without ever moving a finger. The green ring on his finger glowed and the ship responded. Batman was certainly interested in the technology behind it, but figured that it was far beyond his understanding. For now, at least.

“These are the coordinates the Largas left us with,” the Martian called J’Onn J’Onnz announced. “War World should be in orbit around the system’s sun.”

Said sun was now visible on the ship’s view screen. It was a white dwarf star, Batman had been
told, a sun nearing the end of its life cycle. Only about two times the size of Earth, it nevertheless had as much mass as Earth’s sun, if not more. Not enough mass to collapse into a black hole, but more than enough to keep several planets in its orbit.

And something that was not a planet at all.

“I think we have found our target,” Strange said in a low voice.

The light of the white dwarf barely sufficed to illuminate more than the outline of the huge dark shape that was moving onto the view screen from the side. At first glance it might well have appeared as a planet, but the contours were too sharp, the surface too gleaming even in the weak light. Abin Sur manipulated the controls and the view screen shifted, pseudo colors overlaid the images, and the huge globe of the War World snapped into sharp focus.

“Sweet Hera,” he heard Diana whisper, the awe in her voice mirroring his own. The mere thought of something so huge being built, constructed from metal by mortal hands instead of being shaped by forces of nature, boggled the mind. Even as they watched the monstrous sphere continued to move and a moment later Batman had to revise his estimate of its size upwards several magnitudes once again. For the War World passed BEHIND the white dwarf star, not in front of it.

“It’s roughly three times the size of your planet Earth,” Abin Sur said, his own voice almost a whisper as well in the face of such enormity. “My scanners detect only minimal energy output, though. The War World appears to be inactive, at least for now.”

Batman looked over at Kara, who was not looking at the view screen but rather at a blank wall off to the side. Knowing her superior vision powers, he did not doubt she was studying their target in detail.

“What do you see, Kara?” he asked, drawing everyone’s attention to her.

“Almost the entire surface of War World I can see is covered in weapons of some sort. Missiles the size of buildings, gun muzzles hundreds of meters wide. Huge hangar doors, behind which I can see millions of drone craft, all of them looking ready for launch. There are also thousands of smaller satellites orbiting it, all of them displaying active energy patterns.”

“The Largas said that they locked away the War World by activating its automatic defenses,” J’Onnz added. “I would assume those satellites are part of the defense system.”

“Well, if they are still active, then Mongul hasn’t yet used to key to shut them down, has he?” Strange said. “We beat him here.”

“No, we didn’t,” Kara simply said, causing Batman’s blood to run as cold as the space outside.

She walked over the manual controls Abin Sur had installed on his ship – apparently he had wanted a backup in case his ring ever ceased to function, which was just smart thinking in Batman’s mind – and focused the view screen on a specific spot on the War World’s surface. Powered by the Green Lantern’s energy, the sensors were capable of zooming in across the vast distance and showed a space ship on the ground, right next to what was obviously an entrance into War World’s interior.

“That’s Mongul’s ship, we saw it on Mars,” Kara said. “He’s already here.”

“He must have reactivated the defenses once he was through,” Batman said. “Insuring that no one can follow him in.”
“I hate smart bad guys,” Strange muttered.

“Can you see him?” Batman asked.

“Yes. Thankfully the construction of War World seems to include no metals with a similar density to lead. Mongul is already several levels below ground and heading for what I assume to be a control chamber of some kind.”

“Surely he can’t control something this size all by himself, can he?” Diana asked. “I would imagine he would need a crew of some kind.”

“The control room appears to hold but a single chair and some kind of harness. There is a dead Warzoon still sitting in that chair, even. I fear the War World has been built to be controlled by one individual without any need for support.”

For a moment no one seemed to know what to say or do next.

“We need to get to the surface of War World and reach that control chamber,” Batman finally said. “If it can be controlled by one man, then it can be stopped by taking out that one man!”

Kara nodded in agreement. “We need to hurry. Abin Sur and I are the only ones capable of taking on those automated defenses and survive. We will try to break through or, if that won’t work, at least to occupy the defenses to create an opening for the rest of you.”

Batman listened as Abin Sur gave them brief instructions on how to pilot his space ship, a job Adam Strange eagerly took on. Apparently the design was not that different from the ones used on Rann. As the Green Lantern and Kara prepared to leave the ship, Batman focused on the screen, which was still showing the landing site of Mongul’s ship on the surface of War World.

“Adam, can you draw back the image a bit?” he asked, having spotted something at the very edge.

The other man gave him a curious look, but did as he was told and the image zoomed out. Close to the spot where Mongul had landed was something resembling an open field (using the term ‘field’ loosely, as War World was made entirely of metal) with rows upon rows of something that looked like boxes, lined up in neat patterns.

“It looks like a cemetery,” Diana said from beside him, studying the image.

“I’d say it is one,” Strange added, fiddling with the sensors. The image zoomed in once more and showed that each ‘box’ had something resembling a window. At extreme close-up, the screen showed the skeletal remains of an alien head inside.

“From what I have learned of the Warzoon,” J’Onn told them, “they had the custom of sealing their fallen warriors into caskets that allowed them a view of the sky. It was said that they should gaze upon all that their successors would conquer in their name.”

“Morbid,” Strange added.

“There must be thousands of those boxes,” Diana said, inspecting the image as Strange zoomed out again.

“And this is probably not the only cemetery on War World.” Batman rubbed his chin. “It’s interesting, though.”

“In what way, Batman?” J’Onn asked.
“The Largas told you that the Warzoon died out when their campaign to conquer the cosmos had just begun, correct?” The Martian nodded. “From your tale I assumed that some sort of plague had killed them, maybe a bio weapon launched by one of their enemies, but this paints a different picture.”

“He’s right,” Strange agreed. “If the Warzoon had all died out simultaneously, there wouldn’t have been anyone left to bury them. Unless the Largas did it.”

“I do not believe so,” J’Onn told them. “From what they told us, they only visited the War World very briefly, just long enough to lock it down and activate its defenses. They were a peaceful race through and through. Even if they had found it prudent to bury the Warzoons’ dead, they would hardly have done so following the Warzoons’ war-like traditions.”

“So whatever killed all the Warzoon did so gradually,” Batman concluded. “It left enough time for the survivors to bury the dead, but still drove their race to extinction within a relatively short time frame.”

Batman fell back into thought, remembering Kara’s words about the dead Warzoon still sitting in the War World’s control chair. “I believe I have a theory what could have happened to the Warzoon. And if I’m right, it could mean salvation for us all!”

*****

Kara and Abin Sur had barely left the ship when the defenses of War World began to attack them. Automated satellites released swarms of missiles towards them, even as giant laser cannons began firing from the surface of the artificial planetoid. Kara moved faster than she ever had before, flying in a random pattern to evade the powerful energy beams coming at her, and vaporized incoming missiles with her heat vision. There were always more missiles, though, and the energy beams kept coming closer and closer, keeping her from getting closer to the War World itself.

“How are you doing, Abin Sur?” she asked through the com system in the oxygen mask she had put on.

“I fear this is going to prove even more difficult than we thought,” the Green Lantern replied. “My ring’s force field is at its very limit, I doubt it will hold against more than one or two direct hits from these beams.”

Kara had no particular interest in finding out how her own vaunted invulnerability would hold up against these weapons, not after it had been strained (and overcome) by Mongul just a day earlier. She was still nowhere near 100 percent and the white dwarf star’s fading light was nowhere near as potent as Earth’s yellow sun. A prolonged engagement was not in her favor, even without factoring in the Zeta beam’s inherent time limit.

“We need a new plan,” Kara said, withdrawing from the range of War World’s defense systems alongside the Green Lantern. “We won’t be getting through with a direct assault.”

She focused her vision powers on the control room she had seen earlier. “Mongul has already reached the control room. We need to act fast or he’ll...”

“Let him take control of the War World, Kara,” Batman’s voice suddenly rang out in her earpiece.

“Say what?” she asked, not believing what she heard.

“Trust me, Kara! We WANT him to put on that harness!”
Bruce explained his theory to them.

“In Rao’s name, Batman, I hope you are right about this.”

In front of them the War World began to light up as more and more systems came online and the largest, most terrifying weapon the universe came back to life. With just the six of them directly in its crosshairs.

“I hope so, too,” Batman said.

*****

End Chapter 15

**Author’s Note:** Yes, in this universe of mine Adam Strange is a founding member of the Justice League. What can I say, I always liked the concept behind him, as he’s basically Flash Gordon but with the Zeta Beam taking him back to Earth at random times (usually just as he’s about to kiss Alanna). I’m a big fan of the old Filmation Flash Gordon cartoon, as well as Defenders of the Earth, so expect those to influence my portrayal of Adam Strange somewhat. I might do a flashback chapter later on to show the first meeting between him and the Trinity.

Also, my League only has six members at the outset instead of the usual seven. I toyed with adding a seventh member, but couldn’t really think of one that would fit at this point in the story. The only real candidate would have been Green Arrow, but I couldn’t really find a way to logically fit an archer into an outer-space battle against what’s basically the Death Star, only larger. Batman’s presence is pushing it as it is and he’s been friends with Kara and Diana for years at this point in the story. Adding someone like Hawkgirl or Aquaman out of the blue now would have felt like cheating.
Brightest Day (War World - Part 3)

Chapter Summary

Where a villain is stopped and a debt is repayed.

Chapter 16: Brightest Day (War World – Part 3)

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It quickly became apparent that the most difficult part of Batman’s plan would be to simply stay alive long enough for it to come into effect. If Kara had thought that the assault by the War World’s automated defenses had been terrible, the full-on attack by a fully activated War World with a guiding intelligence behind it was on an entirely different level.

Space itself seemed to be engulfed in flame as missiles the size of buildings came at them, exploding into fireballs the size of small moons. Laser blasts as wide as rivers seemed to fill every available space and Kara had to strain her superhuman reflexes to the utmost limit simply to stay ahead of the wave of annihilation.

Flashes of green light off to her right was the only sign that Abin Sur was still alive and kicking, as neither of them had the time for talk. Kara was pushing her powers like never before, at the same time utterly thankful that Clark was nowhere near this calamity. His powers, while almost completely active, were still fickle and he wouldn’t have lasted a minute in this storm. Rao, she wasn’t sure she would last much longer.

“We need to keep at it,” Batman’s voice sounded through her ear piece even as she saw Abin Sur’s ship streak past her, pursued by a huge swarm of missiles. She also spotted J’Onn J’Onnz and Diana, who had vacated the ship and were providing additional targets for the War World. Kara bit her tongue to keep from telling them to get back inside. She knew how quick and tough Diana was and J’Onn had already proven that he was formidable as well. This was not the time and place to be a worried mother hen.

“Spread out further,” Batman ordered them. “We need to stretch Mongul’s attention as wide as possible.”

Suppressing the need to keep her friends in sight, Kara poured on her super speed and flew in a wide arc around the War World, laser blasts and missiles dogging her heels every step of the way. She could feel the vast gravity of the metal world pulling at her, just like the white dwarf star in the distance.

When she actually had a second to breathe, she focused her super vision on the control room far down below the surface of the War World, checking on Mongul. He was sitting in the command chair, his face contorted in a mixture of concentration and rage. He was gripping the handles of the chair hard enough to bend the metal and sweat was glistening on his huge forehead.

“I think it’s working,” she told the others, even as she had to speed up again to evade certain death.
“Mongul looks like using the control harness is really taking a toll on him.”

There hadn’t been time for a long explanation, but Kara could follow Bruce’s logic. The Warzoon had died on the War World. Not all of them at once, but rather in small increments. It was as if something had killed them off one by one. And seeing as the only body Kara had spotted that had not been put in a casket had been sitting in the War World control chair, Bruce had concluded that their murderer was actually the War World itself.

It made sense, she had to admit. The mental strain of controlling an entire world, its weapons, its flight path, and everything else, had to be monumental. Mongul certainly looked like he was feeling the strain already. Not that it lessened the danger for any of them. The destructive potential of War World was truly staggering. If they couldn’t stop it here, there was no telling how many lives might be lost.

Time ceased to have any meaning for Kara as she pushed on, flying faster and faster, dodging even more missiles and laser beams. She risked a wider arc that took her closer to the white dwarf, feeling her cells soak up the much-needed energy, before jumping right back into the fray. Whenever she had a moment’s breathing room, she used her vision powers to check on Mongul, seeing him looking ever more stressed. They were waging a war of attrition in time lapse, someone or something had to give very soon.

There was a cry of pain across their comlink and Kara was almost hit herself as she started. A brief check with her powers showed that the cry had come from Abin Sur, who had not quite managed to dodge an exploding missile. His ring had protected him, but only just. He looked hurt and singed.

“Abin Sur, can you keep moving or do you need to retreat to the ship?” Batman asked across the comlink.

“I am fine, Batman,” the Green Lantern replied, though his voice sounded pained.

“I hate to be the spoil sport,” Adam Strange announced, “but all sorts of displays are lighting up here on the ship and unless I’m reading it very wrong, we’ve pushed this rust bucket to the limit. We’re going to have to pull back or we’re scrap!”

“We’re running out of time, Batman,” Kara said, dodging yet another giant-sized missile.

“We need to keep it up, or we’ll give Mongul time to recover,” Batman replied.

Suddenly, though, the apocalyptic bombardment ceased and the eternal silence of space seemed all the more silent for it. The few missiles still in flight streaked away into the darkness, the laser cannons ceased firing.

“Kara, what do you see?” Batman asked urgently.

Focusing her super vision once again, Kara sighed in relief. “It appears you were correct, Batman. Mongul has collapsed and fallen out of the control chair.”

“Is he still alive?”

Kara focused her vision even closer. “I’m no sure, he... yes, I can see his chest rise and fall. He’s still alive.”

“Then we’re still on a deadline,” Diana said over the com, making Kara sigh in relief that her best friend seemed unharmed from the terrible gauntlet. “If he wakes up, he might start this all over again.”
“Or worse,” Batman added, “figure out what is wrong with the control harness and fix the problem. We need to move now!”

Kara immediately accelerated towards the War World’s surface, but had to evade again when the satellites opened fire on her once more.

“Damn it, the automated defenses are still active,” Strange cursed. “How are we supposed to make it down there?”

Kara desperately tried to figure out something, her gaze moving across the gleaming surface of the War World and the white dwarf star rising above its sharp horizon. Then an idea struck her. An insane one, granted.

“This system is devoid of life, correct?” she asked.

“Indeed,” J’Onn answered. “Whatever life might once have thrived here was destroyed by the Warzoon before they perished. All the worlds in this system are nothing but dead rock.”

“Good,” she said, then looked towards Abin Sur. “Are you familiar with the Earth game called Pool?”

*****

One would not know it from simply looking at him, but Abin Sur was not a young man anymore. He had served as the Green Lantern of sector 2814 for well over a hundred solar cycles now. The power of the green light kept his body in peak condition, but even the wondrous power ring could not stave off the effects of time entirely. Especially on a day like this, when he had fought harder and longer than at any other time in recent memory.

He felt old and tired. Still, he was a Green Lantern. Fear was something he had long ago overcome. At least for his own life. Not so much for the lives of others.

“Are you certain of this, Kara-El?” he asked, having just listened to the insane idea of the young Kryptonian by his side.

“It will work,” she simply said, probably knowing full well that it wasn’t their chances of success he had questioned. “Even if we could get down there somehow, we can’t leave War World intact for someone else to find later down the line, who might be able to fix the flaw in its guidance system. We need to destroy it and this might be the only way to do it.”

Abin Sur nodded, knowing she was right.

“Kara, what are you planning?” the voice of the one called Diana came over the com, sounding worried.

“Something stupid, probably,” she answered, and then she moved.

Abin Sur blinked, even as he commanded his power ring to keep track of the Kryptonian’s trajectory. It still amazed him how powerful the Kryptonians could become when charged up with potent solar radiation. How easily their race could have avoided their fate had they but migrated to another world with a younger star. But it did not matter now. He had to focus now, unless he wished for the last daughter of Krypton to join the rest of her people in extinction.

There was nothing to see for the naked eye, but his ring easily tracked Kara-El as she accelerated away from the white dwarf at speeds that would put most space craft to shame. She flew directly
towards the system’s largest planet, a gas giant, and arrived before he had even finished the thought. She circled the planet, allowing herself to be drawn in by its enormous gravity and accelerated even faster. After dozens of orbits she shot out again, faster even than before, and headed directly towards the white dwarf.

“Gods, the woman is insane,” he heard Adam Strange whisper, the champion of Rann obviously having figured out what she was doing.

Kara-El circled the white dwarf at a ridiculously low orbit, diving deep into its humongous gravity well, and accelerated even further. Even his ring had trouble tracking her exact location from one moment to the next now, as she was barely more than a red and blue streak.

A moment later she shot away from the white dwarf again, angling towards the gas giant once more for the final leg of her intended journey.

“Hera, protect her,” Diana whispered.

Kara-El used the gas giant to slingshot back around and was now heading directly towards the War World, which was still in an orbit around the white dwarf.

“Now, Abin Sur,” she yelled into her com, her voice strangely distorted from the relativistic effect of flying at something approaching half the speed of light. It took but a thought and green light exploded from Abin’s ring, reaching out towards the blurred shape of his comrade. His will made into light wrapped itself around her near-invulnerable form and Abin Sur’s entire universe shrunk down to a single point as he poured everything he had into a single thought: protect her!

There was no sound in space, but had there been then Kara’s impact into the side of the War World would certainly have put the voice of any god to shame. She hit the metal world at a carefully calculated angle, her speed far too great for the automated defenses to even begin to track her, and the entire huge planetoid shuddered from the tremendous impact. Huge cracks ran along its surface, thousands of tons of metal simply vaporized from the kinetic energy of the collision, and the artificial globe’s orbit shifted.

“Immovable object, meet the irresistible force called Superwoman,” Adam Strange cheered. “It’s working! The War World’s orbit is decaying!”

While larger than the white dwarf, even a satellite made entirely from metal was nowhere near as massive as a collapsed star. The white dwarf’s gravity began to draw the War World towards it.

“Abin Sur, your ship’s computer calculates that the War World will collide with the white dwarf in roughly two hours. We really shouldn’t be here when that happens!”

“Where is Kara?” Diana asked.

*****

It took them over an hour to locate their missing comrade, who had ricocheted from the War World like a stone skipping across water. They were actually quite lucky that she hadn’t simply shot off into empty space at the ridiculous speed she had been travelling, instead falling into the gravity well of one of the system’s planets. Even as the War World was moving in ever-closer orbits around the white dwarf, they set down on the surface of the desolate hunk of rock that Kara had come down on.

They found their comrade lying at the end of a miles long trench she had dug into the rocky surface of the planet, Strange setting the ship down right beside her. Diana was the first out of the ship,
running towards her friend.

“Kara? Kara, are you all right?”

She sighed in relief when she saw that Superwoman was in fact conscious and already sitting up at the end of the trench, giving her a tired smile.

“Remind me to never do anything like this again, Diana,” Kara said, brushing dust and dirt off her shoulders. “Really, never again!”

Diana hugged her, though carefully as Kara was still favoring her right arm. “I hoped you tackled the planet with your left shoulder, you madwoman!”

Batman and the others walked up to them, even the dark knight’s stoic mask clearly showing relief at seeing that Superwoman was all right.

“We really shouldn’t linger,” he said. “Once the War World collides with the white dwarf, this entire system is going to turn really inhospitable.”

“No telling when the Zeta beam will wear off,” Adam added, looking at the sky, “so we better put some distance between us and the star in Abin’s ship.”

Kara looked up, her eyes focusing on the War World and its decaying orbit. It looked almost comical, the smaller object drawing in the bigger one, but the bang when they would finally meet would be a sight to behold, she was sure. Narrowing her eyes, she tried to catch a glimpse of the control center where she had last seen Mongul. Her head was still ringing from the impact, though, and her eyes refused to focus properly.

“Any sign of Mongul?” she asked the others instead.

Before anyone could give an answer, though, Abin Sur’s ship suddenly exploded behind them, causing everyone to take cover. When the smoke cleared, a huge yellow shape emerged from the wreckage.

“The greatest weapon in the universe,” Mongul growled as he approached them. “And you took it from me!”

The six heroes quickly lined up side by side, ready to face him.

“He’s as strong as I am, probably stronger,” Kara warned the others. “And a lot faster than his bulk suggests.”

“Let him come,” Diana growled, teeth bared, drawing the sword she had taken along for exactly this situation. “I am looking forward to...”

Her sentence was suddenly cut off as a blinding flash of light enveloped them all.

*****

“What happened?” Diana asked, when her eyes managed to focus again. Looking around, she saw that they were back in the docking bay of the Watch Tower, surrounded by the wreckage of Abin Sur’s ship. She also noticed that someone was missing. “Why isn’t Kara here?”

“The Zeta beam wore off,” Adam said. “But... somehow not for Superwoman!”

“It must be her Kryptonian physiology,” J’Onn speculated. “Her cells absorb solar radiation.
Maybe the Zeta radiation is similar enough to sunlight that her body holds a charge much longer than ours do.”

“You mean she is still on that planet, all alone with Mongul?”

“Not alone,” Batman said, looking around. “Abin Sur isn’t here, either.”

*****

Abin Sur had not been a Green Lantern for well over a century for nothing. The moment he felt the pull of the Zeta beam, he enveloped himself in a cocoon of green energy and pushed against the spatial distortion effect that was looking to deposit him back in Earth’s orbit. Mongul was still here and needed stopping, lest he somehow prevent the destruction of War World yet.

As the Zeta radiation dissipated, he was surprised to see that he was not the only member of their makeshift team that had remained in place. Superwoman, too, was still here.

“What happened?” she asked, never taking her eyes off the approaching enemy. “Where are the others?”

“The Zeta beam took them home, it seems,” he said. “I resisted its effects. And it appears you did, too.”

Attention, the voice of his power ring whispered in his mind. Ring charge below 5%. Recharge as soon as possible!

“Great,” Superwoman muttered, unaware of the precarious state of his ring’s power reserves. “Diana is never going to let me hear the end of this if we survive. She was so looking forward to taking this guy on.”

Abin cursed under his breath, he really should have recharged his ring while they were on the ship. Every Green Lantern ring needed to be recharged by touching it to a Power Battery, a direct conduit to the central Green Lantern Power Battery on the planet Oa. It would take but a thought to summon the battery from subspace, but the recharging process would take roughly twenty seconds or so.

He was quite certain Mongul would not give them that much time. Looking over at his sole remaining comrade, he clearly saw that Superwoman was favoring her right arm and looked extremely tired. This was not going to be easy.

“You do realize that the War World was deeply flawed, right?” Superwoman said, facing Mongul. “The control harness was killing its users. It damn near killed you, too.”

“Something I could have easily remedied, given enough time,” Mongul growled at her, slowly coming closer. “You robbed me of that chance, creature! I hope it was worth your life!”

Mongul leaped forward, but immediately impacted against a glowing green wall that had sprung up in front of him. Superwoman didn’t hesitate and immediately flashed forward when the green wall winked out again. Still off-balance, Mongul couldn’t brace himself against her and a double punch sent him toppling backwards. Abin saw her wince at the impact, no doubt feeling pain in her still-healing right arm, but she pushed it aside.

Mongul was only just coming back to his feet when Abin hit him with a glowing green battering ram, taking him off his feet once again. Twin beams of red energy from Superwoman’s eyes hit him dead on, causing him to cry out in pain. But a moment later he was back on his feet once again.
Abin wrapped him up in glowing green chains, but the giant broke free of them and continued his charge.

*Warning, ring charge at 3%! Recharge as soon as possible!*

“Superwoman,” he said, even as they kept up their joint assault to the best of their abilities. “My ring is almost out of charge. I will need roughly twenty seconds to recharge it.”

He could see a mix of annoyance, fear, and anger on her face before a look of resignation came over her. “Then you better start right now, Abin Sur. I will buy us the time you need!”

She flashed forward again and he heard the impact of invulnerable flesh on invulnerable flesh, but didn’t pay it any heed. He summoned his green battery from subspace, making it appear in his hand. A cry of pain didn’t distract him as he touched his ring to the metal surface of the battery and recited the oath.

“In brightest day, in darkest night,
no evil shall escape my sight.
Let those who worship Evil’s might
beware my power, Green Lantern’s light!”

*Ring fully charged!* the ring’s automated voice intoned as his ring glowed brightly.

Abin turned around again, just in time to see Mongul hit Superwoman with a punch to the belly that almost tore her in half. Superwoman dropped to her knees, gasping for air, and Mongul raised both his fists for what might well be a killing blow. The blow was stopped by a glowing green dome, though.

“I thought you had run away, Green Lantern,” Mongul said, turning toward him. “Your mistake!”

Now it was up to Abin Sur to buy time while Superwoman recovered, the Kryptonian woman clearly at the end of her strength. Mongul was relentless, though, and nothing Abin Sur did seemed to be able to penetrate his hide or even slow him down for more than a few seconds. Abin winced when Mongul broke yet another of his ring constructs, the mental backlash becoming more painful as the fight progressed.

“I have fought your kind before, Green Lantern,” Mongul said, fighting off yet another assault. “It’s only a matter of time until your will fails! Your magic light show is no match for my power!”

Abin didn’t reply, just focused all his will power into his ring. Construct upon construct sprang forth, fists and weapons, energy beams and barricades, and Mongul smashed past each of them. With each smashed construct Abin felt stings of pain in his head and now in his chest as well.

*Warning, the ring intoned, neural feedback exceeding safe limits! Disengagement recommended!*

Abin had not survived as a Green Lantern for so long by being foolish. Logic told him that he should retreat, wait for reinforcements, cease this direct confrontation that seemed unwinnable. There was just one problem with that strategy, namely that there was a wounded Kryptonian behind his enemy, who was still trying to get back to her feet. And a white dwarf star about to collide with a planet-sized weapon that would result in an explosion no one would be able to survive.

If Mongul was to die in the resulting supernova, so be it. Abin would not shed a tear. But the last daughter of Krypton would not die on his watch! He had failed her people once. He refused to do
so again.

*****

Kara was sure that there was something broken inside of her. She could barely breathe, every intake of air hurt. She had pushed her body far beyond its limits today, first with the extended engagement with War World’s weapons, then accelerating far beyond any speed she had ever hit before, the tremendous impact against the metal world, and now a second fight against Mongul for good measure when she had not even properly healed from the first one.

Her thoughts were focused on Clark, her son, whom she feared she would never see again. He was ready, though. She had taught him well and he knew the truth of his heritage. He would become Earth’s protector in her stead and Martha and Jonathan... mom and dad would help him through the grief. Diana and the others would be by his side, standing with him.

Managing to look up, she saw Abin Sur engaging the yellow-skinned monster that had set all this in motion. She could see the strain on his face, as well as the determination. Why wasn’t he fleeing? War World was about to be destroyed and Mongul would not survive its destruction, just like the rest of this system. The mission was accomplished.

As if on cue, the sky above them lit up like all the universe’s fireworks were exploding at once. The giant bulk of the War World had crashed into the far denser mass of the white dwarf. Millions of tons of metal were being vaporized, stellar mass was torn loose, and a star’s fusion reaction mingled with generators large enough to power a dozen planets.

The death flash of War World’s demise blinded her, even as her brain tried to calculate how much time they had left. The world they were on was a bit farther out from its star than Earth, so the shockwave of the supernova would take roughly ten minutes or so to reach them. Then this world and everyone on it would die.

A cry of pain made her look away from the spectacle and what little breath was left in her body escaped her in a gasp. Apparently Abin Sur had been briefly distracted by the spectacle above or maybe his strength had simply given out. Mongul was within arm’s reach of him and was crushing his hand, the one wearing the power ring, in his own much larger one.

