When My Ex Went To Mars

by Subatomic_grape

Summary

A trip to the red planet was the last thing either of them wanted, least of all in each other's company. And when they find themselves catapulted into the middle of civil unrest and tension, surviving long enough to return home and patch the gap between them may be more difficult then Conner or M'gann ever imagined. Supermartian AU.

Notes

This was largely written as a way to survive the Season 2 hiatus, and get out a few AU ideas chewing at the back of my head. I own nothing as usual, and hope that you will enjoy reading.
**Transit**

His ears buzzed as the energy from the zeta tube dissipated. Beyond that, he could hear a faint, metallic voice dutifully reciting his name and designation number. It was fast work to move into the center of the command room and skim his hands over a screen that flickered on. "Keep a channel open and ready, and send out an alert the second there's contact." He ordered as he also punched in the commands. His only answer was static as the audio network flickered on, waiting for a transmission from somewhere outside of Earth's sky space.

Nightwing shook his head as he watched the blank video monitor. That took care of one task…And he wasn't looking forward to the next one, but couldn't see another way of doing it.

It only took a few minutes of searching the cave, before he found his target inside the base's den room. Half leaning against the counter, tail wrapped around the base of a bar stool, and completely intent on finishing a slice of pizza.

"Garfield…" Dick knew that Gar knew that whenever he used the kid's full name, it meant that something had gone disastrous. (Without a hint of aster to be found anywhere, the still seventeen part of his brain supplied.) And as such, the youngest team member jolted up from his spot on the chair, dropping his food back on the plate as he turned around. Dick could see his eyes darting around the room, looking for a familiar face…And not finding her anywhere.

"Wh-what is it? What's wrong? Why isn't my sister here?" This really wasn't going to be easy. Especially at the rate those questions were tumbling out of his mouth. "And where's Conner? Isn't M'gann's friend around too-?"

He held up a hand, at least managing to cut off that tide of questions.

"Look. I'm afraid things got…Complicated on this mission. Artemis…She's in the hospital now. And La'gaan had to go back to Atlantis to recover from the fight." He couldn't bring himself to say because of who; Kaldur's status…Both statuses, actually, were still on the down low. And he didn't really want to say anything about that to a kid who still had a poster of Aqualad pinned to his bedroom wall.

"And M'gann…" Gar's face was already looking distressed, his eyes going wide as he tried, in vain, not to look scared. "…There was a bomb on board the shuttle. She went to disarm it, and by now she's probably halfway to Mars. And Supes-" He mentally cursed at falling into that name out of habit. "…Superboy went after her. Gar, I'm sorry about this-"

"Are you kidding! This is perfect!" Dick stared as Garfield pushed himself out of the chair, and grabbed both of his hands with a huge grin. "This is just like that episode of Lost Hearts M'gann and I were watching! They're going to get some alone time on a distant planet, and after staring all googly-eyed at each other, they'll finally get back together!"

It took every ounce of training and lessons in composure from Batman himself to keep from burying his forehead in his palm. He started to say "Gar, I don't think it's that simple-"

But the boy had already gone running down the hall with an excited whoop.

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Getting her lungs to breathe again took effort. Enough that the first breaths she took were more ragged and stuttering then could ever be considered comfortable, and her sides told M'gann that it
would take several hours before they'd be ready to forgive her for-

…For whatever it was she just put them through. Which was probably nothing pleasant, with how her ribs ached.

"Hey. Take it slow," Came from above her. In a voice that was firm and strong, a little harsh… Qualities that she'd been associating a lot with just one person, lately.

"Conner?" She groaned the name out as she opened her eyes. M'gann found herself focusing on the roof of the bio-ship, and as she rolled her eyes around, saw her ex-boyfriend and teammate getting up out of the pilot's seat and kneeling next to her.

"Yeah; I'm here. And the ship's running on auto pilot," she tried moving her arms and shifting over to her side, but the only reaction she could manage was a low groan. "So you can stop trying to get up."

The floor was cold and hard against her neck, now that she didn't have long hair to help cushion her head. In response, the ship seemed to soften the spots where her body was resting, giving her a chance to relax enough to work out a few more words.

"Okay, but…Do I want to know why I was unconscious on the floor of my ship, and why you were the one at the helm?"

"You weren't really unconscious," he argued the point, frowning down at her. "Just blacked out for a few seconds."

'And gave me a heart attack for those few seconds.' She knew him well enough that it was easy to read that. She could see it from the way