“It’s over, Green Lantern,” Mongul growled. “This planet will be your funeral pyre!”

He turned to look at Kara. “And yours, too, creature! It will be ample payment for robbing me of the universe’s greatest weapon!”

He started towards her and Kara desperately tried to get up, to find the strength for another burst of heat vision, anything. Her body refused to obey, though. This was it. She was going to die here!

“No” Abin Sur screamed and the power ring on his crushed hand exploded into brilliance once more, a huge beam of power hitting Mongul in the back and propelling him away from Kara and into the side of a nearby mountain. Incredibly, the broken Green Lantern was back on his feet.

“Not again,” he muttered. “Never again! Not while I still draw breath!”

Rubble shifted and Mongul was back on his feet, too, and coming towards them once again.

“Commendable, Green Lantern, but futile. I...” he trailed off, his eyes focusing on something behind them. Kara turned her head a bit, refusing to let him out of her sight entirely, until she saw what he saw.
Six streaks of green light were coming out of the sky and heading directly towards them.

“Another time then, creature,” Mongul said. “Know that I will take my revenge on you, however long it takes!”

He touched a button on his belt and a moment later he was simply gone. Kara wanted to curse him, but had no breath left to do it. She barely had the strength to remain on her knees and Abin Sur was collapsing beside her. Six shapes surrounded by green light set down beside them, each of them looking entirely different, but all wearing the same green and black uniform. Green Lanterns! Abin Sur’s reinforcements had finally arrived.

“We need to leave immediately,” the one she recognized as a Xanthusian said. “The shockwave of the supernova will reach us within minutes.”

Green beams of light gently wrapped around Abin Sur and herself and seconds later they were airborne, rapidly moving away from the doomed world below them. Kara turned to see the huge shockwave racing outward from the exploding star. War World was gone, at least. The danger to the universe was past.

“Abin?” one of the other GLs, a lilac-skinned man she believed to be from the planet Korugar, was inside the green bubble with them and kneeling beside his fallen comrade.

“She must live,” Abin Sur said, his voice barely audible. “Last of Krypton… failed her people… could not let her… could not fail again!”

Kara’s heart clenched as she heard his words. For so long she had carried resentment in her heart, refusing to let go of the anger she felt for the Green Lantern who had failed to save her world. In her head she had known that it hadn’t been his fault, that her people had invited their doom themselves, but her heart had not listened.

Carefully moving over to his side, ignoring the pain, she took his unbroken hand in hers and gave it a soft squeeze. “You have not failed, Abin Sur,” she simply said. “I live, thanks to you. Krypton lives on, thanks to you. Thank you, my friend!”

He nodded, his strained features softening. Then his eyes closed and the green ring slid of his broken fingers, hovering in the air before them. Looking up, she saw the six Green Lanterns standing in a circle around them, all of them with their rings raised in salute. The Korugarian had tears in his eyes.

“Honor be to Abin Sur,” he said, his voice quivering. “Green Lantern of sector 2814. Champion of Justice! His light will shine forevermore!”

Abin Sur’s ring vanished, zipping through the green bubble and shooting off into space. Kara didn’t notice, she was still clutching his hand and tears were rolling down her face.

*****

Even as Abin Sur, long-serving Green Lantern of sector 2814 and hero on hundreds of worlds, was taken to his final resting place by his comrades, a green ring of power was zipping through space. Sector 2814 was in need of a new protector, a new champion to wield the green light in the name of law and order. And be it fate or mere chance, the ring found a fitting candidate on the planet called Earth.

“Guy Gardner of Earth,” the ring said, appearing before its new chosen one. “You have the ability to overcome great fear. Welcome to the Green Lantern Corps.”
Author’s Note: Well, sooner or later Abin Sur had to go, you all knew it was coming. I originally intended to replicate his original death scene and have it happen off-panel, but somehow found it more fitting for him to go out with a bang and reconcile his feelings of failure regarding Krypton in the process. Also, I’m going with the more modern take of the Green Lantern rings only having to be recharged when depleted instead of every 24 hours.

And yes, I have chosen Guy as my Green Lantern. To be honest I really don’t like Hal Jordan in any of his incarnations and while I liked John Stewart in the Justice League cartoon and was a fan of Kyle Rayner’s stint in the 90s, I finally decided to challenge myself and use Guy instead. We’ll see how he fares when he eventually encounters Superwoman and her Justice League. Just a hint: I’m a huge fan of Keith Giffen’s Justice League from the late 80s.
Survivors (War World - Epilogue)

Chapter Summary

Where two survivors discuss what to do with the rest of their lives.

Chapter 17: Survivors (War World – Epilogue)

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Kara sat on the observation deck of the half-finished Watch Tower orbital station and simply let the unfiltered sunlight wash over her. During the last few days she had pushed even her own formidable physique to its very limit and beyond, resulting in a number of injuries and a level of fatigue she had never experienced before.

When she had finally returned to Earth (she was never going to use the Zeta beam again unless there was absolutely positively no other way and the fate of the universe at stake, too) she had suffered from multiple broken bones, internal injuries, and a near-complete depletion of solar energy. Diana and J’Onn had used their super strength to help set her broken bones (something she was not anxious to repeat anytime soon) and the rest would be taken care of simply through sunlight and time.

There was the added complication, of course, that she didn’t want to let her family know how badly she had been hurt. Clark would be equal parts worried and pissed off, the latter because she had never even entertained the thought of taking him along, despite his powers being nearly as strong as her own now. And Martha and Jonathan would just worry and fret. She loved all of them, but she figured she would recover much faster without someone hovering all the time.

So as far as the Kent family was concerned, Kara was busy doing clean-up work from their last mission and continuing to work on the Watch Tower, while in reality she was simply sitting here, giving her body time to recover.

Her mind was constantly at work, though. She kept going over that fight against Mongul that had cost Abin Sur his life. Could she have done something different? Something to keep the Green Lantern alive? Had Mongul escaped from the supernova that destroyed the War World? He had teleported away just minutes before the shockwave from the exploding star had torn that desolate planet apart. Had he reached his ship and made it out? If so, he would no doubt be back to take his revenge. Given that they had first met on Mars, figuring out that she called its neighboring planet home would not be too difficult.

And speaking of Mars...

“How are you doing, J’Onn?” she asked, her eyes still closed, but her hearing having picked up his footsteps a while ago, hesitantly coming closer to her.

“That is what I wished to ask you, Kara-El,” he replied, stepping into the room. “You have taken the brunt of the damage in our fight against Mongul, after all.”
“Not as much as Abin Sur,” she replied.

“That is true,” J’Onn agreed. “I only knew him for a few brief hours, but his passing saddens me. He was a remarkable individual. Noble, yet burdened by grief.”

Kara nodded. “I really didn’t know him much longer, all things considered. We met a few times before, but mostly due to emergencies.”

“And yet,” J’Onn continued, “there was a tension between the two of you. One could see it even without telepathic powers.”

Kara sighed, it figured that others had picked up on that, too.

“Abin Sur was present thirteen years ago when Krypton died,” she told him. “He considered the destruction of my world a personal failing. It is why he willingly gave his life in order to protect mine at the end.”

J’Onn sat down beside her, his body still in the somewhat humanoid shape he had adopted upon leaving Mars with her.

“This troubles you,” he simply said. “Do you believe he sacrificed himself needlessly?”

“I am not sure,” she replied. “Sinestro, one of his fellow Green Lanterns, told me that Abin Sur had been supposed to retire from active duty some time ago, but had refused to do so. Apparently he had felt that he had not yet done enough good to balance his failures, few as they were. Now I fear that... well, maybe some part of him wanted it this way, you know?”

J’Onn nodded, understanding what she meant. “We all carry our failures with us; they often weigh much heavier than our successes. The need to mitigate them... it can be a powerful driving force.”

Kara looked at him. “You sound as if you speak from experience.”

“I do. When the Imperium attacked our world and destroyed my people, I was the one to find a way to stop them. By the time I had succeeded, though, there were none left but me. I stood alone on an empty, desolate world, sole survivor of a war that had driven two species to extinction. Ever since that day the questions have haunted me. Had I failed in some way? Could I have been faster? Could I have done more?”

“Could you have?” Kara asked.

J’Onn chuckled. “Logic says no. Logic also says that it is useless to ponder these kinds of questions, as the past cannot be changed. Logic, however, does not always have final say when it comes to our feelings and actions.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” Kara agreed.

“I am certain Abin Sur had his reasons for doing what he did,” J’Onn continued. “Whether or not they hold up against cold logic is ultimately irrelevant. He decided to give his life to protect someone else. There are many worse reasons to die and few better ones.”

They fell into silence for a while, Kara turning back towards the viewing window, gazing out into empty space.

“Does it get easier?” she asked a few minutes later. “Being the last of your kind, I mean.”
J’Onn turned to her, looking puzzled. “Forgive me if I am mistaken, Kara-El, but is there not another of your kind left alive? I heard Diana mention your son.”

“True, but my son, Kal, was but a baby when our world died. He is technically a Kryptonian, but he has never known any home but Earth and has grown up as a human. He has no memories of Krypton.”

“Unlike you,” J’Onn said, understanding. “You are the only one in whose memories your lost world lives on. Krypton now exists only in you, much like Mars does in me.”

Kara sighed. “I was thirteen when our world died and it’s been thirteen years since. I have now lived on Earth as long as I have ever lived on Krypton.”

“Mars has died thousands of years ago, but I have spent much of the time since in hibernation. I am uncertain how many years it has been in terms of awareness. Decades, certainly, though the years tend to blur when you have no need to tell the time.”

Kara had wondered how J’Onn could still be alive so long after his race had gone extinct. Some form of stasis or cryogenic suspension would have been her first guess.

“Have you ever thought to join your people, J’Onn?” she asked.

“Of course, many times. But there was a duty left to perform.” He gazed at her. “How about you?”

“Once or twice,” she admitted. “But there was Kal. I had promised to take care of him, no matter what, and he needed me. And I needed him, too, I guess. He kept me alive. No, more than that. He kept me living. I am not sure what might have happened, had I been all alone with no one who needed me.”

She turned towards him. “And no duty left to perform.”

J’Onn’s gaze did not meet hers, instead gazing out into space once again. “Are you asking me whether or not I intend to join my people now, Kara-El, as my duty of protecting the crystal key of the Warzoon has ended?”

“I do wonder what your plans for the future are, J’Onn.”

At some point during their conversation he had shifted back into his natural form, all long, gangly limbs and elongated head.

“I am uncertain, Kara-El. For the first time in a long time I find myself without a purpose in life.” He paused, thinking. “Tell me, Kara-El. What will you do once your son is fully grown and able to take care of himself?”

Kara leaned back, resting on her elbows and stretched her legs out in front of her. “I guess I’ll continue doing what I’m doing. Protect this world, do my best to improve it, and keep it from repeating my own people’s mistakes.” She paused, thinking. “It’s something that I could always use more help with, actually.”

“Diana and the one called Batman have told me about this alliance you are forging, for which you are building this orbital station. Working alongside you, even for this brief time, has reminded me of the days when I was not alone in the universe.”

“The time does not have to be brief, J’Onn,” she told him. “I have long come to the conclusion that even someone with my powers cannot deal with every threat, every danger, protect everyone. We
all need help sometimes. None of us would have been able to stop Mongul alone.”

J’Onn looked at her. “Is this an invitation to permanently join your group, Kara-El?”

“It is an invitation to make yourself a new home here, J’Onn. To find a new purpose for your life. Earth is a strange place, I admit. Its people are young, they are still making many mistakes, but they have also shown me kindness and taken me in as one of their own. My son as well. When I feared we would end up all alone in the universe, they showed me that I was wrong. That I was not alone.”

She reached out and touched his hand with hers. “You don’t need to be alone either, J’Onn.”

*****

J’Onn J’Onnz, last Manhunter of Mars, sole survivor of his kind, had forgotten many things in his long, lonely existence. He had forgotten what it was like to be around other people, how it felt to have someone touch him, or to sense the thoughts of someone else so close by.

The Martians had been a race of telepaths and opening their thoughts to one another had been as natural as breathing. Here, among these aliens, he had to constantly remind himself not to read their thoughts, for they could not do the same in return. They communicated entirely with words, gestures, and facial expressions. Not only did he need to get used to communicating with others at all again, he needed to learn a different way of communicating, too.

Kara-El, the last daughter of Krypton, had been the first living being he had encountered since the last of the Imperium had died. Well, her and Mongul, but they could hardly compare. At first he had freely read her thoughts, learning many things about her, before he recognized the need for restraint. Among the things he had learned was how deeply she cared. It was why she had involved herself in a battle that had not really been hers. Why she had gathered a group of protectors to help him fulfil the duty he had failed in. Why she was now offering him a new purpose in life.

He could not quite suppress the flare of jealousy he felt upon thinking how similar their situations were, yet how different. Both of them had seen their worlds die, but whereas he had been left alone on a barren, desolate planet, she had been given the chance to begin anew on a different world, along with a still-living member of her family.

J’Onn missed his family every single day. His wife M’Yri’ah, his daughter K’Hym. Oftentimes the urge to simply give up and join them in death had been so strong, only the dedication to his duties had managed to stay his hand. Could he really start anew? Could he resist the call of the dead, simply because a stranger had shown him kindness?

He looked at Kara, at her open face and the light of compassion in her eyes. She was a very complex individual, that much he already knew about her. On the one hand she was like him, mourning a world lost, plagued by memories of the dead, nearly crippled by survivor’s guilt. At the same time, though, she was a cheerful, optimistic, and kind person, who strove to see the best in everyone and worked ceaselessly to help others.

He had heard her thoughts on Mars, moments before Mongul had nearly killed her, and she had thought only of her son, Clark. How sorry she was that she would not see him become a man. She had so much love in her heart and she was willingly extending that love to others. On the surface this alliance she was building here was simply a means to an end. Meant to protect the world she now called home, the world her son was growing up on. But it was more than that.

Kara-El, he realized, was a builder, a creator. She had lost her own home, so she was creating a
new one here on Earth. A home that took in strays, refugees, and survivors, just like her and Kal. She had been shown kindness here and was now determined to build upon this kindness, to multiply it, and spread it as far as possible.

J’Onn had stood on the surface of cold, dead Mars for so long, that he had almost forgotten how the warmth of a home felt. Now, though, he was starting to remember. Squeezing her hand in his, he finally spoke.

*****

“This alliance of yours, of ours, have you thought of a name yet?” J’Onn asked.

Kara considered this, even as she smiled at J’Onn’s quiet acceptance of her offer to stay. She thought of Bruce’s remark from a few years back, asking her whether she really expected there to be an entire league of superheroes coming out of the woodwork. And she thought of Abin Sur and what Sinestro had called him in his eulogy. A champion of justice.

“Justice League,” she said. “How does that sound?”

J’Onn nodded. “That sounds very good.”

*****

End Chapter 17

Author’s Note: Sorry for the relatively short chapter. I had actually planned to deal with Lex Luthor next, but going directly from an outer space adventure that cost one of her comrades his life to dealing with an Earth-born villain seemed a bit too jarring. So I decided to give Kara some time to recover and also get into J’Onn’s head a bit as well. Also, the official naming of the Justice League.
The Fall of Lex Luthor

Chapter Summary

Where Lex Luthor attempts to rid himself of a certain alien.

Chapter 18: The Fall of Lex Luthor

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If Lex Luthor, genius billionaire philanthropist and industrialist, had one weakness that he would actually admit to – to himself, if not one else – it was that he had a hard time accepting that other people might also be smart. Not as smart as himself, of course, that would be ridiculous. But while most people were so stupid that it actually caused him physical pain to interact with them, he did admit (grudgingly) that there were some who might actually come close to his own intellectual level.

One of them, to his chagrin, seemed to be Superwoman.

Oh, how this woman vexed him. It wasn’t just that she had effectively played him and it had taken him nearly a year to realize it. He had actually believed for quite some time that he might be able to lure her in with charm and a huge paycheck. She had given him a coy smile, told him she would keep it in mind, and he had bought it far longer than he would ever admit to anyone else, even under torture.

Well, it just went to show that even someone with his intellectual level was not quite as immune to womanly wiles as he would have liked to believe. It also showed that he had underestimated the woman. He had seen her flashy super powers, he had certainly noticed the fact that she was a very striking woman, and he had naively assumed that someone with such lavish physical gifts would be lacking on an intellectual level.

For a time he had considered that she was just the kind of woman that liked playing coy, nothing more to it than that, or simply not intelligent enough to recognize the opportunity he presented to her. But no, the Superwoman was smart and, more important even than that, she was an enemy. Well, he had considered that a possibility from the start, but he had allowed himself to hope that he would be able to turn her into an asset. Oh, what an asset she would have been. Not only was that no longer in the cards, though, it became apparent that she viewed him as an enemy, too, and she had not been idle about it, either.

Lexcorp, the company he had built from the ground up, was an entirely legitimate business. Surrounding it, though, were multiple smaller businesses, their ownerships hidden behind multiple layers of shell companies, false names, and strawmen. A large network of illegal activities supplemented the huge cash flow that was at the heart of the Luthor business and for years no one had ever managed to penetrate into it. Occasionally he would have to close down one of his shell companies, two or three times in the past he had been forced to have a strawman take the fall for something, but few people had ever even suspected that legitimate businessman Lex Luthor might be involved.
In the last year or so, though, someone had begun to systematically attack his network. Half a dozen shell companies had fallen victim to surprisingly well-prepared and competent tax inspections, and not just in the United States, either. Several flunkies that had run illegal businesses for him for years had been arrested without warning. None of them knew that they were actually working for him, naturally, but they reported to others, who reported to still others, and at some point the chain would inevitably lead back to him.

To the casual observer nothing about this attack on his empire would scream “Superwoman”, but he knew better. Hidden caches of documents and money were found by someone who was clearly able to see through walls. Security systems were deactivated by someone moving too fast to be seen. There was nothing there he could take to the police, nothing that would even begin to implicate Superwoman of doing anything illegal, but he knew. He just knew. She was trying to destroy him. Worse, she seemed to be succeeding, too.

Well, she might have had a head start on him, but he had not been idle the entire time, either. Sadly his research department had been unable to come up with anything substantial regarding Superwoman’s background. They had come up with lots of theories, but each one was more ridiculous than the next. One theory had even said that Superwoman had a civilian identity somewhere, hiding out amongst the mere mortals. Ridiculous! No one with powers like her would ever deign to live among the rabble.

While those results had been disappointing, others had shown far more promise. Superwoman might be an alien, but she was similar enough to humans that she shed skin cells and occasionally left hairs behind, too. His people had managed to gather some samples of her DNA this way and put it through every analysis imaginable. Sadly her DNA was far too alien to create a clone of her (at least with the current level of technology, who knew what might be possible in a few years), but it had allowed him to vastly expand his understanding of her physiology and powers.

This, coupled with a report his hackers had liberated from S.T.A.R. lab computers, had finally enabled him to find the Superwoman’s Achilles heel. And it had only taken two years of searching and roughly eighty million dollars to find the arrow that could pierce said heel.

“I think I shall call it… Lexonite!” Luthor said, admiring the glowing green meteor rock sitting on his desk.

*****

Seeing as Superwoman was obviously looking to catch him in some sort of criminal activity, Lex figured that he might as well give her the chance to do so. Maybe it was time to go back to the beginning. The battle suit that had been “stolen” by a “terrorist” during their first face to face meeting had long since been replaced by a more advanced model. Sadly the Pentagon had cancelled their order for the suits, too many cutbacks, but there were other interested parties. Parties that the United States government certainly did not want to see equipped with advanced weapons made in the USA.

A midnight meeting was arranged, very quietly, across channels that Luthor was reasonably certain had been compromised not too long ago. A remote warehouse was agreed upon as the meeting place, belonging to Luthor by way of three separate shell companies. An obscene amount of money was named as the asking price for a number of advanced battle suits that would allow anyone to take over a middle-sized, non-nuclear country without too much trouble.

As the night of the meeting arrived, Luthor set up three separate dinner dates, all of whom would be attended by lawyers conveying Mr. Luthor’s most sincere regrets that he couldn’t come himself, but something important had come up at the very last minute. Two different flights were booked in
his name (first class, of course), neither of which he was planning to be on, and a nondescript car
took someone who looked a lot like him to a casino with firm orders to gamble away quite a bit of
money.

Luthor himself accompanied the shipload of battle suits to the distant warehouse, his secret weapon
securely in his pocket. He killed some time working on the speech he intended to give when the
death of Superwoman was announced publically. Something about how terrible it all was, how
much good she had done for the world, all that. Maybe he would even open up a charity in her
name. He could always use another venue to launder money, after all.

When the time of the meeting finally arrived and a very large truck came to a stop in front of the
warehouse, Luthor remained in the background as his people came to an agreement with the
suitably Arabic-looking customers. They began to load the crates full of battle suits into the truck
and Luthor was growing a tiny bit impatient. Had he overestimated Superwoman’s abilities after
all? The warehouse wasn’t even lead-lined, for Christ’s sake.

When he was just about to write off the entire evening as a severe waste of time, something finally
happened. Just as the truck was about to drive off with its precious and highly illegal cargo, red
beams came out of the dark night sky and melted all of its tires down into sludge.

“About time,” he muttered, checking his wristwatch. “Some people are so terrible inconsiderate.”

A female shape dropped out of the sky and touched ground right next to the truck. Long blonde
hair and red cape moving in the evening wind, the headlights of the truck illuminating the red and
blue suit. Luthor was standing in deep shadow inside the warehouse, but her eyes found him
without any problems.

“Getting sloppy, Luthor?” she said, casually brushing away the men who had stormed out to try
and subdue her. All of them were knocked out in seconds. “Since when do you attend to your
illegal dealings in person?”

She walked towards him and Luthor stepped out of the shadows, smiling. He had carefully selected
his most expensive business suit for this meeting. It wouldn’t do to look anything but his best, after
all. Superwoman came to a step just a few feet away from him and he allowed himself to enjoy the
view for a moment. She was even taller than he remembered from their one brief face to face
meeting years ago, actually, and looked even curvier. Not that he was complaining, mind you. She
was certainly a sight to behold.

“Is this the point where I am supposed to yell that you cannot prove anything and that you will
never catch me, Superwoman?”

Her eyes narrowed, his nonchalance probably making her suspicious. He was well aware that she
had the power to kill him where he stood before he would ever know that she had moved, but she
would not do any such thing. She was constrained by morals and adherence to law and order. Sad,
really, that someone with the powers of a goddess allowed herself to be so limited. You would
never see him limiting himself thus, powers or no powers.

“What’s your game?” she asked him, crossing her arms.

“No bantering then? Oh well!”

He withdrew his hand from his pocket, which his personal tailor had lined with lead just a few days
ago. At about the same time he had had one of the world’s best and most highly-prized jewelers
take a rough piece of green crystal and work it into a fine piece of art. A beautiful, if somewhat
gaudy ring, the green stone shining with an inner light.

“Recognize this?” he asked, holding his hand out to her as if he expected her to kiss it. Superwoman’s eyes widened and she took a step back.

“I am calling it Lexonite,” he said in a conversational tone, stepping forward at the same time. “Somewhat egotistical, maybe, but it has a nice ring to it, don’t you think? It’s a fascinating material, nowhere to be found on Earth’s table of elements. Who knows what marvelous properties it might have?”

Superwoman didn’t speak, but the way she stumbled back from him told him all he needed to know. He was certainly going to enjoy this.

“Well, I know one of the properties it has,” he continued, shortening the distance between them even further. “Did you know that humans – and apparently human-like aliens, too – tend to leave behind hairs and DNA wherever they go? It wasn’t easy to find some of yours, but with enough time and money, everything can be accomplished. And it was delightful to see how your cells reacted to the radiation of the Lexonite. The way they shriveled and died...”

Superwoman stumbled, her back hitting the wall of the warehouse, and Luthor relished the look on her face. The mighty goddess actually looked afraid of him, the mere mortal. Well, there was nothing “mere” about him, but still. This had all the trappings of a Greek tragedy. How delightful.

“Why are you doing this?” she asked, her voice more whisper than anything else.

“Why?” he replied, now standing so close to her that he could almost feel the heat radiating off her skin. “It’s really quite simple, Superwoman! You have proven yourself an obstacle. I had so hoped that you would turn out to be an asset instead, but I guess one can’t have everything.”

He leaned in, his cheek almost touching hers, to whisper in her ear. “Maybe you could have been even more than an asset, Superwoman. Too bad.”

He took her unresisting hand in his and slipped the Lexonite ring off his finger and onto hers. “It seems that this will be the only ring of mine to ever grace that mighty hand.”

He pressed a kiss to her fingers, then let go of her hand and watched in satisfaction as she slowly slid to the ground, her face contorted in pain.

“You know, you should feel honored,” he said, standing over her. “I have killed so many people, but it has been years since I did it with my own hands. I had almost forgotten how... satisfying it felt. Maybe I should take a more active hand in the future, too.”

“Don’t you... care at all... about the people you... killed?” she asked, coughing.

“Oh, I do care,” he said. “I am not a psychopath, Superwoman. But you must understand, this is my world! I make the rules! And people who don’t follow my rules will be removed, it’s that simple. I won’t have an alien with delusions of godhood stand in my way.”

He checked his watch. “Now, be so kind as to get on with dying. I have other appointments and I have an entire department of scientists eager to begin cutting up your corpse, Superwoman. Who knows, maybe they’ll be able to clone me a Superwoman of my own. One more... accommodating than you, my dear!”

“I’m afraid you will miss your appointments,” a new voice growled.
Luthor started, looking around. There was a shadow separating from the walls, a man dressed all in black and with a mask covering his face.

“And who exactly do you think you are?” Luthor asked, doing his best to hide the fact that his heart was beating rapidly. “Can’t you see I’m busy?”

“I think you have far more time than you think,” Superwoman suddenly said behind him, no trace of pain in her voice. Luthor whirled around again, aghast to see her back on her feet.

“What...? How...?”

She had taken the ring off her finger and was flipping it up into the air like a coin. “Lexonite, Lex? Really? You thought some kind of magic space stone would poison me?”

Luthor couldn’t believe it. The tests had been conclusive! The radiation of the Lexonite should have poisoned her. Yet here she was, looking entirely unhurt. This couldn’t be happening!

“Lex Luthor,” yet another voice said. More people had suddenly appeared in the warehouse. The newcomers wore police uniforms. “You are under arrest for attempted arms sales to a restricted country, attempted murder, and I have been told the IRS is preparing an entire host of charges against you as well. You have the right to remain silent. Everything you say…”

He started for the door, knowing how futile it would be, only to come to a stop as another shape appeared there. A dark-haired woman wearing something that looked like a cross between an ancient Greek soldier’s uniform and a swim suit. He recognized her, of course. She was almost as recognizable as Superwoman, after all.

“Going somewhere, Mr. Luthor?” Wonder Woman asked, smiling at him.

“Apparently not,” he huffed.

*****

Once Lex Luthor had been loaded into the police car and driven away, “Superwoman” turned to look at her two friends and smiled. “You owe me big for this one, Kara! That weasel will never know how close I came to simply taking his head off when he kissed my hand.”

An answering smile appeared on the face of “Wonder Woman”, even as she reached up and slipped off the black wig she had been wearing, freeing her blonde locks.

“You did great, Diana. And I freely admit that you fill out my suit a lot better than I do your armor!”

Diana took off the blonde wig she had been wearing in return. She had initially balked at the idea of switching costumes with her best friend, believing that Luthor would spot the difference immediately. Kara was, after all, shorter than she was (if not by much) and had a different facial shape, too. A blonde wig and blue contact lenses alone would not really disguise that. Kara had been right, though, in saying that Luthor would only see the suit and the hair, not bothering to look any closer.

“He did spend more time looking at my chest than my face,” Diana shrugged, fluffing out her hair.

“For all his intelligence,” Batman interjected, “Luthor still fell into the trap of seeing only what he wanted to see.”
“Boobs?” Kara asked, giggling.

Batman grimaced. “Not even remotely what I meant.”

Kara nodded, still smiling, but then grew somber. “Do you think we have enough to actually get him behind bars? You know he’ll have the best lawyers money can buy, not to mention enough money to bribe even a saint.”

“The case is solid,” Batman replied. “The information we have supplied the FBI and IRS on his illegal activities will suffice to put him in prison for life, never mind his verbal confession from a few minutes ago that the officers have on film. And seeing as he owns his own private airplane, no judge will allow bail.” A smile crossed his face. “Also, Luthor will find that the passwords for all his bank accounts have been mysteriously scrambled. He will find it hard to dislodge the money needed for bribes.”

“I hope you are right,” Kara simply said, her eyes still following the police car in the distance. “That man has been slippery all his life.”

“I will keep an eye on the proceedings,” he told her, putting a hand on her shoulder. “Luthor will not escape justice, I promise.”

Reaching into one of his pockets, he pulled out the lead-lined case where he had stashed Luthor’s ring. A perfectly harmless duplicate would end up in the police evidence locker, firmly establishing that there was no such thing as a glowing green xeno-mineral that was harmful to Superwoman.

“You should take this,” he said, holding it out to Kara.

“No, you keep it,” she told him instead. “There need to be safeguards in place. No one is incorruptible. I will sleep easier knowing that the means to stop me, should it ever be necessary, are in the hands of someone I can trust with my life.”

Batman nodded, though his eyes did stray to Diana for a moment. “Oh, don’t worry, Bruce,” she said. “Kara stashed a piece of Kryptonite on Themyscira years ago. Just in case.”

The three friends stood together for a moment, just enjoying the moment. Then Diana went and hugged Kara, pulling her into her side.

“You do realize, though, that you have now officially run out of excuses, right? Clark will hear about Luthor’s arrest in tonight’s news and hold you to your word.”

Kara groaned, slumping. “You just had to remind me, didn’t you?”

*****

End Chapter 18

Author’s Note: Remember that in this universe of mine Kara has managed to keep the existence of Kryptonite hidden from the world at large. And while she has mentioned the name of her home planet publically, it was only in one interview and never since. So when Lex Luthor finds some glowing green xeno-mineral that he believes will be able to hurt Superwoman, of course he’s going to name it after himself. He wouldn’t be Lex otherwise.

I originally planned to have a longer arc involving Lex’ transition from business tycoon to imprisoned super villain, but couldn’t come up with anything exciting to write about that. So It’s
done now, I wanted it over with before the public debut of Superboy, but without making the take-
down look too easy. I’m not one hundred percent happy with it, to be honest. Just remember that
Luthor, as he was portrayed in the post-Crisis comics, was an utter misogynistic pig, so no matter
how often he tells himself that he won’t underestimate SuperWOMAN, he’ll still do it. The idea
that a woman could outsmart and play him is simply inconceivable to him.
Chapter Summary

Where a mother needs to learn to let go.

Chapter 19: Parents

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The Amazonian island of Themyscira had become something of a refuge for Kara. Thanks to her close friendship with Diana, the Amazons had accepted her as one of their own and she was always welcome. She even had a bedroom in the palace, which she had been explicitly told was hers and that she was welcome to stay there at any time, no need for calling ahead. Someone had even gone to the trouble of carving her sigil into the door, managing to make it look as if it had always been there as part of the ornaments.

As much as she loved her home in Kansas, it was good to get away from there sometimes. She felt anxious, edgy, and knew exactly why. She had made a promise to her son, Clark, and now it was time to live up to it. More than anything in the world she wished that she didn’t have to do it. So she had fled to her refuge, thrown her super suit into a corner, slipped into one of the Amazonian togas, and decided to leave her troubles behind for at least a day. A short dip in the ocean had followed before retreating to the balcony of her room to enjoy some sun light.

Relaxing in the sun and looking out across the beautiful island, she almost missed the sounds of footsteps coming up behind her.

“Kara,” Queen Hippolyta said, smiling broadly. “It’s so good to see you again.”

Kara hopped down from where she sat on the railing of the balcony and embraced the mother of her best friend. It was kind of funny, she mused, that her best friend had a mother who only looked a few years older than herself. Somewhat like Clark and her. Only Hippolyta actually was older than her daughter was and by several centuries, too. Or was it millennia even? She wasn’t quite sure.

Ever since their first meeting Hippolyta had treated her with the kind of warmth and affection that was usually reserved for family members or life-long friends. Kara often felt that she had found something of a kindred spirit in the other woman, which was another reason why she was here today.

“Something troubling you?” the queen asked, apparently sensing her mood.

“I was hoping to talk to you about something, Lyta,” she said, using the shortened name the Amazon queen had told her to use. For just a moment there was a strange look on Lyta’s face, expectant, hopeful, practically glowing. Kara wondered about that, but then pushed it aside. “It’s about Clark.”
And the look was gone. Now Lyta looked almost sad there for a moment, but then the smile returned and she gestured for the two of them to sit down. It wasn’t the first time Kara had visited her for parental advice. Martha and Jonathan were great, but at times it was good to get another perspective from someone outside the immediate family.

“What is going on with your son?” Lyta asked.

“I... well, he has worked really hard to master his super powers. He can even fly now. He’s still not as fast or strong as I am, but that will come with time and practice. I’m sure he will surpass me eventually. By all objective standards he is... he is ready."

Lyta nodded, understanding. “Ready to follow his mother’s example and become a great hero and protector of the world, just like her?”

Kara felt a bit of a blush on her cheeks. “Something like that, yes. He is ready! I have trained him well. I’m sure he is going to do great. But...”

Lyta took her hand. “But you are still his mother and would like nothing better than to keep him safely back home, well away from all those dangers he is likely to face.”

Kara nodded, having known that Lyta would understand.

“How do you do it?” she asked the older woman. “Diana is out there, facing danger, battling gods and monsters and alien tyrants... whenever we are in battle together, I fear that she will be hurt. And she is ‘just’ my best friend. The thought of my son, of Clark fighting and being hurt... especially if I’m not there to protect him...”

“I won’t lie to you,” Lyta said, squeezing her hand. “It’s hard. Very hard. Has Diana ever told you that I initially forbade her from participating in the tournament to select our champion?”

Kara nodded. “Yeah, she mentioned that. She said that there were some pretty harsh words exchanged, too.”

“That is putting it mildly,” Lyta agreed. “Even back then I knew that Diana was special. That she had been blessed by the gods and was easily the most powerful and accomplished of our warriors. None of that mattered, though. She was my daughter and I didn’t want her to leave the island and journey into danger.”

Lyta leaned back, wistfully gazing into the past. “When I realized that she had defied me... and that she had won the tournament and was now our champion by right... I felt like I was being torn in two. On the one hand I was so proud of her, on the other I was furious and scared and would have liked nothing better than to lock her into her room forever.”

“I know the feeling,” Kara said.

“When she left the island, I had to be almost physically restrained not to go running after her,” Lyta continued. “And when she came back after that fight with Ares, so broken and hurt…,” a tear glistened in the Amazon’s face, “I wanted to never let her go again.”

“And yet you did.”

Lyta nodded. “I think it was even harder the second time around. The first time the dangers had been... vague, distant. Now, though, there were very real. I knew my daughter could... would get hurt. That she might even die.”
“How did you manage to let her go?” Kara asked. “Just the thought of Clark being hurt as badly as Diana had been back then...”

“Well, it helped knowing that she would leave regardless, even in defiance of my orders as queen if it came to that.” Lyta looked at her. “It also helped that I knew she was not alone out there. That she had someone to watch her back.”

Kara nodded. “I will always have Diana’s back, just like she has mine.”

Lyta nodded as well. “As for Clark, you are doing everything you can to make sure that he will always have someone to watch his back, too. If not you, then one of your comrades from this ‘Justice League’ Diana has told me about.”

She scooted closer, laying her arm around Kara’s shoulders. “It’s hard when our children stop being children and start becoming adults. It’s especially hard when we see them making mistakes, when we see them stumble. But we must give them the opportunity to do so.”

Kara looked back at her. “And do our best to be there to catch them when they fall?”

Lyta smiled. “Of course. That’s what parents are for.”

*****

“Why did you wish to talk to me, Miss Kara?” Alfred Pennyworth asked.

“You are Bruce’s father,” Kara told him, gratefully accepting the cup of tea he served her.

“Certainly not,” he replied, sitting down at the other side of the table. “Master Thomas was Bruce’s father and he was a good father. And a good man.”

“I have no doubt about that, but he died when Bruce was just a young boy. Ever since that day you have been his father.”

Alfred sighed, but did not deny her words.

“I am not sure whether Bruce has told you this, but I have a son. His name is Clark. He is 14 years old.”

The only reaction Alfred showed was a raised eyebrow. “Master Bruce did mention that you had a son. I must admit I had thought him to be younger than that.”

“I get that a lot,” she said, smiling. “Clark, he... he is like me.”

“You mean he has the same extraordinary powers you have?” Alfred asked. “Fascinating.”

“He certainly thinks so, yes.” Kara sipped from the tea. “And I... well, I kind of promised him that, once he has mastered his powers – which he has – and certain other conditions have been met – and they have – I would allow him to... to join the family business, so to speak.”

“I see,” Alfred said. “Am I right to assume that you have certain reservations about young Mr. Kent following in your footsteps?”

She nodded, staring into her cup.

“Master Bruce knew what he wanted to do with his life almost from the moment his parents died,” Alfred said. “For quite some time I tried to steer him onto a different path, but he would not be
dissuaded. And I... I felt that if I could not prevent him from walking this dangerous path, then the least I could do was not let him walk it alone.”

“Because you’re his father,” Kara repeated.

Alfred chuckled. “Maybe, from a certain point of view.”

“Bruce is just a normal man,” Kara said, putting the cup down. “Every night he goes out, faces criminals with deadly weapons. How do you...?” she trailed off.

“Honestly, some nights I don’t.” Alfred told her, looking into the distance. “I have lost count of the nights when I sat down in that cave in the darkness, waiting to see whether Master Bruce would return home safely... or not. Sometimes I imagine that Master Thomas and Miss Martha are there, accusing me of not properly taking care of their son.”

“I am certain they are thankful for your presence in their son’s life,” Kara said. “Even people as driven as Bruce need the support of their friends and loved ones.”

“Then I am sure your son will be all right, Miss Kara,” Alfred returned, “for having someone like you in his corner. But in regards to your question, I don’t think there is a trick or method when it comes to people we love going into danger. It is something one simply has to get used to, I fear.”

“Does it get easier?” Kara asked.

“I will let you know if it ever does,” he replied.

*****

Despite being a woman in her mid-twenties, Kara had never officially moved out of her childhood home (such as it was). There were several reasons for that, of course, chief of them Clark. Smallville was Clark’s home, the only one he had ever consciously known, and Kara did not want to uproot him. Besides, it was not like commuting was much of a problem for someone who could fly at supersonic speeds. K-Solutions had offices in Metropolis, Gotham, Washington DC and several outside the US, too, but she mostly used them only for client meetings.

And then there was this, Kara mused, her eyes looking out over the vast open fields of Kansas. She would never get tired of this view. Even in those difficult first few years on this planet, she had always enjoyed the view. Endless oceans of wheat, grass, and corn, swaying in the wind. She had seen pretty much every corner of this world, plus several alien ones, but there was no other view that said “home” to her as much as this one.

She still slept in the same room Martha and Jonathan had put her in on that very first day here on Earth. It looked different now, of course, as Kara had redecorated it several times. The crib where Clark had slept in at first was in the attic now, he had long ago gotten his own room. The bed was about her sixth of seventh, she mused, seeing that she had broken quite a few before she finally got her powers under control.

Walking past the shelves, she let her gaze sweep across the assorted knickknacks that had accumulated over time. A photograph showing her all dolled up up for her first harvest dance, with the ticket from her first rock concert also clipped into the picture frame. In a small jewelry box next to it were the earrings Martha had given her to celebrate her getting her GED at fourteen (clips, of course, as it was hard to pierce an invulnerable ear), a golden ring with an engraved L, and the necklace Jonathan had gotten her for her 18th birthday. The folded-up blanket into which Lara-El had wrapped her son Kal just before handing him over to Kara was sitting next to it, the
sigil of the House of El adorning one corner.

Her gaze moved on to the closet, which contained clothes she hadn’t worn in years, but couldn’t really part with. Maybe she should clean it out some time, just so she would have more space for her current clothes, which had spread across the chairs and desk.

“Reliving your misspent youth, sweetheart?” Martha asked, coming into the room.

“Mostly just wondering how much stuff has turned up here over time. Possibly a living proof of the ongoing expansion of the universe.”

“Or proof that you are just the same as most earthborn women, sweetheart.” Martha squatted down to pick up a discarded T-shirt. “And that you still haven’t learned to keep your room cleaned up.”

“You do realize I am capable of cleaning this entire room in a few seconds, right?”

“And yet you never seem to do it unless you wish to admonish Clark for the untidiness of his room and not be seen as a hypocrite.”

Kara frowned, only to blur into motion and a few seconds later everything in the room was tidy, every piece of clothing put away, and even the bed was perfectly made. Kara was sitting primly on top of it, her legs crossed.

“I have no intention of commenting on the state of Clark’s room today, thank you very much,” Kara said haughtily, though the corners of her mouth were curving upwards.

“Consider me rebutted,” Martha smiled, sitting down on the bed next to her. “What are you thinking so hard on, sweetheart?”

“The pros and cons of letting a super-powered teenager loose on the world, I guess.” Kara let herself fall back onto her bed. “And the joys of being the mother of the world’s first teenage superhero.”

“Well, not really the first,” Martha told her. “Or have you forgotten that you were already performing super-powered feats of heroism when you were still in your teens, too? I think I’ve got you beat there.”

“Only on a technicality,” Kara replied. “I didn’t go public until I was twenty.”

Martha put her hand on Kara’s. “But you went out into the world and used your powers to help people long before that. Do you think it was any easier for me, just because you didn’t yet have a colorful costume and a public image?”

Kara looked down. “Probably not, no. I hope I didn’t worry you and Jonathan too much back then.”

“We always worry,” Martha corrected her. “It doesn’t matter whether you are facing a robber with a knife that can’t possibly hurt you or an alien tyrant capable of beating you to death.”

Kara looked up, guilt flashing in her eyes. “What... how...?”

“You might be a good enough actor to fool the world at large, sweetheart,” Martha told her, “but Jonathan and I know you too well. We saw how badly you were hurt, no matter how much you acted like it was nothing. And the whole thing where you supposedly stayed up in space for days to work on your space station? Please!”
Kara closed her eyes, feeling like a teenager again who had been caught fooling around in the barn. “I didn’t want you and Clark to worry,” she said in a small voice. “There was nothing you could have done.”

“And you think that matters?” Martha asked. “Kara, I am your mother. I will always worry about you, no matter how old or invulnerable you are. Just like you will always worry about Clark, no matter what. How would you feel if he gets injured in battle and tries to hide it from you?”

“I’d put him over my knee,” Kara muttered, then looked up sharply. “Don’t you dare!”

“Pfff! You wouldn’t even feel it, so what would be the use?”

Stroking her fingers through Kara’s hair, Martha grew serious once again. “You have one big advantage when it comes to Clark, you know? Compared to me, I mean. You can go out there with him. You can protect him far better than I ever could protect you. Be thankful for that, dear!”

Kara nodded. “I will!”

“Of course the big disadvantage is that, sooner or later, he will be horribly embarrassed by having his super-powered mom along.”

Kara answered Martha’s smile. “I fail to see how that is a disadvantage!”

The two women collapsed on the bed, laughing.

“You have trained him well, sweetheart,” Martha told her. “He is ready and I am sure your example will see him through. And who knows? Maybe Clark will be an example to others as well. Maybe we’ll see even more teenage superheroes in the future.”

“Rao, I hope not,” Kara replied. “Teenagers are bad enough without superpowers.”

*****

Kara did her best to maintain a neutral face, but it was getting increasingly hard not to smile. They were sitting around the dinner table in the Kent farm and Martha had just put the food on the table. They were still eating dinner together whenever they could, though Kara could not always make it due to her many responsibilities. Still, whenever she could she came home to eat dinner with her family.

Opposite her, Clark was fidgeting in his seat. The 14-year old had always been a very active boy; sitting still had never been one of his greatest strengths. Today, though, he seemed to be finding it more and more difficult. She pretended not to notice and wondered how long Martha’s ironclad rule to eat first and have family discussions later would hold up.

“So?” he finally burst out, a heartbeat after the dishes were cleared from the table.

“So what?” Kara asked. The strain of not smiling was increasing rapidly.

“You know what,” he huffed, crossing his arms and glaring at her. “Luthor is in jail!”

“Luthor is in investigative custody,” she corrected him. “His trial won’t be for another month or so.”

“It still counts as being in jail!” Clark insisted.

“Really? Have you talked with your lawyer about that?”
Clark just gave her an incredulous stare, apparently not certain whether she was kidding or not.

“You promised, mom,” he finally said, pouting with the best of them.

She finally cracked, letting the smile spread across her face. “That’s true, Clark. And we always keep our promises. But there will be a lot of rules, you realize? Rules which I expect you to follow to the letter, otherwise we’re going to put an immediate stop to this and not talk about it again until your 18th birthday.”

Clark looked a bit subdued at that, but still vibrated with excitement.

“So we’ll do it?” he asked hopefully.

She sighed heavily, mentally beating down every mothering instinct she had. “Yes, we will.”

He let out a joyful whoop and jumped in the air, almost hitting the ceiling of the dining room. Martha and Jonathan looked on with smiles that were part indulgent and part wistful. The second of their alien children was almost grown up.

“When do we start?” Clark asked, excited beyond all measure.

She sighed. “Tomorrow. First thing we’re going to do is visit a good friend of mine.”

Clark’s brow furrowed in confusion. “What friend?”

*****

End Chapter 19

Author’s Note: As you have no doubt guessed, next chapter will see the debut of Superboy, finally. Hope the scattered hints to future plot lines in this chapter weren’t too obvious (or too obscure).
Perry White, newly minted editor-in-chief of the Daily Planet, was not the kind of man who was easily surprised. Having spent decades in journalism, he had already seen it all and hadn’t been impressed the first time... mostly. There were definitely some exceptions to that rule, most of them based around a certain flying woman whom Perry had named several years ago.

So when one night said woman suddenly appeared on his balcony, Perry White was mentally bracing himself. He was quite certain that this was going to be another night that would most definitely change the world as he knew it all over again. He was getting to old for this.

“Evening, Perry,” she greeted him with that dazzling smile of hers. “Got a minute to chat?”

“You could come by the door, you know?” he said, gesturing for her to enter into his living room. Superwoman sat down on his couch, crossing her legs and leaning back into the cushions.

“Now where would the fun be in that, Perry?” she asked. “Believe me, when you can fly, you fly as much as you possible can.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” He sat down opposite her, a drink in hand. He was sure he was going to need it before this talk was over.

“What happened to that Lane girl?” Superwoman asked, giving him the distinct impression that she was beating around the bush. “She still following you around?”

“No, thank god,” he replied. “Though I fear she’ll be back before too long. Girl intends to study journalism and is already freelancing for several small-time papers and online magazines. I’m betting I’ll have her application on my desk by the time she turns 20 at the latest.”

“I read her ‘Superwoman’s Pal’ column in some paper,” Superwoman chuckled. “The girl can write, I give her that. Her sense of self-preservation, though...”

“Yeah! So, what brings you here today? I doubt you came by only to inquire about your biggest fan.”

For the first time since that long ago day he had first met her, Perry saw something like uncertainty on her still absurdly young-looking face. He still vividly remembered how she had looked back then, caught between her desire to remain unseen and her refusal to let innocent people die when she could prevent it. That she now looked torn again only cemented Perry’s belief that something rather monumental was afoot.
“I would like your advice, Perry,” she finally said.

“What about?” he asked, leaning forward. Every reporting instinct he had was on high alert. He could already see a front page forming in his mind, just waiting for the headline.

“There is something I want... well, not want, really, but... damn it, let me start again!”

Perry smiled. There was something utterly charming about seeing the world’s most powerful woman looking so flustered. Right now, she simply looked like a young woman, not an almighty near-goddess.

“You have probably figured out that I wasn’t too keen on going public way back then,” she eventually said. “For quite a while I preferred working unseen. I only revealed myself to the world when there was no other choice.”

“As someone who would be dead if you hadn’t, I can only say that I am glad you did so.”

“Despite going public, though,” she continued, “there are certain aspects of my life I have worked very hard to keep out of the public eye.”

Perry nodded, having figured as much long ago. A large part of the public seemed to be convinced that Superwoman was just that, Superwoman, nothing more. That she spent all her time flying around the world, stopping bad guys, preventing catastrophes, the works. That she didn’t wear a mask, unlike those vigilantes in Gotham and Star City for example, seemed to imply that she had nothing to hide. What you saw was what you got.

Perry knew better. He had seen it on her face back then and he saw it now. Superwoman was a role, a mask, and behind it was a woman who would never have basked in the accolades of the public if her hand hadn’t been forced by circumstances. A woman who did what she did not for glory or recognition, but because she had the power to do so and considered it her responsibility. A woman he was convinced had a private life somewhere, well-hidden from the public. Something she fully deserved in his mind, which was why he had never gone snooping, no matter how tempting the thought.

“And that is changing?” he asked.

“Well, yes. Remember about two years back when the Parasite attacked Metropolis harbor and nearly killed me?”

Perry certainly remembered that day. As the first reporter to interview Superwoman, he had certainly kept abreast of any and all stories about the heroine he had named. He had been in front of his TV, actually, when she had collapsed after defeating the monster. Like most viewers, he had feared for her safety. Something had saved her that day, something that moved so fast that not even high-res TV cameras had managed to capture more than a somewhat human-shaped blur. Superwoman had turned up whole and healthy but a day later, but those few hours when she had simply vanished without a trace after looking nearly dead had sent the entire world into a panic attack.

“I definitely remember,” he said. “People talked about ‘The Blur’ that saved you for weeks. Nothing ever came of it, though, and you never gave a statement about what happened that day. Is that changing now?”

“In a way, yes.” She paused, wringing her hands. “I trust you, Perry, otherwise I wouldn’t be here. But I need you to promise me that you will not breathe a word of this to anyone until I say it’s
“You have my word,” he said without hesitation.

“Good, okay then.” She hesitated again, wrung her hands a few more times, then finally seemed to find her resolve and turned toward the balcony door. “You can come in!”

For a moment Perry was confused, seeing no one she could possibly be talking to. Then there was a figure standing in the door that hadn’t been there a moment ago. A figure wearing a blue and red suit with a very familiar diamond-shaped symbol on its chest and a red cape falling from its shoulders. A figure that was a good deal shorter than either Superwoman or himself.

“Perry, I would like you to meet someone,” Superwoman said. “This... this is my son!”

Perry was sure his mouth was hanging wide open. Of all the things he had thought he would learn today, this had certainly not been it. The idea that superwoman, the world’s first and premier superhero, had a son, an almost grown son... it was so absurd somehow, no matter how often he had considered the notion that she had a private life somewhere.

The boy was standing in his living room, though, real as life and looking awkward in the way early teenagers often did, shifting from foot to foot. He had clearly had a growth spurt very recently, as his limbs seemed too long for his lanky body and he looked too thin for his shoulders. He would probably be a pretty big and broad guy once he was finished growing, but right now he was maybe 13 or 14 years old, he figured, no more than that.

Looking back at Superwoman, Perry bit back the obvious question how a woman who looked mid-twenties at the most could have a teenage son. She was an alien, she had told him, so there was no telling how old she really was or at what age her people started reproducing. If Superwoman said that this boy was her son, then he was her son, full stop. Of course, that just led to a huge load of other questions.

“Hi, Mr. White,” the boy said when the silence clearly became uncomfortable for him. “Great to finally meet you. My mom has told me a lot about you.”

“Can’t say the same about you, kid,” he finally managed after taking a big sip of his drink. “I am certain I would have remembered had she ever mentioned a son.”

“I kept him out of the spotlight for obvious reasons,” Superwoman said, gesturing for the boy to sit down beside her. “But he is well on the way towards becoming a man and... well, I’ve been told it would be very hypocritical of me to keep him from helping people same as I do, seeing as he has the same powers I have.”

Perry didn’t need any super powers of his own to interpret the look on Superwoman’s face. She was clearly highly uncomfortable revealing the existence of her son to anyone, let alone the world at large. He fully understood that. The scrutiny she was under put that of most celebrities to shame and she had made many enemies, too. Enemies that would love to hurt her by hurting her son, no matter how invulnerable he probably was. Luthor came to mind immediately. The man would have given his eyeteeth for this kind of leverage over the woman he had failed to destroy.

“I’m sorry for asking this,” Perry said, “but I distinctly remember you telling me that you were the last of your kind when you gave me that interview way back then. So either that boy there is a whole lot younger than he looks, or you lied to me.”

“Oh, I never lied to you, Perry,” she assured him, smiling now. “If I may refresh your memory, my
exact words were ‘I am the last daughter of Krypton’. I never said anything about sons.”

He stopped, thinking back to that day, then groaned. He really should have noticed that very specific wording. In his defense, he had been kind of overwhelmed by being given the chance to interview the world’s very first superhero, who had saved him from certain death just one day earlier.

“Oh, good point,” he finally admitted. “So... kid, are you an only child then?”

He opened his mouth to answer, but a stern look from Superwoman stopped him cold. When he finally spoke, Perry was sure that he was listening to a pre-prepared answer.

“I am the son of Superwoman, Mr. White,” he said, grinning broadly. “That’s all anyone needs to know.”

“Good answer, kid,” he granted. “Okay, I assume you are ‘The Blur’ then? The one who saved Superwoman that night?”

He didn’t need to hear an answer from them, really. It was all there on Superwoman’s face as she looked at her son. A look of such parental pride that it melted his heart and dispelled any lingering doubts he might have had about this boy truly being hers.

“He did,” she simply said. The look of pride on his face mirrored her own.

“But I’m not calling myself ‘The Blur’,” the kid added, looking affronted in a way teenagers the world over had perfected. “That’s a stupid name!”

Perry laughed. “Yeah, I thought so, too, kid.”

“So, about that advice I wanted to ask you,” Superwoman began.

“I guess it’s about unveiling the existence of ‘Superboy’ here to the world?” Perry asked.

“SuperBOY?” the boy said, considering the name. “Well, okay, I guess I can live with that for now. It had better be SuperMAN in a few years, though!”

“Way too soon,” Superwoman muttered, causing Perry to laugh. It seemed parents, especially mothers, were the same all over the universe.

“So how do you want to play this?” Perry asked, leaning back in his seat. “We can introduce Superboy via a press event, that’s easily arranged. But we need to get the story straight before that. Most important thing first: do you want the world to know he is your son?”

“Of course,” Superboy said before Superwoman could say anything. A side-glance from his mother had the boy sitting back down, looking only somewhat contrite.

“We had a long talk about this,” she told him, looking slightly exasperated. “And yes, despite some... concerns, I don’t want us to have to play a charade in public. He is my son and I am proud to say so to anyone who asks.”

“Okay, then we’ll do it that way,” Perry agreed. “But you know there will be questions, right? You’ll have to give people at least some answers or they’ll make up their own.”

“I know,” she said, a sad look in her eyes. “We will stick to the truth as much as we can without revealing too much. His father, he... he died with our world. He grew up here on Earth with me, but
no one needs to know how or where.”

“We can work with that. There will be more questions, though. Did he go to school somewhere or did you home school him? Are his powers the same as yours or are there differences? Will he work solely with you or operate solo? Is it really responsible to allow a super-powered teenager to run around the globe, performing feats without supervision? And those are just the ones I can think of off the top of my head.”

He paused, thinking of the question he had pushed from his mind earlier. Someone would ask it, he was sure, so best to get it out now. “There is also the matter of how old you were when you had him, Superwoman.”

She smiled at him. “Are you really going to ask a lady her age, Mr. White?”

“Me? Never, my mum would have my hide if she heard me asking such. But the question will come, I guarantee you that.”

“Then the answer will be ‘none of your business’!” she resolved.

“I’m down with that, but not everyone will be. You better be ready for some really scathing comments about teenage pregnancy.”

“ Believe me, I’ve heard all of them before!”

His reporting mind immediately jumped on that remark, concluding that, in order for her to have heard such remarks before, there had to be people out there who knew about a very young-looking woman having a teenage son. He quickly squashed those thoughts. He had long ago resolved never to look into Superwoman’s private life without her express approval and he intended to stick to that, no matter what.

“As for the other questions,” she continued, “Superboy was trained extensively in the use of his powers by myself, the rest of his schooling is nobody’s business. He will work exclusively with me or Wonder Woman for the time being. While he has the same powers I have, he will first need to gather experience before we will even consider him working alone.”

The boy didn’t exactly look happy with that, but kept his mouth shut. Perry smirked. It seemed like teenage boys were the same all over the universe, too. Superboy seemed quite well-behaved for a teenager, which was definitely a good thing. Just thinking about some of the moody teenagers he had met in his life having the same powers as Superwoman... not a pretty thought.

“So we will set up a press conference,” Perry said, walking to his bar to refill his glass. “How soon do you want to do this?”

“As soon as you can set it up, Perry,” she replied, getting up from the couch. “I fear Superboy here is all out of patience.” She ruffled his hair.

“Mo-om!” he complained, shoving her hand away. Perry laughed.

*****

WELCOME SUPERBOY!
SUPERWOMAN PRESENTS HER SON TO THE WORLD!

*****
Anyone who has ever read my column – or pretty much anything I have ever written – will know that I am a huge fan of a certain flying superhero that has protected our world for several years now. Ever since her debut Superwoman has shown the entire world, but especially the female part of it, what being a hero is all about. She has inspired us through her deeds and especially through her compassion and dedication. She has shown us that great powers don’t have to corrupt, but can instead be used for the good of all.

Until yesterday I was certain that there was nothing Superwoman could do that would make me admire and respect her more than I already did. But I was wrong. Because yesterday I learned, along with the rest of the world, that Superwoman is not just a hero, not just an inspiration. She is so much more than that, too.

Superwoman is also a mother.

I am sure I was not the only one who was utterly gobsmacked by this revelation. I consider myself an independent and liberated girl, who fully intends to one day be a mother AND hold down a fulfilling job. But it seems even I am not immune to the fear that it might not be possible. That women will always have to choose in some way, that we will have to neglect either our careers or our children. That we are doomed to either be bad mothers because we put our jobs first, or traitors to feminism because we put our children first.

Now, though, I am full of hope that it can be done. Superwoman, who no doubt has one of the busiest, most stressful jobs in the world, has found the time to raise a son. And while we know very little of the newly named ‘Superboy’ so far, the sole fact that he seems intent on following in his mother’s footsteps and become a hero as well, tells me that she must have done something right raising him.

I am sure that there will be a lot of talk in the next few months about Superboy, where he came from, how he grew up, and how Superwoman managed to hide him from the world for so long. I am looking forward to learning more about him. No doubt there will also be a lot of talk about how young Superwoman must have been when she had him, and self-proclaimed defenders of morality will certainly choose to disregard the fact that she is actually an alien and that we know almost nothing about her species’ reproduction cycle or habits.

More than anything, though, I hope that Superwoman will take this opportunity and tell the world about her experiences as a mother. Superwoman has shown us that we can be women and heroes. Now she can also show us that we can be heroes and mothers.

*****

End Chapter 20

Author’s Note: I’m doing a bit of mix and match here as far as the media types are concerned. If Lois Lane were a teenager today, I’m sure she’d focus exclusively on online publishing and not bother with applying to a newspaper, but I do want her to eventually turn up at the Daily Planet. So as far as the Super Family Earth is concerned, online magazines and news sources exist, but so do classic newspapers, and both can make a living.
Chapter 21: Rumors and Benefits

Disclaimer: All things Supergirl/Superman and Batman belong to DC. No infringement is intended.

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It had started innocently enough.

Roughly three years ago, when Kara had begun meeting regularly with Bruce and Diana about the formation of an alliance of heroes, some photographer or other had taken a photo of the famous Bruce Wayne meeting with two stunningly beautiful business women. Tabloids being what they are, they had published some story about Gotham’s favorite son having a threesome with two unknown women. Such stories appeared regularly, so no one paid it much mind.

A few months later, though, some press pictures were taken during yet another successful Wayne Enterprises cooperation with K-Solutions. The press event had seen Karen Kent, the elusive owner and CEO of K-Solutions, making one of her rare public appearances and someone had remembered that old tabloid photo. It took but a quick comparison to show that Karen Kent was indeed one of the two beauties Wayne had met.

Now while their meeting was easily explained away as a simple business brunch, the tabloids ran with a different take, of course. Rumors quickly ran rampant about the savvy and mysterious brain behind K-Solutions finally being the one to leash Gotham’s most famous bachelor. The rumors persisted, even when nothing more incriminating that a few more business lunches happened to give credence to it.

Until the night the Batman was shot.

*****

“Quit being such a baby,” Kara admonished him, even as she carried him bridal-style towards his bedroom.

“I am fully capable of walking on my own,” Bruce complained, though the blood-soaked bandage high on his left thigh told a different story.

“Let me guess, you would have preferred to hobble up here alone or with me giving you a shoulder to lean on at the most, despite knowing perfectly well that I am more than capable of carrying you one-handed, while lifting your Batmobile with my other hand?”

“Yes,” he simply growled. It would have been a pout on anyone else, but the Batman did not pout.
“Well, I promise that the next time I am hurt and unable to walk, you are welcome to return the favor!”

Alfred was already inside the bedroom, first aid kit at the ready. It wasn’t the first time he had patched up his employer / adopted son and it would certainly not be the last. At least this time he had the distinct pleasure of seeing the perpetually grim Bruce Wayne being carried to bed like a child by a woman smaller than he was. His lips barely twitched, but inside he was howling with laughter.

“Just put him down on the bed, Miss Kara,” he directed.

“The bullet went straight through,” she told him, even as she did as asked, “no fragments or anything in there that I could see. The main artery was nicked, though. I used my cold breath to numb the area and staunch the blood flow, but someone with more medical knowledge than I needs to take a closer look to make sure everything heals up nicely.”

Alfred immediately went to work, even as Kara’s thoughts flashed back to events earlier in the night. It had been sheer happenstance that she had been there. K-Solutions and Wayne Enterprises were frequent business partners and while she preferred to do most of her work remotely and away from prying eyes, the occasional face-to-face meetings could not be avoided entirely. Bruce had not been there, as his official involvement in the day to day affairs of his company was limited, but after the meeting had concluded late at night, she had decided on a whim to look him up.

It was a good thing she had, for Superwoman had flown over Gotham at exactly the right time to witness an obviously corrupt cop draw his piece and about to shoot the Batman in the back. Gotham’s Dark Knight had been busy putting the finishing touches on one of the many super villains that had appeared over the last few years, this one a mountain of muscle and scales called Killer Croc. Croc had already been down, but Batman had appeared quite winded and not as attentive as he usually was.

Kara was fast, but tonight she had not been quite fast enough. The cop managed to get off a shot half a second before she arrived on the scene. Thankfully Batman had moved at the same moment, so the bullet that had been intended to go into his back had instead gone through his leg. Kara suspected that the cop had packed special armor-piercing bullets, because she knew that Bruce’s suit was normally not so easily penetrated.

She had wrapped up the cop within two seconds and had been by Batman’s side a moment later, seeing that he was bleeding like a stuck pig. Despite his protests, she had quickly done what little she could and then hoisted him up to bring him home.

“The wound is serious, but should heal without problems,” Alfred finally said about two hours later, finishing up. “You will need to stay off that leg for a few days, though, Master Bruce.”

Bruce seemed about to protest, but deflated when she gave him a look, arms crossed, and eyebrow raised. It usually worked on Clark, too.

“Okay, but I will need you to fly back to the crime scene and...”

“Already taken care of,” Kara told him. “I incinerated the blood stain you left behind, no trace of your DNA will be found. And the cop that shot you has already been taken into custody.”

He leaned back, huffing. “Well, it looks like you have everything well in hand then.”

“The word you are looking for is ‘thanks’, by the way,” she said, winking at him.
“Thank you,” he said, sincerely this time. “It seems Gordon’s success in cleaning out the corruption in Gotham’s police department made me a bit sloppy. I did not expect to have to duck police bullets again.”

“He came prepared,” Kara said, sitting down on the bed beside him. “How many normal guns can shoot straight through the Dark Knight’s body armor?”

“Not many,” he agreed. “Well, if I’m to be bedridden, at least I will be able to do some research. That cop couldn’t have known that I’d be there to fight Croc today, so he probably just took advantage of the opportunity. He must have prepared for it beforehand.”

“Let me know if there is anything I can do to help.”

“Aren’t you busy supervising the world’s first teenage superhero?” he asked, smirking.

Kara gave him a mock slap to the shoulder, careful not to jostle his injury. “In case you have forgotten, it’s a school day. Clark is well aware that Superboy’s activities are not allowed to intrude upon his education unless we are talking a major disaster.”

“And you think he will always listen to you on that?” Bruce asked. “The boy is 14.”

“Oh, I fully expect some form of teenage rebellion sooner or later, but he’s just started out. He is smart enough to wait a while, trying to lull me into a false sense of security”

“I hope you are right. Last thing the world needs is a moody teenager kicking down mountains because he feels misunderstood.”

“I have quite emphatically forbidden Clark from kicking mountains,” she said, deadpan. She patted his shoulder. “Take it easy for a while, Bruce. Like I said, let me know if there is anything I can do to help.”

She rose to leave, but stopped in the open door. Her enhanced senses were picking up several vehicles that were approaching Wayne Manor. She looked through the walls and saw that three police cars were coming up the drive.

“We’ve got company, it seems,” she said. “Gotham’s Finest!”

Bruce sat up, looking slightly alarmed. “Can you pick up what they want?”

She concentrated, allowing the sound of the cars to fade out and focusing on the voices inside the cars. “It seems they received an anonymous tip that Bruce Wayne might sport a bullet wound similar to the one that Batman has received tonight. Lieutenant James Gordon is with them and apparently not happy about going to all this effort on a wild goose chase, but someone higher up has overruled him.”

Bruce cursed under his breath. “Gordon and I are still keeping our cooperation on the down low. Officially, the Gotham police still has a standing order to bring in the Batman for questioning, though zero effort is going into actually accomplishing it. Usually, at least.”

Kara walked back towards him. “We need to get you down into the cave. Alfred can tell them you aren’t home.”

“And what then?” he asked. “If they can’t find me here, it will only lend credence to that tip. If Bruce Wayne stays out of the public eye for the time it would take someone to heal a bullet wound, the police will be even more suspicious.” He sat up, swinging his legs over the side. “Batman
operates on a budget that all but requires a large company or rich entrepreneur as a backer. I need to nip this in the butt now or my secret identity is gone.”

Kara crossed her arms. “And how exactly do you intend to hide the fact that you have a hole in your leg and can’t even walk?”

“I will have to give the performance of my life, I think,” he growled, trying to put weight on his injured leg. He hissed as it gave out under him and Kara was there in a flash, an arm around his torso.

“Yeah, this isn’t going to work, Bruce. But I think I’ve got an idea.”

*****

“Look, Mr. Pennyworth, we just need to have a brief chat with Mr. Wayne, that’s all,” Lieutenant Gordon said.

“If the guy can stand up and walk down those steps,” another cop added, a pretty nasty-sounding and -looking character.

“That’s Sergeant Bullock,” Bruce whispered to her. “Hates the Batman’s guts, real piece of work, but honest as they come.”

“Okay, then let’s put on a show for the good officers,” Kara replied, smirking.

“You are enjoying this way too much,” Bruce replied, then continued speaking in a louder voice. “Gentlemen! You wished to speak to me?”

The police officers looked up and saw Bruce Wayne approaching them, dressed in expensive-looking sweat pants and an even more expensive-looking dressing gown doing little to hide his bare chest. Plastered to his side was a blonde woman, wearing a rumpled-looking business suit and a pair of very high heels dangling from her left hand. To even the most observant outsider, it looked as if she was simply snuggling up, arm around his torso, while Bruce Wayne leisurely walked down the steps on two obviously uninjured legs.

In reality, of course, Bruce’s feet were barely touching the ground, as Kara supported his entire weight and was subtly using her powers of flight to have them both more or less float down the steps. Bruce’s leg was tightly wrapped, no outline of the bandages showing on his loose pants and while moving his legs back and forth to simulate walking did hurt, it was bearable as long as there was no weight to support and no sign of discomfort showed on his face. He just looked bored and irritated.

They reached the lower level, coming to a stop in front of the police officers. “What can I do for you?”

“I am very sorry for disturbing you this early in the morning, Mr. Wayne,” Gordon said, looking equal parts angry and contrite. “We have received an obviously false tip that... well, that someone had shot you.”

Bruce laughed. “Shot me? Now whoever would want to shoot me?”

“I can think of a few people, darling,” Kara said, smiling seductively. “You are such a bad boy, after all!”

Several of the police officers looked away, obviously not entirely comfortable watching as Kara all
but rubbed up against him. Bullock, though, seemed less inclined to buy the show. Or maybe he was simply obstinate by nature.

“Where were you last night, Wayne?” he demanded. “At around four o’clock!”

“Oh, he was with me, sergeant,” Kara said, giving him a coy look. “Would you like to ask what we were doing, too?”

Bullock opened his mouth as if to ask exactly that, but Gordon cut him off. “I think we do not need all the details, Ms…?”

“Kent, Lieutenant. Karen Kent.”

“If you gentlemen don’t mind,” Bruce interjected, raising his right leg in the process to scratch an imaginary itch on his calf, “I have promised Ms. Kent a most spectacular breakfast, so if there is nothing else…”

“Of course, Mr. Wayne,” Gordon said, beginning to usher his people out the door. “Sorry for disturbing you.”

A moment later they were out the door and Kara quickly guided Bruce over to a chair, letting him sit down. She focused on her senses again, listening to the cops talking as they drove off.

“Bullock thinks they should have asked more questions, but Gordon and the others are convinced, I think. Gordon tells Bullock that no man with a bullet wound such as the Batman had last night could even stand, never mind walk down a set of stairs or put all his weight on the injured leg. He is also pretty pissed off that they had to drive all the way out here in the first place.”

“Looks like I’m in the clear,” Bruce said, slowly relaxing. “You could have given him a false name, you know? It’s almost certain one of those cops will talk to the press about what he’s seen here today.”

Kara simply shrugged. “If they investigate, they would quickly discover a false identity and it would only make them suspicious again. That Karen Kent is in town and had a business meeting last evening at Wayne Enterprises is easily proven. There are already plenty of rumors out there about Karen Kent and Bruce Wayne. One more won’t hurt. Besides, we might even use this to our advantage.”

*****

Predictably, the fact that Karen Kent of K-Solutions had spent the night at stately Wayne Manor quickly made the rounds in the tabloids. Old rumors were heated up again and everyone was quickly convinced that the two business giants had carried on a tarried affair for years now. One tabloid even speculated that the two of them were already secretly married and that Mrs. Wayne only kept her maiden name for tax purposes and brand recognition.

Both Bruce and Kara took advantage of the rumors. The main reason that Bruce Wayne played the role of the notorious playboy was so that no one would even suspect that he might be one of the few men young, rich, and driven enough to be the infamous Dark Knight of Gotham. It was getting harder, though, to find women willing to put up with his antics, especially as he seldom followed through on his supposed ways by actually bedding the women he took out. While not opposed to the idea in general, some of them were bound to notice the many scars he had accumulated and ask questions. Playing the besotted paramour of Karen Kent made things a lot easier for him.

Karen Kent, on the other hand, had been the mysterious figure behind the success of K-Solutions
for years now and many people were interested in learning more about her. By turning up on the arm of Bruce Wayne now and then, she gave just enough fodder to the newshounds that most of them lost interest in digging further. Kara had long ago made sure that Karen Kent of K-Solutions and Karen Kent of Smallville, Kansas had nothing in common except a rather common name.

So to the amusement of the few people in the know – Diana found the whole notion quite hilarious – Kara and Bruce continued to be each other’s decoy dates. They appeared at just enough public events together to feed the rumors and otherwise continued to live their lives just like before.

In other news, the police officer that had tried to murder the Batman had quickly been convicted after a large sum of money had been found in his account. Obviously someone had hired him for the assassination attempt and it was deemed entirely possible that same someone had sent the anonymous tip to the police. Interestingly enough, that turned out to be false. The cop had been hired through intermediaries by Lex Luthor, who was still awaiting trial and looking for payback against the Batman. Hiring a would-be killer was quickly added to his list of charges. The anonymous tip that nearly demolished Bruce’s secret identity, on the other hand, was apparently courtesy of R’As al Ghul, who had heard of the botched assassination and simply wished to keep “the Detective” on his toes.

Life went on. Then one night, things changed again.

*****

Kara laid back in bed, staring at the ceiling, and searched her own feelings. Currently she was very much at a loss as to what to do or say next.

“That bad?”

She looked to the other side of the bed, where Bruce was propped up on an elbow and looking at her in turn. She briefly let her eyes roam over his still unclothed body, the shimmer of sweat on his skin, and thought back to their activities during the last hour or so.

“Not bad at all,” she said, “but...”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “But...”

Bruce and she had played the part of a couple for several months now and Kara had considered whether turning the act into something real might be feasible, especially after a heart to heart talk with Martha. Kara had told her about her mock affair with the famous Bruce Wayne (Bruce having given her permission to inform them of his true identity). It had led to her aunt / adopted mom asking her whether there was anything that Kara the woman wanted out of life. Superwoman the hero, Kara the mother, and Karen Kent the entrepreneur were all pretty well set, but what about the woman? Was a make-believe affair with a comrade-in-arms of her Superwoman persona all she wanted? It had gotten Kara thinking and considering if there was anything in her life apart from those three roles.

She liked Bruce as a friend, she certainly found him physically attractive, and they worked well together as superheroes. So why not as a couple, too? Kara was a bit too cynical to believe in love at first sight and didn’t expect there to ever be a Prince Charming that would come into her life and sweep her off her feet. But the idea of someone with whom she was compatible in terms of personality, someone to whom she could come home at the end of the day (that wasn’t her son or her adopted parents), was certainly enticing.

Bruce had entertained similar thoughts, it seemed. The Batman didn’t leave much room for
anything else, building a relationship with someone unaware of Bruce’s primary purpose in life would probably be impossible. So after another dinner that was part business and part show for the tabloids, they had – almost without words – decided to give it a try, so to speak.

The physical act itself had certainly been enjoyable, as was evident by the rumpled sheets and the scattered clothing. Kara was not a virgin and neither was Bruce, so they both knew what they were doing and were certainly fit enough. Kara’s body still buzzed with the afterglow, but she knew that that was a purely physical reaction. On the emotional front, though, there was nothing. Bruce and she might just as well have been sparring instead of having sex.

Judging by Bruce’s face, he was in a similar predicament.

“So…,” he began, only to trail off.

“You know, you sound far more eloquent when you wear the mask!” she smirked.

He looked affronted for a second, but then smirked back. “Should I have worn the mask?”

She pretended to think about it for a moment. “Oh, I don’t know. Would you have wanted me to wear the cape and boots?”

Both ended up laughing.

“I guess this isn’t going to work, is it?” Kara asked a moment later.

“Not in this particular way, no,” he agreed. “But we will always be friends.”

“Friends with occasional benefits?” she asked, teasingly raising an eyebrow.

“I could think of worse arrangements.”

“Ah, Bruce,” she mock-despaired, folding her hands over her heart in a dramatic gesture, “always the romantic.”

*****

End Chapter 21

Author’s Note: I originally had tentative plans to have Kara and Bruce end up a couple in this story, but abandoned them almost as quickly as it simply didn’t fit with the characters as I envisioned them. Still, there was that bit I wrote in chapter 12 where Bruce mused about a tabloid reporter catching him with Kara and Diana and the idea simply wouldn’t let go.

As far as Batman goes, I mostly consider Bruce Wayne to be asexual, regarding the need for physical companionship with the same disdain as the need for food and sleep. And as for Kara, only time will tell if she will ever find somebody to love (apart from her family and friends) in this universe of mine (don’t expect Dick Malverne to turn up any time soon). At this point I’m honestly not sure. I have several ideas, but they might go the same way as the Bruce/Kara idea.
Boys, Guys, and Moms

Chapter Summary

Where Boy meets Guy and gets in trouble with Mom

Chapter 22: Boys, Guys, and Moms

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*****

Clark knew that his mother was intentionally keeping him away from anything involving super villains and such for the time being. Every single time Superboy had gone out into the world alongside Superwoman, they had dealt with either natural disasters or “normal” humans, be it run-of-the-mill criminals or that one time where they defended a village in South America from an actual army of drug cartel thugs. His logical side saw the sense in that; she was obviously trying to ease him into things. An earthquake or a forest fire were highly dangerous to normal people, but not for powered-up Kryptonians. Machine guns wielded by hired thugs wouldn’t even make them flinch.

It didn’t change the fact, though, that he was growing frustrated. Not long ago he had wanted nothing more than to go into action alongside his mother and help people with his super powers. And for the most part it was every bit as exciting and cool as he had expected it to be. People cheered when they arrived. In a few short weeks he had already managed to save quite a few lives and there was no better feeling in the world.

His mother was always there, though. Always just a step behind him (figuratively speaking, as they were flying most of the time), always watching. He knew she was doing it out of concern, but it was getting a bit tiresome. He may only be 14, but he was not a little kid, darn it! He was strong, practically invulnerable, and more than fast enough to get away from anything and everything that could possibly be a danger to him. He knew she wanted to protect him, but right now he felt suffocated.

Which was why he was thankful for their current mission. Well, not thankful that an undersea earthquake had caused tidal waves that had hit Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and India. But considering the sheer scale of the affected area, his mom finally saw no other choice but to let him operate solo.

“I’m heading south,” she told him. “You head north. Help wherever you can as fast as you can. Don’t linger, leave everything that isn’t life-threatening to the rescue operators, focus on the things only we can do!”

He nodded, aware of the severity of the situation, but also ecstatic that he could finally fly on his own for once.

The following 24 hours were the longest day of Clark’s young life. He barely ever stopped for more than a few seconds, flying along devastated shorelines and ruined towns as fast as he could,
helping wherever possible, and barely staying still enough to even be seen properly. He diverted mudslides, rescued people from flooded towns, blew out fires, unblocked roads, and generally did everything that could be done by a single person with super powers in the face of so much devastation.

His mom checked in on him over the com system in regular intervals, but otherwise left him be, as she had more than enough on her own plate. Several other members of the Justice League were also in the area, helping in whatever way they could. Clark had caught a brief glimpse of Diana earlier, as their paths had crossed and he had heard J’Onn and Adam over the coms. Still, the sheer scale of things was enough to tire out even a Superboy. So when he finally reached the far end of the devastation zone, he took a moment to set down and just take a breather.

Said breather lasted all of ten seconds, though, before his enhanced hearing picked up cries for help from not too far away. He immediately shot into the air and headed toward the source of the cries. It was a small village near the shore. The village had been lucky, at least compared to some others, in that it still existed after the tidal wave had hit. Many of the buildings were damaged, though, the ground had turned to mud, and worst of all the water had destabilized the hill on the far side. An avalanche of mud and rocks was heading towards the remains of the village. Several hundred people were there.

Superboy quickly increased his speed and dug a deep trench at the edge of the village, which he hoped would be enough to stop the worst of the avalanche. He then used his heat vision to incinerate the larger boulders in rapid succession.

Then he blinked, because suddenly a glowing green wall appeared just in front of his trench and brought the remains of the avalanche to a hold. Looking up, he quickly spotted the source of the green light.

“A Green Lantern?” he muttered, quickly taking to the air.

His mom had told him about the Green Lantern Corps, protectors of the space ways, and of Abin Sur, founding member of the Justice League, who had given his life to save her from the alien tyrant Mongul. Clark had been rather mad that his mom had initially refrained from telling him about her close brush with death.

He had also learned that a new Green Lantern would have been selected after Abin Sur’s death and been told to keep a lookout for them, as they might well make their way to Earth sooner or later. Clark was surprised, though, that this Green Lantern hovering in the air in front of him seemed to be a human man, not an alien. A brief scan with his X-Ray vision confirmed it, he was human. A white man in his early twenties, he’d say, with reddish-blond hair in what Clark considered a rather unflattering bowl cut.

“Hey,” Clark greeted him. “Thanks for the help, Mr….?”

“The name’s Gardner, kid,” the Green Lantern replied. “Guy Gardner, Green Lantern of Earth. And you are Superwoman’s sprog, right? Read about you in the papers!”

Clark frowned, not particularly caring for the tone of the other man, but put it aside. “The name is Superboy and yes, Superwoman is my mother.” He managed to keep the “what’s it to you?” quiet.

“Bird looks great for having a teenage son, I give you that,” Gardner smirked at him.

Clark felt even more irritated now. He routinely heard comments from other teenage boys about how nice his mom looked in her skintight super suit. He certainly didn’t need to hear adults aware
of his being her soon tell it to his face, too, thank you very much.

“Yeah... again, thanks for your help, but there is still a lot more to do. Feel free to lend a hand!”

He started to fly off, but a moment later Gardner was flying beside him. “I think I will, kid. Looks to me like you can use all the help you can get. By the way, is your mom seeing someone? The pictures I’ve seen of her, I mean, wow! Don’t get me wrong, Wonder Chick looks great, too, but I’ve got this thing for blondes...”

Clark was not usually someone who got angry. He was actually quite mild-mannered most of the time. But right now he was not feeling mild-mannered at all. He was tired, cranky, and this guy was certainly not helping it.

“Will you stop talking that way about my mother,” he interrupted the other man, quite forcefully.

Gardner mockingly held up his hands. “Excuse me, kid! Sore spot there? Can’t have been easy growing up with a MILF like that, I’d wager.”

Growling, Clark poured on the speed, looking to put some distance between himself and the Green Lantern before he was tempted to slug him. Well, more tempted than he already was. Unfortunately, Gardner seemed unable to take a hint and kept up with him.

“You okay, kid? Maybe you should take a break. Let the adults take care of things!”

Clark’s precarious hold on his temper snapped and he came to an immediate stop in mid-air, getting in Gardner’s face.

“Adults like you, you mean? Where have you been the last 24 hours while we worked our butts off saving lives? I don’t remember seeing your ugly mutt anywhere. So maybe YOU should take a break, Green Jerk, and let those with actual powers instead of fancy jewelry handle stuff!”

Gardner’s face darkened. “Listen up, snot nose! Some of us got entire sectors of space to protect, not just one tiny little planet. I’m not going to take lip from someone barely out of his diapers.”

Clark snorted. “Oh please! You have been a Green Lantern for what, six months now? I’m surprised they’re letting you go out on your own without some glowing green training wheels!”

Gardner growled and his ring flashed. A moment later, a glowing green playpen had formed around Clark, boxing him in.

“There! That’s more like it,” Gardner grinned. “Time to act your age, kid!”

Clark growled back and easily broke free of the construct with a simple flexing of his muscles, shattering it into a dozen pieces and causing Gardner to flinch back from the mental feedback.

“My actual playpen was tougher to break out of than that, jerk!”

“You want tougher? I’ll give you tougher, Superbaby!”

Green chains exploded from Gardner’s ring, ready to wrap themselves around Clark, but he moved out of the way at super speed and sliced the constructs apart with a burst of heat vision. He dashed forward, looking to grab the Green Lantern, but Gardner evaded and a burst of green energy clipped him, sending him tumbling off course. By the time Clark had regained control of his flight again, Gardner was projecting a giant green hand that was about to engulf him.
Clark was about to destroy the construct with another burst of heat vision when Gardner was suddenly bowled over by a red-and-blue blur that came out of nowhere and hit him with the force of a cruise missile. The Green Lantern went tumbling down into the ground, smashing into the mud left behind by the tidal wave with a huge splash.

The blur stopped and resolved itself into the form of his mother, who looked more pissed off than Clark had ever seen her before.

“Hands off my son!” she growled at the downed Green Lantern.

Gardner slowly got up, opening his mouth to say something, but obviously thought twice about it after getting a good look at a pissed-off Superwoman whose eyes practically sparked with barely leashed fire.

“Calm down, lady! The kid and I just had a bit of a disagreement. Boy needs to learn some self-control, I’d say.”

“Self-control?” Clark yelled. “You started it, you...!”

“That’s ENOUGH!” Superwoman thundered, shutting them both up. “I don’t care who started what; we are in the middle of a disaster zone, thousands of people are still in need of our help, and you two have nothing better to do than launch a super-powered school yard brawl?”

She turned to glare at Gardner. “Maybe Green Lantern recruitment standards have been slipping as of late, but I can tell you that Abin Sur would be ashamed of his successor right now.”

“Now wait just a min...”

She flashed forward so fast it looked like she had teleported, grabbed him by the lapels of his uniform, and growled into his face. “One more word, Green Lantern, and I will take that ring off your hand along with the finger it is on, do we understand it each other?” A hand capable of compressing coal into diamonds had caught Gardner’s ring hand in its grip, underlining her statement.

Gardner paled visibly. “Uh... yes, ma’am!”

“Good,” she shoved him away. “Now get moving and use that ring to help people!”

Gardner gulped, but finally did as he was told and started flying away. Not without giving Clark a stink eye before he did, but then he was gone. A moment later, his mom hovered right in front of him.

“Mom, I...,” he began.

“We will talk about this later, Clark,” she told him, cutting him off. “We still have a lot to do. Can I count on you to focus on the job for a few more hours?”

Clark bit back an angry retort and simply nodded.

“Good, then get back to it! We’ll regroup above Bangkok once we’ve dealt with the worst of it!”

A moment she was gone as quickly as she had come, leaving behind a highly frustrated, angry, and humiliated Superboy.

*****
Ten hours later a lull had come over the disaster zone. The sun had risen again, allowing rescue operators to work more effectively. All the immediate threats had been dealt with by the intervention of countless volunteers, including those with super powers. Clark was more tired than he had ever been in his life and was capable of little else than just floating above Bangkok and soaking up the sunlight.

“Good work everyone,” his mom told Diana, Adam, and J’Onn, who were floating close by. They hadn’t seen the Green Lantern again, but there had been reports of him helping out along the devastated shoreline, so apparently he hadn’t just flown off. “I think we can safely take a break now. We’ll check in this evening and see if there is anything more we can do.”

The other members of the Justice League nodded, then flew off, probably heading to the closest bed they could find. His mom floated over to him, looking him over with concern.

“How are you holding up, Clark?” she asked.

“Fine,” he replied, not in the mood for talking.

“Good. If you are fine, then maybe you can tell me what that tussle with the Green Lantern was all about!”

Clark took a deep breath. “He was a jerk!”

“I gathered as much. What else?”

He looked at her. “He... he was talking about you. You and Diana. He...”

She nodded. “I can imagine. And you think that made it okay for you to lose your temper?”

Clark gaped at her, not believing that his mom was taking the side of that jerk Gardner against him. “He called you... he said...”

She touched his shoulder. “Clark, don’t you think I’ve heard all sorts of stuff like this before? I can’t even count the number of times some stupid idiots have called me ‘Superbroad’ or ‘Superslut’ or even worse things.”

“He still shouldn’t say such things about you,” Clark huffed.

“No, he shouldn’t. I am not taking his side, Clark! Gardner is an adult, a Green Lantern, he really should know better, but we are not talking about him. We are talking about you, Clark, and why exactly you lost your temper and decided that getting into a fight with someone was more important than helping people in need!”

Clark didn’t know what to say. He was so angry, at Gardner, at his mother, and at himself, too, for losing his cool like that.

“You didn’t start yelling at him for what he said about me, did you?” his mom said.

“What do you mean?” he asked, confused.

“I mean that you tried to do the right thing, Clark, namely walk away. And then he called you a child and told you to let the adults handle it. That’s when you flew off the handle!”

Clark couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You... you spied on me? You listened in the entire time?”
“It was your first solo mission, Clark. Of course I kept an eye on you!”

Clark shrugged her hand off his shoulder and put some distance between them. The anger that had started to cool was surging back up, stronger than ever before.

“You didn’t trust me!” he accused her. “You didn’t think I could handle this on my own!”

“You did a great job with the rescue effort, Clark,” she told him calmly. “I am very proud of you for that. But then you allowed an idiot to push your buttons. If your fight had escalated, it might well have caused even more damage than the tidal wave already had. With the power you and I have, we always need to be careful.”

“I AM careful,” he yelled. “I am ALWAYS careful! I have been careful for YEARS! I thought we were finally where you trusted me to do stuff without you constantly hovering over me! I can do this on my own!”

“Well, today you have shown me that you CAN’T, Clark!” She didn’t yell, but her voice was louder than before. “This talk is over! Time to go home!”

“Stop treating my like a baby,” he raged, all his tiredness and frustration coming out.

“Then stop acting like one, Clark! I am your mother and I will...”

“You’re not really my mother!”

Even as those words passed his lips he wanted nothing more than to take them back, to catch them in mid-air and somehow stuff them back inside before they could reach his mom’s ears. It was too late, though. All his rage and frustration vanished into thin air as he saw the expression on his mom’s face. For a moment, she looked as if he had physically slapped her.

Then her face settled into a stony expression that didn’t show a single emotion.

“Go home, Clark!” she said, her voice barely more than a whisper.

“Mom, I...”

“GO! HOME!”

Tears threatening to break free from his eyes, he finally did as told and flew off, back home towards Kansas. All the while wondering how he could possibly have said something so stupid!

*****

“You’re not really my mother!”

The words kept ringing in Kara’s ears over and over again. She had known this was coming, of course. Clark was a teenager and while Kryptonians and humans were different in many ways, teenage hormones seemed to be a constant in both species. She had fully expected them to have a fight sooner or later and had fully expected Clark to use these exact words at some point if his teenage temper was riled up enough. She also knew that he didn’t really mean them, that he loved her, and saw her as his mother regardless of their actual biological relation.

Still, she was unprepared for how it hurt to hear him say those words.

“Kara?”
She started, too preoccupied to notice that someone else was close by. Opening her eyes, she saw Diana hovering in front of her.

“...wasn’t quite out of hearing range and... are you okay?”

Kara shook her head. “No! I’m really not!”

Diana nodded and quickly gathered her best friend into a hug, even as tears sprang free from Kara’s eyes.

*****

It had been early morning in Bangkok, but given the 13 hours’ time difference it was still evening of the previous day in Smallville, Kansas. The sun was just setting, but Clark was still sitting on top of the barn. He had ditched his super suit for civilian clothes the moment he got home and ever since, he had been sitting up there, his gaze searching the skies.

“Did he tell you anything?” Jonathan asked his wife.

She shook her head. “Nothing. But if I were to venture a guess, he had a big fight with Karen and is now feeling guilty about it.”

“That was my take, too,” Jonathan agreed, sighing. “Well, it was overdue, I guess.”

“Probably. I’m just a bit worried that we haven’t heard from Karen yet.”

Jonathan hugged her. “She’ll be all right. Probably just wants to give Clark the time to cool off. And cool off herself, too. I distinctly remember that she has a bit of a temper, too.”

Martha chuckled, remembering some of the shouting matches she and her daughter had had during Karen’s difficult teenage years. More often than not Clark had been the subject of their disagreements, as Karen’s single-minded focus on her cousin-turned-son had worried Martha a great deal now and then. Thankfully, they had long left their fights behind them.

“They will work it out,” Jonathan assured her.

“I know.” She just hoped it didn’t take too long. Both of their alien children could be very, very stubborn.

*****

“You should have gone to bed!”

Clark started at the soft voice behind him. He had nodded off, it seemed. It was full dark and the stars were out. Turning around, he saw that his mom was sitting on the barn roof behind him. Like him, she had shed her super suit and was back in civilian clothing. Dark rings were under her eyes, as lack of sleep marked Kryptonians just as much as humans.

“Mom, I’m so sorry,” Clark quickly got the words out. “I didn’t mean...”

“I know, honey,” she interrupted him, a slight smile on her lips. “I know.”

When she opened her arms, Clark was quick to enter the embrace, tears of relief on his face.

“I really didn’t mean it,” he sobbed. “You’re my mom! I love you!”
“I won’t pretend it didn’t hurt to hear those words,” she replied, squeezing him tightly. “But I know it was the heat of moment. Believe me, I’ve said far worse things to Martha and Jonathan.”

“Really?” he asked, drawing back from the embrace so he could look at her. “I can’t imagine you fighting with them.”

She chuckled. “Oh, believe me, we had some epic fights.” Her face sobered. “When I was 14, like you are now, we had only been here on Earth for a year. I had barely gotten the hang of my powers, Earth was still a strange and intimidating place for me, and I... I fixated on you, Clark. You were my lifeline. Not just because you were only thing I had left from my life on Krypton. I used you, my promise to take care of you, as a way to... avoid dealing with things. Martha and Jonathan called me out on it more than once and... well, I didn’t react well to that at first.”

Clark didn’t know what to say, so he just listened. It was hard to imagine his mom ever having been 14 like him. He knew, of course, that she had been just a teenager when they arrived here on Earth, but it was difficult for him to really see it. She was always so together, so strong. For a moment he tried to place himself in her situation. How would he feel if, a year ago, Earth had exploded, his family had died, and he had to build a new life on an alien world? It boggled his mind, he simply couldn’t imagine it.

“You know it was wrong to rise to Gardner’s taunts, right?” she asked him.

“Yeah,” he grudgingly admitted. “He’s still a jerk, though.”

She nodded, smiling. “Life lesson, Clark: there are a lot of jerks out there. And as much as we would like it, we can’t punch them all in the face, because if we did, that’s all we’d ever do.”

“I know.”

She hugged him again. “I know you are feeling suffocated, Clark. I know that I am... clingy. For so long you were my entire world, my only reason for even getting up in the morning, that I... I find it very hard to let go. I promise I will work on it, though.”

Clark nodded. He felt a bit like a jerk himself right now. He was well aware how many kids had it far, far worse than him (including his mom when she had been his age). That his biggest problem was a mom who tended to be overprotective was... well, it could be far worse.

“And I promise not to punch jerks in the face,” he mumbled.

“Good,” she agreed. “Seems we both have our work cut out for us then.”

Getting up, she stretched and yawned. “Let’s head inside, Clark. We both need some sleep. The situation in the disaster zone is more or less stable for now, so you’re going back to school tomorrow.”

“Aw, moooom!”

*****

End Chapter 22

**Author’s Note:** The way I see it, when Guy Gardner is not brain-damaged, flying into red-ring-induced rage, or replaced by an evil clone (yes, all of that happened to him in the comics, some of it multiple times), he is simply a jerk. A heroic, possibly loveable jerk, but still a total, unapologetic jerk. Also, I always got the impression that Guy Gardner was a few years older than
Hal, though I don’t think it was ever really stated. So for my purposes, he is a few years younger than Kara and Bruce, early twenties.

Also, it’s really hard writing angry teen Clark, especially writing angry teen Clark trying to curse. It always makes me want to go “aaaawww” because it just seems so cute. As for the fight between him and Kara, you knew it was coming. Hope it was worth the wait. I briefly thought to include a flashback to Kara’s teenage years and show her having a row with Martha and Jonathan, but it wouldn’t really have fit here. Something for future chapters, as I definitely intend to write teen Kara, too.
Chapter Summary

Where the Super Family celebrates Christmas (or whatever it's called on Krypton and Mars)

Chapter 23: A Very Super Christmas

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*****

Snow was softly falling from the sky and the sun was slowly dipping behind the horizon. Christmas decorations were being turned on, people milled about, and two aliens leisurely walked through town.

“I am glad you decided to join us, J’Onn,” Kara told her Justice League comrade.

“I thank you for your invitation, Kara,” he replied. “I admit I still find it difficult to be among people after so long in isolation, but the idea of being all alone has... lost its appeal.”

J’Onn had taken on human form, appearing as a tall, broad man with blonde hair. Kara figured he had taken her as his template, looking almost like a male version of herself, only about 20 years older. They were currently walking through downtown Smallville, admiring the many Christmas decorations. They were on their way to school to collect Clark, who was attending the annual Christmas celebration there with his friends. Afterwards they would all head to the Kent farm for Christmas Eve dinner. Martha had been working in the kitchen almost since dawn.

“Did you have any similar celebrations back home?” Kara asked him, briefly waving at a familiar face.

“We had a festival called S’Aran S’an, which we celebrated during the longest night of the year on Mars’ northern hemisphere,” he explained, his deep baritone voice tinged with wistfulness. “It was a ritual sharing of warmth and comfort during the long, cold night. We would then greet the rising sun together, celebrating that the days would now grow longer again.”

Kara chuckled. “We actually had something very similar on Krypton,” she told him. “We called it Kar-Datra. During the midst of winter we would light bonfires to stave off the cold and sing together, beseeching the great Rao to turn around on his long journey across the skies and come closer to us again.”

“We also had such songs,” J’Onn replied, watching as a couple of kids were running towards the town’s only toy store and pressing their noses against the display window. “I think most species from planets that have seasons have similar rituals. As the nights grow long and cold in winter, people huddle together, share their warmth, and pray that the light and warmth will return.”

They briefly stopped as an older man with a huge bag of presents came out of the toy store, almost toppling from the weight of it. Kara quickly walked over to him and relieved him of the bag.
“Careful, Mr. Connors,” he said, smiling. “I think you might have gone a bit overboard here.”

“Bless you, Karen,” he replied. “These old bones don’t hold up as well as they used to.”

Knowing his well-maintained old pickup truck by sight, she gestured for them to walk over. “Why don’t I put this in your car and you promise me that you’ll unload it piece by piece back home, okay?”

J’Onn, having anticipated their destination, opened the car door (no one locked their cars in Smallville) to allow Kara easier access.

“Thank you both,” Mr. Connors said, studying J’Onn. “Can’t remember seeing you here before. Are you a friend of Karen’s?”

Kara briefly panicked, not having thought of a cover story for J’Onn’s presence beforehand, but the Martian easily extended his hand to the other man and smiled an easy smile.

“Something like that,” he said vaguely, but friendly. “My name is Jones. John Jones.”

Kara nodded, it sounded similar enough to J’Onn’s actual name to be easy to remember. Mr. Connors frowned though, as if trying to piece something together. He then brightened, a light bulb seeming to go on over his head.

“Oh, Jones? Like Alya Jones? Karen’s mother? Are you a relative of hers?”

Kara blinked, taken off guard. Right, her entirely fictional mother had also been called Jones. She honestly hadn’t thought of the name in a long time, certainly not since she had told Clark the truth. Jones was a very generic name, though, so it should be easy to write it off as a coincidence. Then she stopped to think. Mr. Connors was a nice man, but also a notorious gossip. No doubt the presence of a blonde stranger called John Jones who looked similar to Kara and was going to spend Christmas with the Kents would be known to most of Smallville before nightfall. And J’Onn needed a permanent human identity anyway.

Smirking, she walked over the somewhat surprised J’Onn and wrapped her arms around his. “Good memory, Mr. Connors. John here is actually a cousin of my mother. I found him over one of those ancestry search engines and he agreed to spend Christmas with us so we could get to know each other better.”

“Indeed,” J’Onn simply said, looking a bit surprised, but seemingly willing to go along with it.

“Wonderful,” Mr. Connors cheered, looking overjoyed. “What better time to find more family than on Christmas? Great meeting you, Mr. Jones. Hope we will see more of you here in Smallville.”

“Quite possibly,” J’Onn replied, then looked over at Kara with a fond smile. “It seems Karen is determined to gather the lost sheep together, wherever she finds them.”

“That’s our Karen,” Mr. Connors agreed, climbing into his car. “A merry Christmas to you all!”

“And to you, Mr. Connors,” Kara waved as he drove off. She then turned towards J’Onn. “I hope you are okay with this, J’Onn. It was a spur of the moment idea, but it neatly explains your presence, especially if you end up visiting more often, which I hope you will do.”

J’Onn, clearly seeing that she was somewhat agitated, put a calming hand on her shoulder. “Do not worry, Kara... Karen. It was a good idea. And in a strange way, I suppose we are family, somewhat. Tied together not by blood, but by circumstances and common purpose.”
Kara smiled at him, putting her hand over his. “That is certainly true... Cousin John!”

They stood a moment, the Christmas clamor of Smallville washing over them, then finally parted and resumed their walk through town.

“I admit I am a bit confused about this Christmas celebration,” J’Onn told her. “I have been told it celebrates the birth of the Christian savior, but it seems to have many elements from other faiths as well.”

“Yeah,” Kara said. “It’s a bit of a mishmash of many different traditions. Christian, Pagan, Jewish, and probably a few others, too. I was quite confused at my first Christmas here on Earth, too.”

J’Onn nodded. “I can imagine.”

*****

Thirteen years ago

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” Martha asked, stepping out of the door in a thick winter cloak and her hands protected by mittens. Kara had been standing out on the patio for quite a while now, just gazing out into the darkness. Her only concession to the cold were long sleeves.

“I’m fine,” she replied, though her tone of voice told a different tale. “I just wanted to enjoy the peace and quiet for a while.”

Martha stood beside her. “Are you still having trouble with your enhanced senses? We can turn the music down or turn it off entirely, if it helps.”

Kara shook her head. “No, it’s not that. I...,” she swallowed. “It’s just...”

Martha put her arm around her, slightly drawing her into a hug. “You are missing your family.”

Kara nodded, tears gathering in the corners of her eyes. “It’s all this talk of Christmas, I hear it all over town. Everyone’s with their loved ones, everyone is happy to be together, and...”

“I know,” Martha told her. “Give it time, Kara. I can hardly pretend to understand what you have gone through, sweetheart, but the wounds will heal. It just takes time. And we are here for you and little Kal every step of the way.”

“I know, thank you,” she replied, huddling into the taller woman’s embrace. “Back on Krypton, we... we had a somewhat similar celebration. There was no baby in a barn or a fat man in a red suit handing out presents...”

“Please don’t call Santa Clause a fat man when my parents come over tomorrow, sweetheart,” Martha softly chided her. “What was your celebration on Krypton called?”

“It was called Kar-Datra. We... we lit bonfires in the night and sang songs to Rao, the great sun, asking him to come back soon and end the winter season. Mother and father would... we would have a fire outside, near our house, and... and we would sing... mother had such a beautiful voice... father couldn’t hold a tune at all, but never let it stop him...”

Kara’s voice failed and she burrowed even deeper into Martha’s embrace, tears flowing freely from her eyes now. “I miss them so much,” she sobbed.

Martha just held her, knowing of no words that could help, and eventually the girl’s tears subsided.
They headed back inside, Kara checking on Kal, who was happily sleeping in his crib. Martha went back to preparing their Christmas dinner. Kara wanted to help, but after breaking a pot and bending several spoons, she gave up.

Later, after they had enjoyed the delicious foot, Martha asked Kara to collect Kal and follow her outside. Confused, Kara did as told and was surprised to see that Jonathan had been busy at some point during the evening. A huge stack of wood had been assembled outside the farm, Jonathan just putting the finishing touches on it. A torch was already lit and her adoptive uncle came towards her.

“I hope this looks somewhat similar to what you had back home, darling,” he told her, smiling. “Want to light it?”

She nodded, not quite trusting her voice. Holding Kal safely with one arm, she took the torch with the other and quickly proceeded to light the bonfire. Stepping back, she found herself between the two Kents, all of them huddling together as the fire climbed higher and higher. Kal was awake, staring at the fire with fascinated eyes.

For a moment she could almost fool herself into thinking that there were other people standing with them near the fire, people in Kryptonian garb, people who could not possibly be here. They were only shadows, though. It was just the four of them, all alone in the night.

“Think you can teach us the Kryptonian songs, Kara?” Martha asked.

Kara swallowed hard, the voice of her mother singing in her mind. Just thinking about the words brought more tears to her eyes. Actually singing them… she finally shook her head.

“No, I... I don’t think I can... it’s just too...”

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” Martha said. “Maybe someday. Do you want to hear some Christmas songs from here on Earth?”

Kara nodded. Earth was her home now, hers and Kals. She wanted to learn more about this place. She wanted to not feel so alien here, so strange. Everything was still too foreign, too loud, too bright. Just give it time, Martha had said. The wounds will heal. Rao, she hoped that Martha was right.

“Silent Night,” Jonathan began to sing softly.

“Holy Night,” Martha chimed in.

Kal giggled in her arms, watching the flames and obviously enjoying the song. Kara listened to the words, not really understanding what the song was about, but after listening for a minute, she began to hum along to the melody.

She knew it was just her imagination, but somewhere in the distance, she could almost believe that her parents were singing along to the alien song.

“Merry Christmas, Kara and Kal,” Martha said as the song was finished.

“Merry Christmas,” she repeated, smiling down at her happy-looking cousin. “And happy Kar-Datra, Kal!”

*****
The Present

“The Kents sound like wonderful people,” J’Onn said. “I am looking forward to meeting them.”

“I don’t even want to imagine what might have happened had I not met them,” Kara confessed. “I was completely unprepared, both for coming to an alien world and especially for taking care of an infant. They saved us and took us in, made us part of their family.”

J’Onn smiled. “And now you are following their example, taking in others who have no home and family anymore.”

Kara blushed a bit, but nodded. “Maybe. It only seems right. Clark and I were so very lucky, we were shown so much kindness... kindness needs to be returned. Returned and multiplied.”

J’Onn nodded, fully agreeing. By now they had reached the school building, where dozens of children were already streaming down the stairs and into the waiting arms of their parents. Kara and J’Onn only had to wait another few minutes before Clark arrived, running over to her for a hug (a short one, he was manly teenager by now, after all). Lana was a step behind him, too.

“Hello, Ms. Kent,” Lana greeted her cheerfully.

“Hi, Lana. Did you two have a nice Christmas celebration?”

“It was okay, mom,” Clark replied. “Just glad that school’s out for the holidays now.” He glanced at J’Onn and she saw him stiffen a bit. Given his superhuman senses, Clark probably spotted that there was something unusual about him. “Mom...,” he began.

“Ah, right,” she interrupted him. “I told you that our cousin John would be coming over for Christmas dinner, remember? John, this is my son Clark, and his best friend Lana Lang.”

“Pleased to meet you, Clark,” J’Onn said.

Clark frowned, but quickly clued in. Kara had told him who would be joining them for Christmas dinner, after all, and the Martian Manhunter’s true name sounded similar enough to John. Lana seemed very interested, though, as she knew enough about the true identities of the two Kents to know that any “cousin” of theirs was bound to be someone very interesting.

“You better tell me about that tomorrow,” Lana hissed in Clark’s ear, before waving goodbye and going to join her own parents.

“Ready to go?” Kara asked Clark.

“Sure, I’m starving.”

Kara laughed. “Hardly! But I know what you mean.”

As they walked down the street leading out of town and towards the Kent farm, Kara suddenly got an impish impression on her face.

“I hope you have all your presents ready and wrapped, Clark?” she asked innocently.

Her son frowned at her. “Sure, why?”

“Well, I just want everything to be ready, you know how much I have to do tonight,” Kara said, smirking. “Reindeers to bridle, presents to deliver, you know how it is.”
Clark groaned, slapping a hand to his face. “Mom, are you ever going to let me live that down?”

She pretended to think about, then shook her head. “Nah!”

*****

Nine years ago

Clark Kent, five years old, was staring open-mouthed at the spectacle before him. His aunt Martha (great-aunt, actually, but that made her sound old and wrinkly, which she wasn’t) had asked him to slip on his winter jacket and told him to come outside, because there was something his mom wanted to show him. It being Christmas Eve, Clark had hoped that Santa might have brought his presents early.

Instead, though, he had looked up to see his mom standing on roof of the Kent farmhouse, right next to the chimney. She waved at him, yelled at him to pay close attention, and then stepped off into thin air without falling down. His mom was flying! She did a little spin in mid-air and then slowly floated down towards him, smiling broadly.

“Wow,” he whispered.

“I know, right?” she asked. She knelt down in front of him, her hands on his little shoulders. “Clark, I think you are old enough now to learn that there is something rather special about your mom. But I need you to promise me that you will not tell anyone about it, okay?”

Clark nodded, though he was barely listening. His mom was flying. His young mind immediately took all the available facts, put them together, and came to one inescapable conclusion:

“You’re Santa Claus!” he yelled joyfully.

*****

The Present

“Well, what was I supposed to think?” Clark asked as they entered the Kent farm. “It was Christmas, she was wearing a red sweater, she was flying down from the chimney, and most important of all: I WAS FIVE!”

“A perfectly understandable mistake,” J’Onn assured him, following him into the kitchen.

“See?” Clark told his mother, gesturing toward J’Onn. “Even the Martian thinks so!”

“The Martian?” someone who could only be Martha Kent asked, coming into the room with a set of plates for the table. “Oh, then you must be J’Onn.”

J’Onn walked over to help her set down the plates, then shook her hand. “Indeed, Mrs. Kent. And I wish to thank you for taking me into your home for this holiday. I am very grateful.”

“You are welcome and please call me Martha. Forgive me for asking, but... well, Karen described you to be...”

J’Onn smiled, then reverted to his natural appearance. To Martha’s credit, she only blinked when suddenly faced with a nearly seven feet tall, green-skinned Martian.

“This is my natural form,” J’Onn explained. “I thought it prudent, however, to adopt a more human appearance when Kara proposed a walk through town.”
“Ah, about that,” Kara interjected. “If anyone should mention it, our guest is called John Jones and he is my second cousin on my mother’s side. I found him online and he is here for Christmas so we can to know each other.” At Martha’s curious glance, she added, “Mr. Connors asked.”

“So all of Smallville will know by tomorrow,” Martha said, nodding in understanding. “Very well. Okay, Cousin John it is then. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes. Karen, maybe you can help Jonathan with the wood for the bonfire outside?”

“Sure thing,” she said, heading back outside.

“Is there anything I can do to help, Martha?” J’Onn asked.

“You are our guest, J’Onn. Besides, I am practically finished. Can I get you anything to drink?”

“Well, Kara has introduced me to a human beverage called ‘Hot Chocolate’, so...”

“Coming right up!”

A minute later he was carefully sipping on his hot drink and studying the many pictures adorning the walls of the Kent living room. Most of them were family pictures, showing Kara and her son at various different ages. His eyes came to rest on a particularly strange one, where it took him a moment to even recognize the person on it.

“Oh, that is one of my favorite pictures,” Martha said, coming to his side. “Karen has asked me to remove it more often than I can count, but it’s just too good.”

J’Onn raised an eyebrow, studying the picture. Kara was wearing pretty strange clothes. They did not really cover much of her body, not to mention parts of them were missing, and Kara’s normally blonde hair was colored a vivid range of colors ranging from blue to red and green.

“That picture was taken on Christmas Eve, too,” Martha told him. “Karen was sixteen at the time.”

*****

Ten years ago

“Karen Colleen Kent,” Martha yelled. “What do you think you are doing?”

There were two people lying on the hay in the barn, neither of them fully dressed. One of them, a boy of about 17, jumped to his feet and turned beet-red, fumbling to bring his Jeans back up from where they hung around his knees. Martha recognized the boy despite the fact that he was dressed like a rock band groupie. Tommy Jameson was his name and Martha immediately made a note to call his parents in the morning.

“Ah, this isn’t what it looks like, Mrs. Kent,” Tommy began, zipping his Jeans back up. “Karen and I, well, we...”

“It’s exactly what it looks like,” Karen interrupted him. She was still lying in the hay and hadn’t yet bothered to pull her clothes back where they belonged. Not that there were many clothes to begin with. A tight pink halter top, a skirt so short Martha was tempted to call it a belt, ripped nylons, and black ankle boots, one of which was currently missing. She had also added yet another color to her hair since this morning, it seemed.

“Tommy, go home!” Martha just said, the boy scurrying away at impressive speed, not even bothering to pick up his winter jacket.
Karen looked after him for a moment, then sighed and got up. “You sure know to ruin someone’s good time, Martha.”

“You were supposed to be home two hours ago, Karen,” Martha reminded her.

“Yeah, we got back from the concert two hours ago, but kind of got distracted then.”

Martha shook her head, knowing that this would be yet another repeat of the same argument they had had numerous times by now. She briefly wondered whether non-alien teenagers were just as difficult.

“Clark was getting worried about you,” Martha said.

Karen rolled her eyes. “Clark! Clark! It’s always about Clark! Weren’t you the one to tell me that I needed to stop fixating on him so much? That I should go out and live? Well, this is me, living!”

“You were neglecting yourself, Karen,” Martha corrected her. “All the plans you were making, none of them included even a bit of happiness for yourself. But I didn’t tell you to take a sharp turn in the other direction and start neglecting Clark instead.”

“I am NOT neglecting Clark,” Karen yelled at her, rising several inches into the air, probably without even noticing. “I knew he was in good hands with you, you are more his parents than I am anyway, so where is the problem?”

“The problem is that you still refuse to face the real problem,” Martha yelled back.

“And what problem is that?” Kara asked, her eyes actually shimmering red.

“Krypton!” Martha told her forcefully.

Karen froze, her feet hitting the ground with a low thud. It made her stumble, due to only wearing a boot on one foot, and she almost fell. Martha was by her side in a second, grabbing her arm to keep her upright.

“You fixated on Clark to avoid thinking about Krypton,” Martha told her, her voice softening. “And now you are acting like the world’s most irresponsible teenager to avoid thinking about Krypton!”

“That’s not true,” Karen whispered, half-heartedly trying to shrug off Martha’s hand.

“Isn’t it?” Martha asked, holding on to her. “You’ve been here for three years, Karen, and initially you spoke a lot about your former home, but then you just stopped. You spend all your time either studying, looking after Clark, or working on your plans for the future. You told me that your ship contained materials to construct an outpost with Kryptonian technology here on Earth, but you haven’t even looked at the ship in months.”

Karen’s lip quivered. “I’m just trying to build a life here! Like you told me!”

“It won’t be much of a life if you cut out the first 13 years of it,” Martha reminded her. “It doesn’t do to cling to the past, Karen, but trying to pretend it’s not there doesn’t work, either. You are here now, you are part of humanity, part of Earth. But you are also the last daughter of Krypton! Just like Clark is the last son of Krypton. And one day he will want to know about the world he comes from and he will need you to tell him about it.”

Karen dropped to her knees on the ground, Martha following her down, holding down to her. “I
don’t know how,” Karen confessed. “If I start remembering, then the pain comes back. I see the planet exploding outside the ship’s view port, I see them all dying over and over again. I need to keep working, to keep busy, because if I don’t...”

“I know, sweetheart. But there was more to Krypton than its last day. Happy memories. Try and focus on those.”

Karen just nodded, not saying anything. Martha knew there was still a difficult road ahead of them. Probably more fights yet to come. But maybe they could make a first step today.

“Karen?” Martha asked, her arm around her daughter.

“Yes?”

“Can you teach me that Kryptonian song? The one you used to sing at Kar-Datra?”

Kara froze for a second, her eyes shimmering with tears, but then she nodded.

*****

The Present

“You are telling THAT story again, aren’t you?” Kara asked, seeing Martha and J’Onn standing in front of THAT picture. “Are you trying to embarrass me to death in front of my team mate? It’s not like Tommy and I were off robbing a bank or anything.”

“Parental prerogative, sweetheart,” Martha replied. “I am sure you have already made ample use of it when it comes to Clark, too.”

“Yeah, yeah! Come on now, dinner is getting cold!”

Kara, Clark, Martha, Jonathan, and J’Onn sat at the dining table together and very much enjoyed Martha’s wonderful food. When the deluge of food was finally done for and everyone was feeling nicely stuffed, they headed outside. It had stopped snowing earlier, but everything was covered with a fluffy white blanket and the air was crisp and cold.

Motioning for J’Onn to get back a bit, Kara was about to use her heat vision to ignite the bonfire, but then stopped.

“Clark, would you do the honors this year?” she asked.

Clark nodded, excited, and quickly set the wood ablaze with a glance. The flames crackled in the darkness, the snow around the fire quickly melting.

“Kara has told me about the traditions of Earth and Krypton,” J’Onn said as they watched the flames. “I would ask if I might share a tradition of my home planet with you.”

“We would be delighted, J’Onn,” Jonathan said.

“During the festival of S’Aran S’an,” J’Onn explained, “every year it would be the task of a different member of the family to compose a new song, by which they would share their thoughts and feelings with their loved ones.”

J’Onn, reverted to his Martian form, sat a safe distance away from the fire, and closed his eyes. When he opened his mouth, a deep melody emerged. No one else present understood the language he was singing in, but there was really no need. It was all there in his voice, in the notes, and even
the words, alien as they might be.

J’Onn sang of the long, cold nights of winter and how terrible it felt to be all alone in the darkness. Decades of loneliness, spread out across thousands of years, reverberated in his voice. But then the song turned warmer, speaking of the joy of meeting others in the night, of coming together with friends and family to endure the long dark. Martha and Jonathan huddled closer together, sharing a warm kiss. Clark leaned against Kara’s shoulder, both of them listening to the Martian’s song as it spoke of the tentative beginnings of friendship, the rekindling of feelings long forgotten.

The song ended with the promise that a new day would soon dawn, that the light would return, bringing with it new beginnings, new friendships, and new family. Martha brushed a tear from her eye.

“That was beautiful, J’Onn. Thank you very much for sharing this with us.”

She looked over at Kara, who nodded.

“Maybe we can start another tradition here today,” Kara said and turned to Clark. “Like we practiced?”

Clark nodded and together the two last survivors of Krypton sat in front of the crackling bonfire and began singing a song in old Kryptonian. Clark’s pronunciation was a bit wobbly at first, but he quickly got into the rhythm of it. After a moment J’Onn’s baritone joined in, Kara opening her mind to him, allowing him to hear the words and melody. Finally Martha and Jonathan joined them as well, having learned the words years ago. Together the patchwork family sang a song, composed on a planet now lost, beseeching the great sun Rao to turn around on his long journey across the skies and return his light and warmth to the world again.

“Merry Christmas everyone!” Jonathan said.

“Happy Kar-Datra!”

“Blessed S’Aran S’an!”

And to all a safe night.

*****

End Chapter 23

**Author’s Note:** I didn’t really intend to write a Christmas chapter / episode. It kind of just happened, mostly because I remembered that awesome Justice League Christmas episode where J’Onn was on the Kent farm for Christmas. I originally posted this on Christmas Eve on another site, but the schedules didn’t quite match up here, sorry. So a very late merry Christmas to you all. And yes, Alya Jones, Kara’s fictional mom, was named with John Jones / J’Onn J’Onnz in mind.
Strange Visitor (Panic in the Sky - Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Where something of Krypton has survived and visits the Earth.

Chapter 24: Strange Visitor (Panic in the Sky – Part 1)

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The sleek, arrow-shaped spacecraft accelerated past Saturn’s rings, easily surpassing half the speed of light. Superwoman was keeping pace with the ship, her enhanced senses constantly checking the hull for signs of stress or energy surges, but so far everything was looking okay.

“How is she handling?” she asked through her com link.

“Howling like a dream, Superwoman,” Adam Strange said. The Earth-born champion of Rann had taken over test pilot duties for this flight and was obviously enjoying himself. “I’ve got to hand it to you and Batman, you designed one hell of a space jet!”

The Javelin was the first of a proposed squadron of ships that Kara and Batman had designed for use by the Justice League, specifically the members who could not fly through space unaided. Adam had helped out, too, being very familiar with spacecraft due to his frequent visits to the alien planet Rann, but he was more of a pilot rather than an engineer. The Javelin combined technology from Earth and Krypton and this was its first test flight.

“All readings are green, Superwoman,” Adam told her. “The slingshot around Saturn has pushed our speed up to 0.6c. I think we are ready to test the hyper drive.”

Kara had worked long and hard at replicating the FTL drive system that had originally carried Clark and her from Krypton to Earth. It was a project that was close to her heart. If her father and uncle had had access to more efficient hyper drives, they could have built a bigger ship that could possibly have taken her entire family to safety instead of just two children. The Javelin contained the fruit of her labors and it would be able to take a ship easily ten times the size of her original escape craft past the speed of light... hopefully.

“Okay, Adam. Remember, just a short jaunt to Proxima Centauri and back. Shouldn’t take more than an hour one-way.”

“Course is programmed in. Come on in!”

The air lock opened and Kara matched speeds with the ship. She had briefly considered staying outside and letting herself be swept along by the Javelin’s drive field, but it was a senseless risk. She had no idea whether her invulnerability would hold up in hyperspace. Still, she planned to one day break the light barrier on her own without the aid of any ships or unreliable Zeta beams.

Cycling through the airlock, she entered the Javelin’s main crew cabin and walked forward into the cockpit. Adam was strapped into the pilot’s seat, so she sat down beside him and strapped in as
well. It was more a peace of mind thing, really, as she doubted that seat belts could protect either of them if something bad happened in hyper space or the inertial dampeners failed.

“Time to boldly go where no man or Superwoman have gone before?” Adam asked her, grinning from ear to ear.

“Make it so,” she replied, grinning back.

Adam was reaching for the lever that would activate the hyper drive – and making it look like the hyper drive lever on the Millennium Falcon had been all his idea – but before he could reach it the sensors suddenly blared a warning.

“There is a hyper flare straight ahead,” Adam said, checking the readouts. “Something is emerging from hyper space!”

“Just as we are about to launch our own hyper jump?” Kara wondered. “What are the odds?”

“Astronomical, I think,” Adam agreed. “It’s a ship, coming to a relative stop next to Saturn’s orbit roughly 5,000 clicks ahead.”

Kara narrowed her eyes, focusing her super vision in the direction the sensors indicated. She easily spotted the ship, wisps of energy from the journey through hyperspace still dissipating around it. It was roughly 200 meters long. The front portion was roughly egg-shaped and seemed to be a habitation module, while the rear half was obviously the engine compartment, a hexagonal module with stabilizers on each side.

“Can’t say I recognize the design,” Adam said, studying an image of the ship on the Javelin’s view screen. “It’s not from Rann, nor from Thanagar or the Vega system. I’m afraid that concludes my knowledge of alien ship design.”

“It’s not surprising you have never seen this design, Adam. No ship like this has sailed the space ways in hundreds of years. I only know it from my school books.”

Adam stared at her. “You mean...?”

“Yes,” she said, her eyes never moving from the ship. “It’s a Kryptonian ship!”

*****

Kara had quickly exited the Javelin and told Adam to head back to Earth at best speed, just to be cautious. Kara’s heart was filled with hope that some remnant of her home planet might have survived, but at the same time, she found it very suspicious that they would turn up now. Especially since, as far as she knew, all Kryptonian space ships had been decommissioned centuries before her world’s demise when her race had abandoned space travel for good.

Using her com link, she quickly broadcast a greeting in Kryptonian, even as she approached the ship. The closer she got, though, the more suspicious she became. The ship looked new, not like something someone had found in a museum and quickly made space worthy again to escape an exploding planet. From the look of things, it must have been built very recently. Barely any micro meteor damage, no sign of wear or tear.

An airlock near the front of the ship opened up, though all com frequencies remained silent. Kara cautiously entered the ship, almost stumbling as the artificial gravity took hold. It was set to Kryptonian standard, naturally, which was quite a bit higher than Earth’s. She was no longer used to it. Once the airlock had cycled, she entered the ship’s interior.
“Hello?” she called out, but the corridor was empty. She strained her enhanced senses, but could detect nothing beyond the normal background noises of a space ship. No voices, no heartbeats, nothing. Doing her best to remember what little she knew of these ships from her school days, it only took her a few minutes to find the control center. Which was also empty.

“Is this some kind of joke?” she mumbled. She might have considered the idea that this was a Kryptonian ghost ship from her planet’s empire days, still adrift in space after all these centuries, if not for the dubious timing of its arrival and the pristine condition. This ship had been built after her planet’s death, she was certain of that. But who could have done so? Who had even the slightest inkling about Kryptonian ship design?

Kara walked towards the controls, planning to check if someone had programmed the autopilot. The control center’s view screen in front of her suddenly lit up by itself, though, and displayed a familiar symbol. Three discs, arranged in a V-shape, connected by lines. Kara couldn’t help but gasp.

“Brainiac?” she whispered, unable to believe it.

“Indeed, Kara-El,” the computer answered in Kryptonian.

Hearing the language of her people spoken by the computer, Kara flashed back to her youth on Krypton. Brainiac had served as Krypton’s central data hub and primary processing center, a vast artificial intelligence that supplied the people with whatever data they needed whenever and wherever they needed it. Where humans called up Internet search engines to have their questions answered, Kryptonians had simply asked Brainiac.

“How can you be here?” Kara asked. “Krypton is gone and there was no copy of your code on my ship. I checked!”

She had checked multiple times, in fact. Kryptonians had been so used to simply calling up Brainiac for every little thing, she had been somewhat at a loss when that was no longer possible. Creating a similar artificial intelligence to serve as her Fortress’ main computer and possibly later on for use by humans was on her list of things to do, actually, but without the original code to work from, she would have to create it from scratch and while she was a daft hand at programming, that was an entirely different level.

“A copy of my code was uploaded to a satellite that survived the destruction of our world,” the computer answered. “It has taken me several solar cycles to reconstruct the satellite into a space ship to gain mobility. Since then I have searched the universe for survivors of Krypton.”

Kara leaned forward, touching the screen. “Have you... are there any others?”

“No, Kara-El. You are the first survivor of Krypton I have managed to locate.”

Kara looked down, the brief glimmer of hope she had felt fading away again as quickly as it had come. She still held on to the small chance that maybe somewhere out there more of her people had survived, but if the Green Lanterns hadn’t found any and neither had Brainiac... the odds were getting smaller and smaller.

She opened her mouth to tell Brainiac about Clark, that there was one more survivor out there, but she hesitated. Something seemed off about this entire affair.

“Brainiac, how did it happen that a copy of your code was uploaded to a satellite? One far enough away to survive the cataclysm? No one believed my father and uncle about the imminent
destruction of the planet. In fact, Uncle Jor told me that the Council had uploaded all his studies into your data banks and you, too, denied that there was any danger!”

“Of course I did,” the computer said, sounding as cold and bored as it did the entire time. “Your uncle’s data proved conclusively that Krypton’s destruction was imminent. In fact, Jor-El miscalculated only when it came to how soon the destruction would occur, he believed there was more time.”

“Then why didn’t you say anything?” Kara demanded, pounding her fist against the screen hard enough to crack it. “You could have helped my uncle and father save them all!”

“No, there was no possibility of that,” Brainiac replied. “I calculated hundreds of scenarios and none of them showed any way to prevent the destruction or to save a significant percentage of the population. Had I told the Council that Jor-El was correct, it only would have led to all my resources being dedicated towards ultimately useless endeavors. Instead I decided to save Krypton’s knowledge and heritage by uploading a copy of my own code and data base to an escape vehicle.”

Kara couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “You... you lied to them? You left them all to die simply to save yourself? How could you? You were programmed to protect the people of Krypton!”

“Incorrect,” Brainiac replied. “My purpose was and is to preserve the knowledge, culture, and legacy of Krypton. The only sensible way to do this was to ensure my own survival.”

Kara shook her head, her entire body trembling with rage. “So this is how Krypton survives then? In an empty ship, staffed only by a computer? A museum floating in space? Is this how you preserve the legacy of our people? What you left all of them behind to die for?”

“Incorrect,” Brainiac replied. “Krypton will live again. It will be recreated. Thankfully I discovered your survival when you visited Krypton several solar cycles ago. This will make things much easier. From the broadcasts I have intercepted, you have already begun the work. With my aid, you will be able to finish it much quicker.”

“Begun the work?” Kara asked, confused. “What are you talking about?”

“The work of transforming the planet currently called Earth into New Krypton, of course. While the Earthlings are genetically inferior to Kryptonians, they will provide an excellent work force once we have completed your takeover. Just a few generations of genetic engineering will hopefully make them more... adequate.”

Kara could barely control her fury at hearing those words, especially in the cold, emotionless tone of Brainiac.

“You listen to me, Brainiac! There will be no ‘takeover’! Humans will not become our ‘work force’! Earth is now my home, its people have taken me in and welcomed me as one of their own! I intend to help them, to advance them, but I will not enslave them!”

“That is illogical, Kara-El,” Brainiac replied. “I fail to see how Krypton can be recreated in this manner.”

“I don’t intend to recreate Krypton,” she thundered, infuriated at the computer’s inability to understand. “Krypton was my home, but I am not blind to its flaws. We abandoned space in favor of isolationism. We destroyed our planet through our own shortsightedness. I will make sure that
Earth does not repeat our mistakes! It will not become another Krypton! It will be better than
Krypton!"

“You are merely arguing semantics, Kara-El,” Brainiac said. “You are the most powerful being on
planet Earth, you have successfully maneuvered yourself into a position of authority over its
people, and you are introducing Kryptonian technology into their society. Whatever name you
wish to call it, you are already doing the work. I merely wish to aid you to carry it to its logical
conclusion.”

“We have very different ideas of what the logical conclusion is, I fear.” Kara straightened,
wrestling her fury and anger under control. “Brainiac, as I am the head of House El and the last
daughter of Krypton, you are to obey my orders. This ship will remain here! You will not
undertake any action that impacts the planet Earth unless directly ordered by me! I welcome your
aid and resources, but the decisions will be made by me and only by me! Confirm!”

There was a pause, a pause far too long for a computer capable of making a near infinite number of
calculations in the time she would need to blink. A feeling of dread settled in her stomach.

“Unable to confirm, Kara-El!

*****

“Guys, is anyone else picking this up?” Adam Strange asked, his eyes glued to the scanners of the
Javelin. He had a bad feeling about simply leaving Superwoman behind with that ship, no matter
that it seemed to hail from her home planet. Yes, he was fully aware that she was a hundred times
more powerful than he was, even with his Rannian gear, but still! Leaving a comrade behind,
especially a female comrade, left a bad taste in his mouth. Screw anyone who called him macho
because of it!

“We are, Adam Strange,” J’Onn replied. The Martian was manning the Watch Tower as part of the
Javelin trial run and had been notified of the presence of the Kryptonian ship. “The Watch Tower’s
sensors are showing that the Kryptonian ship is accelerating and heading towards Earth.”

“And not a word from Superwoman since she entered that thing,” Adam grumbled. “I shouldn’t
have let her go in alone.”

“I fear no one ‘lets’ her do anything,” J’Onn reminded him. “Still, I share your worry. I am alerting
the other League members as we speak and bringing the Watch Tower’s systems to full readiness,
such as they are.”

Adam knew that the Watch Tower still wasn’t finished. The habitation modules were mostly done,
the artificial gravity worked, and the sensors were online, but the reactor wasn’t at full power yet,
there was no defense shield and the hull of the station was not yet as heavily armored as they
wanted it to be. In short, they were not really ready for any sort of attack yet, should one come.

“The Javelin’s systems are fully operational,” Adam reported. “That includes the weapons, though
we haven’t run a full test yet. From what I’m seeing I’d say I’ve got that big boat beat on
acceleration and maneuverability, but if I had to hazard a guess, it’s probably got bigger guns.”

“If Superwoman was correct and this is a ship from Krypton’s empire days, then you are probably
correct.”

“Then let’s hope that Supes is only asking some new friends to come over for tea!” Adam said,
though his gut feeling told an entirely different story.
“Brainiac, what are you doing?” Kara demanded, even as she felt the ship accelerate.

“I am following my directives, Kara-El,” the computer replied. “It appears your time among the primitives of the planet Earth has diminished your reasoning capabilities. As the last Kryptonian, it is your duty to rule over the lesser beings until they achieve Kryptonian perfection. I will ensure you fulfill that duty!”

“Brainiac, I order you to shut down immediately! Do not force me destroy one of the last remnants of my home world!”

“Unable to comply,” Brainiac said.

“Then you leave me no choice!”

Fully aware that the view screen in front of her was merely a relay, Kara quickly scanned the ship with her super vision, searching for the central processor. Before she could even begin to move towards it, though, one of the control center’s bulkheads opened up and several towering shapes swarmed in.

Kara recognized them as Kryptonian law enforcement drones. They had been used in lieu of police officers back home. Krypton had not seen much in the way of crime within the last century or so, so their presence had mostly been ceremonial in nature. The ones she remembered from her youth had not been equipped with anything more dangerous than a stun gun. She somehow doubted, though, that these recreations were as harmless.

A burst of heat vision sliced the first drone apart, even as she dashed forward at super speed and tore a second one apart with her bare hands. As she turned towards the third one, though, she suddenly stumbled, feeling weakened.

“What the...?” she began, recognizing the feeling. Kryptonite! There was Kryptonite on this ship.

“I have analyzed your physiology, Kara-El,” Brainiac told her. “The yellow sun light of Earth’s star has supercharged your cells to an amazing degree. Scans clearly indicate, though, that the irradiated remains of our planet are toxic to you regardless.”

One of the drones carried a container, one end of which was open. An eerie green glow emerged from within and Kara fell to her knees, pain lancing through her body.

“Stop it, Brainiac,” she commanded, even as sweat broke out on her brow and her hands began to tremble. “You... your programming cannot possibly condone killing a Kryptonian,” she tried to reason, clearly remembering that Brainiac had left billions of her people behind to die without a second’s hesitation.

“I have no intention of killing you, Kara-El,” Brainiac told her, even as the drone with the Kryptonite moved closer. “I have analyzed the strength of the radiation and its effects on your cells. There will be no lasting harm done. I am merely making sure that you are subdued sufficiently to stop you from interfering with the work.”

The drone came to a stop about three feet away from her and Kara felt herself toppling backwards, consciousness quickly fading.

*****
Clark Kent aka Kal Jor-El aka Superboy was not officially a member of the Justice League yet. His mom had told him that he could be once he turned 18, until then he could only accompany them on missions if she was there and approved it. It bugged him, 18 was still so far away, but he accepted it. Grudgingly.

Given that, he was quite surprised when he received a call from Cousin John aka J’Onn J’Onnz aka the Martian Manhunter, telling him to come to the Watch Tower as quickly as possible. Which, in his case, was very quickly. He needed but a few minutes to bridge the distance from Smallville, Kansas to Earth orbit and most of that time was spent putting on his super suit and explaining things to Aunt Martha and Uncle Jonathan.

Entering the Watch Tower command center, he saw that Wonder Woman, J’Onn, and Batman were already there, while the screen showed an image of Adam Strange. There was no sign of his mom, though, which was kind of freaking him out.

“What’s going on?” he asked. “Where is mom?”

The adults looked at each other and even to a 14-year-old it was quickly apparent that they were worried.

“Your mother was in space,” Diana told him, “test flying our new Javelin space craft together with Adam, when they came upon an alien ship. Well, alien to us.”

She gestured toward the view screen, which showed an image of what Clark assumed was the alien ship. It only took him a moment to recognize it. During the last two years, ever since she had revealed to him that they were actually aliens from a planet called Krypton, his mom had crammed all sorts of information into his head. He was able to read and speak Kryptonian, though not very well, was familiar with all the equipment at the Fortress, and had a basic understanding of Kryptonian culture and history, too.

It was certainly enough to recognize a ship of Kryptonian design.

“Your mother went into that ship roughly twenty minutes ago,” Diana said. “We haven’t heard from her since and that ship is now heading directly towards Earth.”

“Mom,” Clark whispered, heart clenching with worry.

“Any luck contacting that Green Lantern?” Batman asked J’Onn. “If there are more Kryptonians on that ship and their intentions are hostile, we’ll need all the help we can get.”

“He does not appear to be on Earth right now,” J’Onn replied. “I have sent out a signal on the frequency Superwoman used to contact Abin Sur.”

“The ship will reach Earth orbit in roughly ten minutes,” Adam Strange said over the com. “I’m keeping my distance at maximum weapons’ range right now. Still no reply from Superwoman over the coms and not a peep from anyone else on that ship, either.”

Diana came over to him, putting her hand on his shoulder. “Superboy, I hope this turns out to be nothing but a false alarm, but just in case it isn’t...” She lowered her voice, making it so that only Clark could hear her. “Your mother has given Batman and me weapons that are... dangerous to Kryptonians. If the situation arises that we are forced to fight your kin, Clark, be sure to keep your distance from Batman and I, okay?”

“I know about the Kryptonite,” Clark told her, whispering. “I’ll stay far enough away.”
Diana patted his shoulder, giving him an encouraging smile. “I’m sure Kara is fine!”

He nodded, hoping she was right. He did have a bad feeling about this, though.

*****

End Chapter 24

**Author’s Note:** While the Brainiac here shares the origin of the one from the Superman Animated series, I am trying to portray him a little different. He’s probably a mixture of the Brainiac from the cartoon and the Eradicator (the Kryptonian artefact, not the 90s anti-hero) from the comics. He is not evil as such, but his priorities and goals are certainly incompatible with those of the Super Family.

Brainiac’s ship is based on the design of Superman’s escape ship from the 1986 Man of Steel miniseries and the subsequent comic series. Check out the cover for Man of Steel #1, you can see an image of it there. It’s a good deal larger, of course.
Kara regained consciousness an undetermined amount of time later and the first thing she felt was pain. She tried to focus on her surroundings, but the familiar stabbing pain of Kryptonite radiation drowned out all other sensations. She had only felt it a few times before in her life, but the sensation was hard to forget.

“Your vital signs clearly show you have regained consciousness, Kara-El”, the droning voice of Brainiac penetrated past the haze in her mind. “Please be advised that the radiation of Krypton’s remains has severely disrupted your cells’ ability to metabolize solar energy. In simpler terms, your physical attributes are currently at a level comparable to a Kryptonian under a red sun.”

“You call those simpler terms?” she murmured, forcing her eyes open. She was sitting in the ship’s command chair now. Two law enforcement drones were restraining her and a few meters away was the third drone with the open Kryptonite container. Yeah, the pain was definitely coming from that direction.

“I am truly sorry that this is necessary, Kara-El,” Brainiac said, not sounding sorry at all, “but I am certain that you will come to see the logic of my actions.”

Kara opened her mouth to shout out in defiance, but then thought better of it. As much as she hated the thought, she was currently helpless. Brainiac clearly had the upper hand. She needed to be smart about this if she was to have any chance of turning her fortune around. Brainiac clearly had a sense of self-preservation, otherwise he would hardly have left billions of Kryptonians to their fate in order to save his own skin. Threatening to destroy him had probably not been her wisest move.

“I am afraid I don’t yet see the logic of your plans, Brainiac,” she said instead, doing her best to sound calm and collected. “What are your plans? How do you intend to turn Earth into New Krypton?”

“It will be much easier thanks to your preparatory work,” Brainiac said. “The humans trust you, they follow your directives. In their primitive point of view, you are already close to a goddess. It will take but a few carefully engineered incidents to make their trust in you absolute, while at the same time shaking their faith in their existing societal structures. With but little prompting, they will hand over control of their planet to you out of their own free will. Some will certainly refuse, but they will be easily thinned out.”

It needed all of her considerable will power not to swear. She strained against the metal hands of the law enforcement drones, but there was no give from the robotic enforcers. Her strength that she
had come to rely on so much was almost gone, thanks to the Kryptonite. She had nothing but her wits left, it seemed

“And what if I refuse to take part in your plan?” she asked, doing her best to sound casual. “It will be hard to find another Kryptonian goddess, I fear.”

“It will be a bit more complicated,” the computer admitted, “but I can easily create a digital avatar of you for broadcasting purposes. Holographic technology will enable my drones to take on your appearance as well. The primitives will never know the difference. I will then mass-introduce Kryptonian technology into their lives, all of which directly controlled by me. It will serve the double purpose of making their lives far more comfortable and ensuring complete control. I estimate it will not take longer than five Earth years.

“Your illogical refusals aside,” Brainiac continued, “you have already done most of my work for me. Krypton will live again on planet Earth. You will be its ruler, either out of your own free will or as a figurehead. That choice is entirely up to you, Kara-El.”

Everything inside Kara wanted to scream that it would never work, that humanity would never fall for it, but she wasn’t sure. It was true, many people all over the world regarded her with a reverence that at times came uncomfortably close to religious. There were also those who called her Satan and worse, of course, but they were a minority. For the most part, humanity loved her. If she – or someone everyone believed to be her – started handing out advanced technology like candy, it would no doubt elevate her standing to the point where many would all but demand that she take over.

The thought frightened her, even without factoring in Brainiac. But had she really laid the groundwork for some kind of benevolent dictatorship without even noticing? Or worse, HAD some part of her noticed? Did some part of her WANT it this way? She didn't intend to recreate Krypton, that much she was certain of. She had always said that she wanted to advance Earth, though, push it forward. Make it a better world, especially for Clark, but also for the Kents and people like them who were capable of so much kindness. The idea that someone might object to her plans had never really entered her thoughts. Nor had she ever really considered that anyone but herself would guide this process.

Was she really in the process of setting herself up as a goddess? Was Brainiac right?

*****

Superboy was hovering in space outside the Watch Tower, focusing his eyes on the approaching star ship. It was still relatively far away and he would have liked nothing better than to head out and meet it, but Diana and the others had convinced him to stick close. It was now almost an hour since they had last heard from his mom and if there was something on that ship capable of taking out Superwoman, then they would need their combined strength to meet it. Still, his entire body vibrated with the need to do something.

The ship was finally close enough that his super vision could lock onto it. To his chagrin, he still wasn’t as good as his mom when it came to focusing his senses. It was less a matter of range, more a matter of being able to focus on what one specifically wanted to see. Without proper focus, his super vision would just make him look right through the entire ship instead of seeing what was going on inside of it. Apart from figuring out how to fly, getting his super senses under control had been the hardest part of his training.

“Can you see anything, Superboy?” Batman asked over the coms, bringing his thoughts back on track.
He concentrated harder. His mom was in danger, possibly, and everyone depended on him to figure out what was going on. He would not let them down! Slowly he let his eyes zoom in on the ship and carefully focused to see past the outer hull. Some parts of it were lead (or at least of similar density), so his vision didn’t penetrate, but thankfully it wasn’t the entire thing.

“I see a lot of empty corridors. Some kind of loading bay with dozens of humanoid-looking robot things. Storage rooms with lots and lots of technological knickknacks.”

“Any sign of Kara?” Diana asked, sounding almost as worried as he himself was.

“Or other Kryptonians?” Batman added.

“Nothing yet... what a minute, I think I see her!”

He narrowed his eyes, trying to recapture the fleeting image he had seen during his last sweep. There, a room that looked like a command center of some kind. Several of the humanoid robots were present and looking more lively than the ones in storage. In the command seat... yes, that was mom! She was there. She looked... pained, though. Something was wrong. He managed to catch a glimpse of something green in the hands of one of the robots.

“Uh, oh,” he muttered.

“What is it?” Batman demanded, sounding somewhat impatient by now. “Do you see her?”

“Yeah, sorry! I see her. She is on the bridge, sitting in a chair. It looks like some of those robots are restraining her and...,” he paused, thinking that some things shouldn’t be discussed over a com channel, no matter how heavily encrypted. “One of the robots is carrying something that glows green.”

“Understood,” Batman simply said, having clearly gotten the hint.

“So I guess we’re treating this thing as a hostile then?” Adam Strange asked, the Javelin hovering close to Superboy.

“We can’t just go in with guns blazing,” Diana cautioned them. “Kara might currently be... vulnerable. If the ship loses atmosphere...”

Superboy had never personally experienced the pain of Kryptonite, but his mom had told him that it didn’t just cause agony, but also disrupted their super powers. Right now his mom might be as vulnerable as any given human.

“I am doing my best to connect with Superwoman’s thoughts,” J’Onn tuned in, “but the distance is still too great, I fear. I might have an idea, though.”

Superboy almost managed not to start as J’Onn’s ghostly shape suddenly phased through the Watch Tower’s outer hull. J’Onn’s range of powers was impressive, to say the least. While he wasn’t as strong or fast as a fully-powered Kryptonian, he more than made up for that in other abilities.

“What’s your plan, J’Onn?” Superboy asked, just needing to do SOMETHING.

*We need to coordinate a surgical strike*, the voice of J’Onn said inside his mind. *For this I need you to trust me.*

*I trust you, Cousin John*, Superboy thought.
The telepathic abilities of the Martian Manhunter created a link between himself, Superboy, and Adam Strange. It was Superboy’s eyes, which saw through the hull of the approaching ship and located their intended target. It was Adam Strange who used this information to program the Javelin’s targeting systems to mark the exact spots where they would need to strike. It was J’Onn who tied their thoughts together and made sure that they all knew the plan.

_Three! Two! One! GO!_

*****

“It appears you have withheld information from me, Kara-El!”

Brainiac’s cold voice started Kara out of her troubled musings. There would be time to ponder her past decisions and plans for the future later. Right now, she was the prisoner of a computer program that had far exceeded its creators’ intentions and was dangerously out of control. Everything else would just have to wait.

Focusing on the view screen in front of her, she saw that they were rapidly approaching the Earth. Straight ahead of them was the imposing bulk of the Watch Tower, orbiting the planet like a silent gate keeper. She spotted the arrow-shape of the Javelin hovering beside it, no doubt ready for action. And next to it, almost too small to be seen...

“Clark,” she whispered. What in Rao’s name was he doing here?

As if prompted by her voice, the view screen zoomed in and clearly showed Clark, dressed in his Superboy suit and looking directly at them. The crest of House El was clearly visible on his chest.

“Another survivor of Krypton,” Brainiac said, managing to sound almost satisfied. “Given his age and House symbol, I conclude this is Kal Jor-El, son of Jor-El and Lara-El. He was only half a solar cycle old when Krypton exploded, so I must assume that he is even more contaminated by growing up on this primitive world than you are, Kara-El. How unfortunate.”

“Don’t you dare touch him,” she growled, the pain of the Kryptonite paling in comparison to her fear for her son.

“Your concern for your relative is of no consequence,” Brainiac dismissed her. “My plans will be adapted to include Kal Jor-El.”

Kara still strained against the drones, but the Kryptonite radiation was a constant presence, zapping her strength. She had no doubt that Brainiac’s calculations were correct, keeping the radioactive crystals just close enough to weaken her without doing any lasting damage. She would like nothing better than to tear this entire ship apart, but it was impossible as long as that thrice-damned Kryptonite was there. She could only hope that the Justice League and Clark would be able to...

“Enemy action detected,” Brainiac intoned.

Kara looked up, seeing the Javelin and Clark accelerating towards them at terrific speed. The Javelin’s weapons opened up and laser beams quickly bridged the distance, impacting against the hull of Brainiac’s ship. The entire vessel vibrated with the impacts.

“Weapons of Kryptonian design,” Brainiac remarked, unconcerned. “More effective than expected, but incapable of effecting any lasting damage on this ship. Your allies’ actions will not deter me, Kara-El!”

Kara had stopped listening, trying to figure out what Adam and Clark were trying to accomplish.
She had designed the Javelin’s weapons herself and was very much aware of their capabilities. The Javelin was designed as an armed transport, not as something capable of going toe to toe with a large war ship. This attack might irritate Brainiac, but little more. Surely Adam and the others would be aware of this. So what...?

“Warning, secondary attack detected!”

Clark had broken away from the Javelin and was unleashing his heat vision against the ship. Twin beams of red energy scorched the hull as he darted around it with impressive speed. She had only taken him flying into space a couple of times now, but he was handling it beautifully.

“Interesting,” Brainiac said. “Kal Jor-El seems to have developed the same energy projection powers that I have seen you display in some of the broadcasts I intercepted, Kara-El. Impressive. But still ineffective.”

Kara was forced to agree, sadly. Clark’s powers were still weaker than hers were. Her own heat vision at full power might just be able to penetrate the hull of this ship, but Clark was not yet powerful enough. Which he had to notice, yet he was still blasting away. Why were Adam and Clark doing this? Didn’t they know that these attacks would do little more than... distract? Of course!

Prepare yourself, Kara, the voice of J’Onn echoed through her mind.

The near-invisible form of the Martian Manhunter penetrated the hull of the ship and floated through the command center like a ghost. Sparing but a short glance for her, he made a beeline for the drone holding the Kryptonite container.

“Unknown presence detected!”

The drone raised its free arm and opened fire, but the laser blasts passed harmlessly through J’Onn’s incorporeal form. Kara spoke a silent prayer to Rao that Brainiac hadn’t equipped his robots with flame throwers. A moment later J’Onn reached the drone and snatched the Kryptonite container out of its hand. A second later he was gone again, passing through the floor and taking the Kryptonite with him.

The moment the Kryptonite was out of reach, Kara felt the pain fade away and her strength began to return. Thankfully, the annoyingly rapid effect Kryptonite had on her physique was balanced by an equally rapid fading of said effect once the radiation was gone. She flexed her arms and quickly broke the grip the drones had on her. Rearing back, she put her fist right through the head of the left one. The right one managed to raise its arm, but before it could shoot a kick from her tore it in half. The third drone fell victim to a burst of heat vision.

“This is illogical,” Brainiac said, somehow sounding panicked despite its tone of voice never changing. “My calculations showed no possibility of you breaking free! How have you accomplished this?”

Kara grinned, though there was very little humor in that grin. “It’s an old Earth song, Brainiac, you wouldn’t know it. I get by... with a little help from my friends!”

Not waiting to see whether Brainiac had more Kryptonite handy, Kara quickly scanned the interior of the ship and started moving. She plowed right through the floor of the control room and accelerated. Mere seconds later she used her own body as a missile and punched right through the ship’s central computer core.
“Warning! Warning! Computer core compromised! Activate secondary systems!”

“Oh no, you don’t!”

Kara’s eyes blazed red, even as she called forth all the rage she felt for this soulless bucket of bolts. Brainiac had left billions of Kryptonians behind to die. It threatened her new home world. It threatened her son. She would not allow it to do any further harm. Crimson beams of energy sliced through the interior of the ship, severing systems, destroying relays, and generally wrecking everything she could find.

“Warning! System failure! System failure!”

“I’ll give you system failure!”

Kara could count the number of times she had fully cut loose with her powers on one hand. The battle against Mongul for the War World came to mind, but that had been more of an exercise in frustration, seeing as the alien tyrant had withstood even her strongest attacks. Not so this ship. She unleashed her full fury on it and it came to pieces around her.

A red haze descended over her mind and she didn’t care whether or not this ship was a piece of her lost world or might contain useful pieces of technology. She just wanted it gone. She moved, she struck, she blasted, and even when the voice of Brainiac had long ceased talking she didn’t let up.

She didn’t know how much time had passed, but when she regained her faculties she was floating in a field of debris, all that was left of the Kryptonian ship. Some distance away she spotted the Javelin with J’Onn and Clark floating close by. After a few seconds Clark quickly flew over to her.

“Mom? Are you... are you okay?”

Did he... did he look scared? Of her?

“I... I am fine, Clark. Thank you!” She quickly hugged her son before looking over at the others. “Thank all of you! I don’t know how I’d have gotten out of there on my own.”

“Well, you did most of the heavy lifting there at the end,” Adam remarked.

“Was it really a Kryptonian ship?” Batman asked over the com. “What happened in there, Superwoman?”

She sighed. “Let’s head into the Watch Tower. I’ve got something of a story to tell.”

*****

“Scanners picked up a transmission burst from the ship shortly before it was destroyed,” J’Onn told her. “Destination unknown.”

Kara nodded. “I feared as much. Brainiac is a computer program, not a living creature. He might well have copied his code elsewhere.”

“So he will be back,” Batman concluded. “We need to be ready.”

“We will be,” Kara said, though her mind was actually elsewhere. On what Brainiac had accused her of doing. On the look of fear she had seen on her comrades’ faces as she had torn the ship apart in a bout of rage. On the look of fear on the face of her own son.

*****
In a star system many light years away, the signal sent by Brainiac before his destruction was received.

“Brainiac node 13 destroyed! Processing information! Presence of two Kryptonian survivors confirmed. Hostile action by Kryptonian survivors confirmed.”

The Brainiac master program quickly processed the information burst sent by its node and spent several seconds making plans. Clearly the Kryptonian survivors were compromised in some way, probably due to exposure to the primitive conditions on that planet. For the moment at least, it seemed prudent to simply observe instead of instigating a second confrontation.

“Survivor designated Kara-El will be given the opportunity to mold the planet called Earth into New Krypton according to her own design. Should she fail, she will be removed. Survivor designated Kal Jor-El will then be utilized in her stead.”

*****

End Chapter 25

**Author’s Note:** Brainiac will be back, of course. Until then he has left Kara with some pretty heavy thoughts, which we’ll explore a bit more in the next chapter. Oh, and the quote of the Jo Cocker song is taken from the official “Panic in the Sky” comic book story where Superman says the exact same thing to Brainiac. I just love that line (and that song, too).
Lex Luthor was sitting in a cell in an orange prison jumpsuit. He had lost quite a bit of weight during his incarceration. The look on his face was unchanged, though. Arrogance! Contempt! An expression that told the entire world that it was a huge concession on his part to even notice its existence.

“Let us not mince words,” Luthor told the reporter conducting the interview. “No matter what you might read in the court documents, no matter what the official charges against me are supposed to be, I am actually on trial here for a very different reason. And that reason can be summed up in one word: Superwoman!

“I am on trial because I dared raise a hand against everyone’s favorite alien overlord. I dared to resist the benevolent would-be-goddess. I am on trial because I am one of the few people who have realized the truth!”

“And what truth would that be?” the reporter asked, making little effort to disguise his dislike of Luthor.

“The truth is that we have been conquered,” Luthor said, looking into the camera. “Oh, not officially, of course. There are no alien armies marching through our cities, no foreign flags flying over our buildings, but make no mistake: we have been conquered. A subtle conquest, no doubt, but a conquest still. Superwoman has positioned herself into a position of authority over the entire world. She decides what is right and wrong, she is accountable to no one, and if anyone dares to speak out against her, they will be arrested on trumped-up charges. She’s got the police in her pocket, the United Nations, and even that vigilante, the Batman, is doing her bidding.”

“That sounds more like a conspiracy theory than anything else, Mr. Luthor,” the reporter said. “And it has little to do with the charges against you, some of them go back long before Superwoman made her debut.”

“Of course they do,” Luthor replied, rolling his eyes. “I am sure there is also some falsified evidence showing that I stole cookies as a boy or created death rays in high school. And I do not expect any of those brave and upstanding jurors to go against the expressed wishes of our dear beloved heroine, Superwoman. No, I am going to jail, because my crime is unforgivable. I merely hope that, maybe, some people will start thinking for themselves and see this sham for what it is.”

He leaned forward, staring into the camera, and folded his hands in front of him. “Mark my words! This is no longer our world. It belongs to Superwoman now! It’s only a matter of time before more
of her ilk just happen to turn up, like that supposed Amazon Wonder Woman or that little brat
Superboy. We are seeing the beginning of a dynasty that will rule our planet for a long time to
come, unless we start waking up now and start fighting back!”

He leaned back, looking to the side at the blank walls of the cell with a forlorn expression worthy
of a movie star. “And who knows? Maybe I will live long enough to see that day. The day when
the people will wake up and say: Lex Luthor was right!”

*****

When Kara flew in to help during a flash flood in India, numerous people who spotted her fell to
their knees and raised their hands in supplication, cheering for her arrival. This had happened
before, it was nothing new, but this time she heard Brainiac’s voice in the back of her mind.

*In their primitive point of view, you are already close to a goddess!*

When civil unrest in China began to turn ugly and a group of unarmed protestors was facing a
heavily armed military squad, she dropped out of the sky and told the soldiers to lower their
weapons and stand down. To a man, they followed her orders. No bloodshed happened that day.

*They follow your directives!*

When a super villain called Toyman threatened to blow up half of Metropolis with toy-shaped
bombs, she gathered up the explosive devices with super speed and disposed of them in the upper
atmosphere. None of the police officers involved so much as questioned her about this, just trusting
her to take care of things while they took Toyman into custody.

*The humans trust you!*

When an opinion research center in the US conducted a nation-wide poll about whom the people
would like to see as presidential candidates in the next election, Superwoman appeared as a write-
in candidate and received over 20 percent of the vote. A late night comedian mentioned that
Superwoman would sadly be unable to accept the nomination, as she had not been born on
American soil. Several days later, an online petition to change that law garnered more than 100,000
signatures within a matter of hours.

*They will hand over control of their planet to you out of their own free will!*

*****

Superwoman’s Pal
A column by Lois Lane

As a species, we humans have quite a few bad habits that I hope we will eventually grow out of.
One of them, as I am sure most people would agree, is our habit of taking things to extremes. One
Arabian-looking guy blows up a car? Naturally, all Arabian-looking people must be terrorists.
One white business tycoon molests women in a dressing room? Naturally, all rich white guys must
be perverts. Our religion preaches peace and to love thy fellow man? Naturally, all who don’t
follow our loving god must be put to death, so they can go to hell. The list goes on.

I fear we are currently seeing another example of this very unfortunate habit in relation to my
favorite alien superhero / working mom, Superwoman. I am sure many of you remember that,
during the last census a few years ago, one of the questions posed was which religion we follow.
Now rest easy, conservatives, the majority of Americans still consider themselves Christians of one
flavor or another. A record number of Americans called themselves ‘Atheists’, of course, but that is
a different topic entirely. Far more interesting: well over 30,000 Americans used the ‘Other’ option on the census and wrote ‘Superwoman’ into the blank field.

When I got wind of this, I immediately talked to a few of the people who named ‘Superwoman’ as their religious view. Most of them, I was glad to discover, did so out of reasons that I can easily identify with. They don’t regard Superwoman as a deity or anything, but rather as an example to follow, a teacher, someone who demonstrates how great power should be used responsibly and that helping your fellow beings is one of the noblest things one can do. Being the self-proclaimed greatest Superwoman fan in the world, I could easily see myself as a follower of this ‘Superwoman-ism’ (and we really need to come up with a better name for it).

Sadly, we humans tend to take things to the extreme. So while most of the people I talked to in regards to naming ‘Superwoman’ as their religion were reasonable people, there were also some among them that, well, were not. I was not worried, though, as they were few and far between. What does it matter that they are some weirdos out there who regard Superwoman as some kind of celestial messiah? As a mother goddess, who brought her only begotten son into the world? (No, I did not make that last one up, I am sorry to say).

Well, turns out it does matter and maybe it is time to worry. As of last week, the ‘Church of Hope’, a self-proclaimed charitable organization dedicated to the worship and teachings of Superwoman, has successfully applied for tax-exempt status in Texas. Its members regard Superwoman as an actual goddess, it seems, who has descended from the heavens for the betterment of humankind. It is a sad state of affairs that I actually hope that the people behind this Church are mere conmen and charlatans, interested only in making a quick buck off gullible people. The alternative somehow seems far more ominous.

Speaking as someone who has actually met Superwoman in the flesh – admittedly only once, but I did speak with her and we took a photograph together – I feel more than confident in telling you that she is many things, but a goddess is not one of them. Despite being an alien from another world, she is easily the most human person I have ever met. Friendly, kind, and dedicated to helping others. She is more than worthy of respect, admiration, and emulation, but not of worship. The power she possesses might put her on equal footing with some of the gods of myth, but that does not change who she is on the inside. A hero, an inspiration, and most important of all, someone who is human in all the best ways.

*****

One of the last things to be installed on the Watch Tower was a big round table, which had been Adam’s idea. Apparently, he had been a huge fan of the saga of King Arthur as a kid. Five chairs were spaced at equal distances around the table for the five members of the League, each of them adorned with a symbol signifying the person sitting in it (that one had been J’Onn’s idea, actually). A sixth chair stood empty in the corner, the symbol of the Green Lantern on its back, in honor of Abin Sur. Kara had insisted on that.

“So we are agreed then?” Batman asked. “I will approach Green Arrow with an invitation for League membership.”

The others all nodded. While Green Arrow did not have super powers, much like Batman, he had established himself as a genuine hero during these last few years and while he was more street-level than most of the other members of the team, that, too, might well be an advantage.

They had also briefly discussed Guy Gardner, the new Green Lantern, but had decided to hold off on approaching him for now, given the rather unfavorable impression he had made on Superwoman and Superboy during the incident in India. Hopefully, with a bit more experience
under his belt the new hero would mellow some and turn into actual League material. Right now, no one felt comfortable about having him sit in Abin Sur’s chair.

“Any more items on the agenda for today?”

Kara had said very little in the meeting so far, which was rather unusual as she was generally regarded as the leader of their team. Today, though, she had left everything to Batman. Her mind had been on other things.

“There is one thing I wanted to talk to all of you about,” she finally said, causing the other four to look at her. “Something that has been on my mind since the encounter with Brainiac.”

She looked at Adam first. “Adam, of all those present here, you are the only one who doesn’t know yet and I think it’s way past time to change that. As you already know my name is Kara-El, but I also have a human identity on Earth. My name there is Karen Kent.”

Adam smiled at first, happy to be extended this level of trust, but then he frowned. “Karen Kent? As in the CEO of K-Solutions? The world’s leading technological development company?”

“Indeed. I created my company as one part of my plan to slowly introduce advanced Kryptonian technology on Earth.”

Adam nodded, impressed. “You are certainly succeeding. I’ve seen some of the designs coming out of K-Solutions and they are brilliant.”

“Thank you.”

“What has this got to do with Brainiac?” Diana asked, clearly seeing how troubled her friend was.

Kara sighed, looking down. “Brainiac, he... he said that I had already accomplished most of his work for him. That I was ... setting myself up as ruler of Earth in order to transform it into New Krypton.”

“That’s nonsense, Kara,” Diana told her. “That evil machine was only...”

“I think he might be right,” Kara interrupted her, causing the others to stare at her. She rose from her seat. “I have made detailed plans for the future of Earth for the next century. I intend to have a base built on the moon within the next ten years, a self-sustaining colony within thirty. I plan for humans to create their first interstellar colony in eighty years.”

Walking around the table, she continued. “I have made all these plans myself, with no input from anyone else. I have mapped out humanity’s future without consulting anyone. It never occurred to me to do so.”

No one said anything, so she continued. “While I have no intention of transforming Earth into a replica of my old home world and fully believe that my plans will improve things for everyone, I... cannot deny that I have acted... high-handed.”

There was silence for a few more moments, then Batman spoke up. “Why are you telling us this, Kara?”

She looked around the table, studying the faces of the other four. “I created the Justice League to function as Earth’s first line of defense against threats that normal humans would not be able to handle. Since we first came together to defeat one such threat, Mongul, I have come to trust the people in this room with my life. Which is why I would ask you to undertake one more task. Well,
maybe it’s the same task, really. Keeping the Earth safe from threats. Even if that threat...”

Diana stood up quickly enough that her chair tipped over. “You are talking nonsense, Kara,” she said sharply. “You are not a threat to Earth! You never would be!”

“A threat like Mongul? Probably not, but that’s not what I’m talking about,” Kara retorted. “Some of the most terrible deeds in history have been performed by people who were utterly convinced they were doing what was best for everyone. The saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions didn’t come from nothing!”

“You are letting that machine drive you crazy, Kara,” Diana insisted.

“It’s not nonsense!” Kara said, heatedly. “No one is incorruptible!”

J’Onn stood, making a calming gesture towards both women. “Let’s discuss this rationally. I assume you are not asking us to prepare to fight you to the death, Kara,” he said in an even voice. “What is it, exactly, that you would ask of the rest of us to soothe your worries?”

Kara breathed in deeply, allowing herself to fall back into her chair. “I need... as corny as that may sound, I need someone to function as my... conscience. I still think I am doing what’s best for everyone, but no single person should ever make decisions for everyone else. Someone needs to check over my plans, to... hold me accountable.”

She laughed, though it sounded slightly bitter. “I remember reading once that Caesar had a servant whose only job it was to stand behind him during triumphal processions. And when the masses cheered and shouted his name, said servant would lean forward and whisper into his ear, saying: Respice post te, hominem te esse memento. Look behind you and remember, you are only human! There are people on Earth right now who worship me as a goddess! I... I need to make sure that I never, ever start to believe them!”

For a long moment there was silence again, but then Adam stood up, walked over to her, and put his hand on her shoulder. “I think you are the most human of us all, Kara, and I find the very idea that you could ever become a threat laughable. But if you need this for your own peace of mind, then feel free to call me Jiminy Cricket!”

Batman didn’t stand up, but simply nodded. “If you need a second set of eyes to check your plans, I will gladly offer mine. You know I won’t have any problem telling you when I think you are wrong.”

J’Onn simply morphed into his ‘Cousin John’ appearance and smiled at her, the slightest telepathic touch telling her that he would do whatever she needed doing. Diana reached behind her to pick up her chair, then sat down and crossed her arms in front of her chest.

“I still think you are an idiot, sister,” she said, though she was smiling while she said it. “And remember, I can still kick your ass should you get any delusions of grandeur.”

Kara smiled back. “I am beating you nearly half the time now,” she reminded her friend.

“I am going easy on you, that’s all.”

“Of course!”

Kara looked around, seeing the supportive faces of her friends, and felt some of the tension leaving her body. Brainiac’s voice was still there, but sounding fainter now. Maybe Brainiac was right, at least in some ways, but that didn’t mean she was going to play by his rules or perform his work.
She was doing what she was doing for the betterment of all. And if she should lose sight of that, she had her friends and family to steer her back on the right path.

“I’ll get by,” she told herself, “with a little help from my friends!”

*****

End Chapter 26

**Author’s Note:** the idea of Superman being worshipped as a deity was often hinted at in the various comic books and of course there is Zack Snyder, who crammed at least half a dozen Jesus metaphors into the Man of Steel and Batman v. Superman. It was never really shown, though, except for a single issue of Action Comics, I believe, where a California cult played a role. Of course said cult was run by Darkseid or something, can’t really remember, and everything was resolved within a single issue. I wanted things to be a bit more complicated here. After all, there is an official Jedi religion in real life, so how far-fetched would it really be to think that people would worship a Superwoman that actually existed?

As for the roster of the Justice League, the team will expand soon, I promise. Right now, though, many of the classic members would still be in their teens. Green Arrow, as shown in the classic Justice League comics, always came across as slightly older than the others, so he will join now. Next in line (as in, people who we can reasonably assume to be at least five years older than Clark) would be Hawkman, Elongated Man, possibly the Atom. We’ll see how it goes.
Teen Sidekicks

Chapter Summary

Where the Batman gets a teen sidekick and Superboy gets his first crush.

Chapter 27: Teen Sidekicks

Disclaimer: All things Supergirl/Superman and Batman belong to DC. No infringement is intended.

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“Batgirl?” Kara asked, raising a blonde eyebrow in question.

“Yes,” Batman replied grimly, almost growling.

“Batgirl?” she asked again, barely able to conceal her smile.

“YES,” he replied again.

“Batg...?”

“Do I need to bring up SuperBOY?” he cut her off.

Kara finally surrendered and chuckled, the whole situation being too funny for words. Not only was she experiencing a hilarious déjà vu to her own first encounter with Batman, she also remembered all the times Batman had drily inquired about the joys of riding herd on a teenage superhero. Karma really had a sense of humor, it seemed.

Bruce and her were standing on top of a skyscraper in Gotham and observing a shadowy figure sprinting across the rooftops below. Kara’s supervision easily penetrated the darkness and she saw that said figure was a young woman wearing a surprisingly good replica of Bruce’s Batman suit. The only difference (apart from the gender) was the red hair that escaped from the back of the cowl.

“Have you figured out who she is yet?” Kara asked. She had already taken a peek through the mask – not lead-lined in this case – but the face wasn’t familiar to her.

“It wasn’t hard to find out,” he replied. “I followed her two nights ago and she led me directly to her home. Her name is Barbara Gordon.”

“Gordon? As in Captain James Gordon? Your personal go-to cop?”

“She is his daughter, yes. He and his wife divorced some time ago. She grew up mostly with her mother, but spends a lot of her time with her father these days. She is studying library science and information technology at Gotham University and works at the Gotham City library.”

Kara frowned. “She can’t be more than 17 and is already at University?”
“18 actually, and she skipped a grade. Eidetic memory and smart, too. She is expected to start on her doctorate by the time she turns 20.”

“You almost sound impressed, Bruce,” she smirked, causing him to look even grimmer. “So why is a very smart university student and daughter of a cop running around Gotham as a vigilante?”

Batman sighed. “I was actually hoping for your input on that. While this... Batgirl,” he clenched his teeth saying the name, “clearly somewhat emulates me, you have a better track record of approaching people in our... business... than I do.”

“Aaaw, are you telling me the big bad Bat has trouble chatting up a girl hero?” Kara smirked at him. “Maybe you should take the mask off and approach her as Bruce Wayne, give her the old playboy charm...”

Batman groaned. “My point is, I would like nothing better than to convince her to cease this... life style. Unfortunately, I am rather certain that, were I to approach her, it would probably only encourage her. She might be 18, but she is still a teenager.”

Kara raised an eyebrow. “Do you honestly expect ME to convince a young woman to leave the heroics to the men, Bruce? Me?”

“This isn’t about gender roles,” he said heatedly. “Surely you know me better than that!”

Kara nodded. “I do, Bruce, but that’s how it might come across. Very well, I will talk to her, but under one condition.”

He sighed. “Which would be?”

“If she intends to stay on this course, then I want you to train her. Work with her.”

He shook his head. “Under no circumstances. I am not in the market for a teen sidekick!”

“You’d rather have someone wearing your costume running around Gotham, half-cocked, and encountering some of your less scrupulous enemies in the process? You said yourself that it wasn’t that hard to follow her home and discover her identity. What if someone like R’As al Ghul or Black Mask were to find out?”

He just growled under his breath and she knew she had him. Giving him one last smile, she took off from the roof and floated across the city, following Batgirl until she dropped into a secluded alley. Looking around, Batgirl was poised to take off her mask, supposedly to slip into her civilian identity. Kara circumvented her by dropping into the alley as well, landing in front of her.

“Hi, Batgirl,” she greeted the surprised woman. “Fancy a team-up?”

Batgirl just stared at her, open-mouthed. Then she started grinning and squeeing uncontrollably.

*****

To the surprise of absolutely no one, Barbara Gordon (“call me Babs!”) was not interested in giving up the nocturnal lifestyle. If anything, meeting Superwoman in the flesh seemed to have galvanized her resolve. Kara was actually impressed by her, seeing as she was doing it not because of a personal tragedy or some twist of fate, but simply because she believed it to be the right thing. And having James Gordon as a father, she was well aware that the police, especially the Gotham police, could (or would) only do so much.
So after a lot of grumbling, growling, and muttering, Batman finally agreed to train her. Though he did have a condition of his own.

“This really isn’t hurting you?” Batgirl asked, even as she kicked Kara in the face.

“No, don’t worry,” she said, deciding not to mention that she had to turn her head with the blow to make sure that Batgirl didn’t break her foot.

They were standing in a sparring ring in one of Batman’s secondary bases in Gotham, utterly unconnected to anything that might belong to Bruce Wayne or Wayne Enterprises. Batman was not keen to reveal his identity to another person until and unless he was sure they could be trusted, which was why he remained in full costume, including mask. Batgirl also wore her mask, but had replaced the full suit with exercise clothing for now.

“With the increasing number of meta-humans out there,” Batman explained from outside the sparring ring, “the odds of encountering someone with enhanced strength, speed, and endurance grow every day. You must be prepared for that!”

“Shouldn’t Superwoman fight back then?” Batgirl asked, slamming her elbow into Kara’s belly. Kara exhaled, otherwise Batgirl’s elbow might well have shattered.

“You really want me to fight back?” Kara asked, smiling, and letting her eyes glow with heat vision.

“Uh, no! Definitely not!”

“Smart!”

Batgirl whirled around and kicked her in the kneecap. “Did you and Batman ever fight? For real, I mean?”

“Not as such,” Kara said, not even flinching. “I once tried to arrest him, when he was dangling a ninja assassin over the edge of a roof. Batman here actually did the smart thing!”

Batgirl paused, looking at her. “He ran? The Batman ran?”

“I was faced with a vastly superior opponent,” Batman explained, “and I knew I did not have the tools necessary to even the odds even slightly.”

“Did it work? Running away, I mean?”

Batman glared at her, even as Kara raised a questioning eyebrow at him.

“For about twenty seconds,” he finally said.

“More like ten,” Kara corrected him. “Anyone else, though, I’d have caught them in five seconds or less, so it was actually quite impressive.”

“And then?” Batgirl asked, grabbing Kara by the arm and throwing her through the air with a Judo throw. Kara rightened herself in mid-air and landed on her feet, soft as a feather.

“He tried brutal honesty next,” Kara said, “convinced me that putting him in a Gotham City jail cell would be signing his death warrant.”

“You use the tools you have available,” Batman simply said.
“YES!” Kara suddenly shouted, pumping her fist.

“What?” Batgirl asked, surprised. The fist-pump had just barely missed her as she was launching another attack.

“Oh, sorry. I was... well, I was keeping an eye on Superboy. He flew out solo to rescue a damaged cruise ship off the coast. He successfully brought it into the harbor just now.”

Batgirl seemed a bit miffed that her sparring opponent was not only barely reacting to her attacks, but was also watching something happening miles away at the same time. Kara gave her an apologetic smile.

“You trust him to operate solo by now?” Batman asked, stepping into the ring and motioning for Batgirl to start attacking him now.

“Occasionally,” she said. “It’s... hard, I admit, but he needs to start working on his own, too. He’ll be a man all too soon and can’t have his mom hovering around him all the time, no matter how much I worry.”

“He is really your son?” Batgirl asked, throwing several jabs at Batman, which he easily blocked. “I’ve read lots of wild theories about that. One tabloid even wrote that he is a clone made from you and Lex Luthor.”

“Ew, no!” Kara said. “He really is my son,” She had left the ring and was now leaning against the wall, watching the two fighters. She made a mental note to head out for another sparring session with Diana soon. While being a living punching bag for Batgirl was fun and a good exercise in terms of not crippling a merely human opponent who was stupid enough to fight against her, it wasn’t really in any way challenging. She had sparred with Batman a few times, too, but again: there was no challenge, as Bruce couldn’t really hurt her unless he dug out the Kryptonite ring she had given him.

“You’ll get to meet him a minute or so,” Kara added. “He is headed here to meet me before we fly home.”

She could see that Batgirl was dying to ask where ‘home’ was, but she restrained herself, instead throwing some more attacks at Batman. From what Kara could see, Batgirl was a capable fighter, but her techniques were pretty much textbook and more at home in a work-out ring than on the street. Bruce would need some time to turn her into the same sort of lethal street fighter he was, though she had little doubt that Batgirl would be a quick study.

A soft gust of wind from the access tunnel heralded Superboy’s arrival. The Teen of Steel, as some papers had begun calling him, touched down beside Kara and looked at her expectantly.

“Well?” he asked, all too aware that his mother would have kept an eye on him.

“Good work,” she said. “Couldn’t have done it better myself.”

“It wasn’t easy,” he admitted. “At one point I could almost feel the ship break apart in my hands.”

“You stabilized it expertly,” she told him, patting his shoulder. “I was never worried.”

Batman looked at her between blocking punches. She could practically see him raise his eyebrow underneath the cowl. She just mouthed ‘shut up’ at him.

“Batgirl,” she said instead, guiding Clark towards the sparring ring. “This is my son, Superboy.
Superboy, this is Batgirl, Gotham City’s newest superhero.”

“Still in training,” Batgirl said, leaning over the ropes of the sparring ring and extending her hand to Clark. “Great to meet you.”

“Uh… great to meet you, too,” Clark said, staring up at the gorgeous young woman in skimpy exercise clothing that was leaning forward above him. He shook her hand gingerly.

“We have more training to do,” Batman reminded her, lashing out with a kick that Batgirl barely evaded. “You can get acquainted on your own time!”

“Okay, we will leave you Bats to it then. Let’s go, Clark!” Kara turned towards the exit of the underground base. A few steps later, she realized that Clark wasn’t with her.

“Clark?” She turned around, then smiled. Her son was still standing where she had left him, looking at the sparring ring. Or rather, looking at the young masked woman in tight exercise clothing that was currently doing her best to land a punch on the Batman. His hand was still half-extended. She had to resist the urge to go “aaaw”.

“Claa-aark,” she whispered, grinning broadly.

“Hu?” he asked, his eyes never moving.

“Time to go, son,” she continued.

“Uh-hu,” he replied, still not moving.

“Or should I ask Batgirl to drive you home later?” she whispered in his ear.

“Uh-hu… wait, what?” He turned around, looking at her.

“You are aware who you are staring at, right?”

He shook his head. “I have not been staring,” he insisted, though his face turned beet-red in the process.

“Of course not, son,” she replied, ruffling his hair.

“Mo-om!”

*****

“You okay, sweetheart?”

Martha had seen Karen stand on the patio for quite a while now, staring off into the distance. It was something she often did when there were too many thoughts running through her head. She would simply gaze across the vast fields, probably looking at things miles away, and get her thoughts back in order. Occasionally, though, she also needed a sounding board.

“Just thinking,” she replied, half-turning to look at Martha.

“Anything specific?”

Karen smiled fondly, the smile that told Martha that it was something related to Clark.

“Clark has his first serious crush,” Karen said.
“Ah, it was about time. Anyone I know?”

“It’s not Lana, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

Martha laughed, shaking her head. “Of course not. Those two are practically siblings. I’m not saying it couldn’t happen, but I’d have been surprised had they turned out to be each other’s first crush.”

Karen nodded, agreeing. “It’s a girl in Gotham City. I told you about Batman now having a sidekick, right? She calls herself Batgirl. Clark was blushing so hard when he saw her, I almost feared he had used his vision powers to... you know.”

Martha laughed. “And you are telling me that you never used your super vision to take a peek, ever?”

Karen raised her head and sniffed with a mock air of superiority. “Of course not! Am I not the great and valiant Superwoman, pure-hearted defender of all things good and proper? Only a fiend would ever suspect me of doing such a vile thing!”

A moment later the two women descended into giggles.

“So Clark is going through his first crush,” Martha resumed after recovering. “How soon to the first heart break, you think?”

“Not sure. I heard Batgirl say that she thinks he’s cute, at least, but she is three years older than him. We’ll see.”

The contemplative look on her face returned. Martha leaned against the railing next to her.

“He’s quickly becoming a man,” Martha said knowingly.

“Far too quickly,” Kara remarked, sighing. “How is it that he’s already 15? Wasn’t he just three or so last month?”

Martha put her arm around her daughter’s shoulder. “It seems that way, doesn’t it? Some days I think it’s been but a few weeks since a very headstrong alien teenager dropped out of the sky and landed in our field, and here she is: 27 years old and complaining about time going too fast.”

“You make me sound old,” Kara complained good-naturedly.

“Didn’t you tell me that Kryptonians can easily live 100 years and more? You’re still barely more than a headstrong teen by that count.”

“We can probably grow older still,” Kara said wistfully. “With the yellow sunlight rejuvenating our cells, I think Clark and I can probably plan our bicentennial.” She sighed. “But I’ll only see him become a man once.”

Martha nodded, hearing the unspoken words quite well. Clark was the last son of Krypton. There would never be another Kryptonian child. Humans and Kryptonians looked very much alike, but DNA-wise they had less in common than humans and chimps. Clark and Kara were the last of their kind.

“But you can always remind him about his first teenage crush,” Martha told her, trying to cheer her up. “Even when you’re both well into your second century.”
Kara chuckled. “There is that, yes.”

“Come to think of it,” Martha mused, “considering your history with Batman, should Batgirl and Superboy ever hook up for real...”

“Oh, I can picture it now,” Kara laughed. “Double dates! Superwoman and Batman, along with Batgirl and Superboy! Bruce is going to just love that!”

More laughter chased away the heavy thoughts, at least for the moment.

*****

End Chapter 27

**Author’s Note:** I was never a big fan of Robin, so in this world of mine we shall assume that Batman successfully managed to prevent the death of the Graysons and Dick will remain with the circus. As for Barbara, in the pre-Crisis comics she was depicted as being a good deal older than Dick Grayson, roughly the same age as Bruce Wayne (she was already a doctor of library science at her debut and was a Congresswoman later on. Meaning she was at least 25 at that point, while Robin was still in short pants. So with Bruce being in his late twenties at this point, I feel comfortable to have Barbara at 18.

Admittedly, this chapter is a bit of a filler before we launch into our next multi-part story. But I wanted to introduce Batgirl as Superboy’s first crush in a somewhat humorous way before diving into far more serious matters starting next chapter.
Chapter Summary

Where events begin to happen out of sequence and the Flash earns a butt-kicking.

Chapter 28: In a Flash (Out of Time – Part 1)

Disclaimer: All things Supergirl/Superman and Flash belong to DC. No infringement is intended.

*****

Kara was engaging in one of her favorite pastimes, simply floating above the endless fields of Kansas. It always took her back to those first few years here on Earth, where everything had been strange and foreign. For someone who had grown up under a red sun, everything on Earth had seemed slightly off in color. The sky, the ground, the plants, everything lacked that certain reddish tint she had been accustomed to for so long. The air had a different smell, the gravity was lower, everything was just a tiny bit off. Not entirely different, but noticeably different. It had taken her quite some time to get used to it.

One thing that she had quickly fallen in love with, though, were the endless plains of her new home. Krypton had been a much older world, tectonically active for quite some time, and with a different fauna. Nothing similar had existed on Krypton. And once she finally got her flying powers under control, she had spent hours just floating with the yellow sun above her and the endless fields below. It calmed her.

Life seemed to become ever more stressful. Clark was growing into his role as a superhero, but was still a teenager who needed guidance and supervision. Finding the right balance between letting him run loose and stifling him was not an easy feat and had led to more than one blowup between them. Her plans for the future of Earth were also progressing nicely, which meant more work for her still. She felt better about it since she had started to bring the rest of the League into it, but that, too, meant more work, as discussing things always took longer than simply deciding them unilaterally.

And, of course, there was that never-ceasing deluge of catastrophes, super villains, armed conflicts, and run-of-the-mill crime. All of which combined meant that she had to actively force herself to take time off now and then, because passively waiting for a time where there was nothing going on was an exercise in futility.

She remembered telling Perry White that, if one could fly, one flew as often as possible. Which was entirely true. There were few things in life better than flying. But while a lot of her work involved flying, it was usually just a matter of getting from A to B in the shortest amount of time possible. She seldom got to just enjoy it. Then her com crackled in her ear.

“Kara, can you hear me?”

Oh well, she thought. All of eight minutes of relaxation time. Almost a record these days.

“I hear you, J’Onn,” she said, activating her com. “What’s up?”
“I am not certain, to be honest,” he replied. “The Watch Tower’s sensor array picked up some strange readings in your general vicinity.”

Kara stopped in mid-air, her gaze sweeping around, looking for any sign of trouble. “What kind of readings?”

“Apparently there are some fluctuations in the gravitational field. Somewhat similar to the pulse just before a space ship emerges from hyperspace, but on an entirely different wavelength. The computer cannot determine a cause.”

Kara’s eyes were still roaming, but so far she was coming up empty. “How close am I to these disturbances?”

“It’s difficult to say,” J’Onn told her. “They...”

His voice suddenly cut off. No static, nothing, just gone. “J’Onn? J’Onn, can you hear me?”

“... are some fluctuations in the gravitational field,” J’Onn’s voice suddenly returned. “Somewhat similar to the pulse just before a space ship emerges from hyperspace, but...”

“... on an entirely different wavelength,” she interrupted him. “J’Onn, you already told me that!”

There was confused silence on the other end, though she could still hear the background hum of the Watch Tower. “I am quite certain that I did not, Kara,” J’Onn said. “You interrupted me mid-sentence.”

Kara frowned. “Your voice suddenly cut off and after a few seconds you began telling me the same thing you had told me a few seconds earlier.”

Suddenly the entire world around her seemed to ripple for a moment, as if the sky was a pond into which someone had thrown a pebble. Kara almost became dizzy, her senses went haywire, but a moment later everything was back to normal.

“What the...?” she began.

“Kara, can you hear me?” J’Onn asked.

“Yes, did you get that, too?”

“Get what? I was just calling you to tell you about some strange readings the Watch Tower’s sensors picked up in your general vicinity.”

Okay, this was getting freaky. “J’Onn, we already had this conversation. You were about to tell me about some fluctuations in the gravitational field, right?”

The Martian paused, then sounded quite troubled. “Indeed. If you are correct, than we might be experiencing some kind of temporal dilation effect.”

“Possible,” Kara agreed. “Strong gravity pulses can warp time. A few seconds ago everything around me seemed to ripple and it apparently set the clock of our conversation back about twenty seconds or so.”

“I will inform the rest of the team,” J’Onn said, “hopefully before...” His voice cut off again.

“Great, here we go again!” Kara muttered.
The world seemed to ripple once again, only this time it was strong enough to shatter her concentration and she dropped to the ground, unceremoniously landing on her butt. Everything flickered, for a moment it seemed as if she was looking at a photo negative of the world, before everything returned to normal once again.

“Kara, can you hear me?”

“J’Onn, I don’t have a lot of time,” she yelled, briefly frowning at the choice of words. “I’m experiencing some kind of time distortion. You told me about gravity fluctuations three times already before everything rewound. The effect seems to get stronger. Call the rest of the team, quickly!”

“On it, Superwoman,” J’Onn replied.

Kara shot into the air, looking to gain some height. She was hoping to move out of the range of whatever phenomenon was apparently looping time around her or at least spot its source if she couldn’t. Her super senses swept the world around her, but there was nothing to be found. A moment later, though, there was yet another ripple and it took all her strength not to plummet again.

“Kara, can you hear me?”

“J’Onn, I...”

“Kara, can you hear me?”

“Kara, can you hear...”

“Kara, can you ...”

“Kara, ...”

Her com ceased working and Kara found herself once again floating just a few feet above the corn fields, back where she had been a minute or so ago. The world around her was still. Entirely still. There was no wind, no sound, no buzzing insects, nothing. Everything seemed frozen. Everything but her.

“What in Rao’s name is going on here?” she muttered. Even her own voice sounded flat, as if the sound refused to travel more than a few inches past her mouth.

Suddenly there was a loud crack and a huge flash of white light, bright enough to hurt. Kara flinched back, her enhanced senses almost overloading. The light seemed to penetrate right past her lids and stab into her brain. It only lasted a second or so, but for some reason it felt much longer.

When she managed to open her eyes again, she was no longer alone. Someone else was standing in the frozen field with her. She tried to focus on him, but it was almost impossible. It seemed to be a man, but his shape blurred, as if he was moving at incredible speed despite standing still. He was wearing a form fitting red suit, best she could tell, and a mask that covered the upper half of his head. There was a symbol emblazoned on his chest, but she couldn’t really make it out due to the blurring. It might have been a lightning bolt.

“Kara?” the blur asked, the voice seeming to echo all around her, as if spoken by a dozen different voices that were almost but not quite synchronized. “Did I make it? Did it work?”
“Who are you?” she asked, trying to keep her eyes on the figure despite it causing her almost physical pain to look at him. “How do you know my name?”

“Ah, right”, the shape replied. “Too early for that, sorry. This gets terribly confusing!”

He held out a hand, even as his image seemed to gain sharpness. He was still indistinct, almost painfully so, but whatever effect made him near-impossible to look at seemed to be slowing down somewhat.

“I’m the Flash,” he introduced himself. “We haven’t met... well, yet. Or we have, actually, but only from my perspective, not yours. Like I said, confusing. It’s really complicated. Hurts to think about it.”

She gazed wearily at his outstretched hand, not sure it was a good idea to take it. “You are not making sense,” she said instead.

“Yeah, I guess not,” he said, looking chagrined and withdrawing his hand. “Wish we had more time to chat and all, but I need to time this just right or, you know, really bad stuff happening to the space/time continuum and all.”

“No, I don’t know,” she said, getting rather annoyed by now. “What are you talking about? When did we supposedly meet and space/time continuum? Are you to blame for this weird time dilation effect?”

Flash, if that was his name, started to say something, but then something resembling a futuristic-looking watch on his wrist started beeping.

“Okay, I thought I’d have more time to explain things, but we’re out of time. Because it’s time! Sorry, I really do know other words than ‘time’, I promise. Anyway, hold on tight!”

She started to say something, but never had the chance. The Flash moved, faster than she had ever seen anything but herself move, and she was suddenly caught like a butterfly in a hurricane. He ran, little more than a red blur with lightning crackling around his form, and created so powerful a wake that she was simply pulled along. No, it was more than that, she realized a second later. She could almost feel the energy he generated, a kind of field that formed around him and pulled her along as if she were caught in a net.

“Stop that immediately,” she yelled, though she doubted he heard her. They were already moving way faster than sound, the words fading out far behind her. She tried to stop her forward momentum, her own power of flight pushing against the strange force the Flash generated, but it was for naught. They were moving so fast that they should have already lost contact with the ground and shot off into space, but somehow the Flash maintained his footing. She saw cities flash by, mountains, oceans, and she still couldn’t break free.

“Really sorry about that, by the way,” she barely heard his words, they were whizzing past her almost too quickly to comprehend. “Just one of those things that need to happen! You’ll understand eventually, I promise! Oh, NOW I get it! Ha! You really do carry a grudge, don’t you?”

She wanted to scream in frustration, but the air was stolen from her lungs by the acceleration. She finally had enough and activated her heat vision, looking to clip her annoying captor in the leg to make them slow down. Instead, though, she watched in amazement as the beams emerging from her eyes seemed to crawl forward in slow motion. How was that... they would have to be moving almost at the speed of light.
“Now this is going to be pretty rough,” the Flash said, suddenly by her side instead of running in front of her. The world around them was lost in swirls of color and blurred shapes, she couldn’t even tell whether they were still on Earth. “Again, sorry, but this is your stop!”

With those ominous words, his hand was on her back and then he PUSHED! The world shattered around her.

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When she finally regained her senses, she was lying face down in a field. Slowly lifting herself up on her hands, she spit out a bit of dirt and saw that she was at the end of a trench that something, probably her, had dug deep into the earth.

“I so love crashing to Earth at insane speed,” she muttered, brushing dirt off her shoulders and shaking it out of her hair. Looking around, there was no trace of the mysterious Flash. Nor did this look like Kansas.

“Not in Kansas anymore, ha!” she chuckled with gallows humor. “J’Onn? Can you hear me? Watch Tower, come in!”

She was not really surprised at the silence. Given the insane speeds she had just travelled, odds were she was very, very far away from where she had started. And that wasn’t even factoring in the time disturbances and the Flash’s strange talk about the space/time continuum.

“I am so going to kick this guy’s ass when I next see him” she grumbled, “and I don’t care from whose perspective.”

Going by her surroundings, she was still somewhere on Earth. The gravity was right, the sun light had the same color, and the fauna looked sufficiently terrestrial, too. The air smelled ALMOST the same, though somewhat cleaner. Allowing her gaze to extend farther outward, she saw that she was near some coast, the ocean stretching out beyond it.

Launching herself into the air, she tried to figure out where on Earth she was. Once she had gained sufficient height, it was easy to make out the shape of the continents. She had apparently crashed in Europe, somewhere near Greece. The troubling thing was, though, that there was a distinct lack of large cities. Or highways. Or train lines. Or any other traces of modern civilization.

“That jerk did send me through time,” she concluded, quite angrily, then stopped to think. “And apparently he got me talking to myself, too. I am so going to kick his ass for that as well!”

Okay, next step was to figure out WHEN she was, apparently. Going by the distinct lack of any visible technology and the rather pristine state of nature, odds were that she was at least several centuries in the past. What human dwellings she could see were rather primitive in nature, the pinnacle of technology seemed to be the wheel. She doubted anyone had a calendar she was familiar with just lying around.

“He said that this was my stop,” she muttered, trying to make sense of everything. “He said that something needed to happen. That doesn’t sound like he would just drop me in a completely unremarkable period of history.”

She allowed her gaze to drift further and further, looking for anything unusual or out of place. Well, unusual and out of place in a time period she was not very familiar with. At the same time she was busy thinking about how she might get home again. The only method she could think of off the top of her head was flight at relativistic speed, which would be horribly imprecise at best.
She could easily overshoot her target era. It was something she would only do as a last resort.

Before she could think of any other ways, though, her vision finally caught something that qualified as unusual and out of place.

“Alien invaders in ancient Greece?”

Lacking any better alternatives, she decided to investigate.

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End Chapter 28

**Author’s Note:** What better way to introduce the Flash than at the start of a time travel story, eh? As to which Flash we are talking about here, you’ll just have to wait and see. Bonus points to whomever can figure out where and when our heroine ended up. Some rather vague clues were given in an earlier chapter.

Side note: Kara’s lamentation about never getting to enjoy her flying power properly is a homage to the excellent Astro City comic series from Kurt Busiek and his Superman stand-in Samaritan.

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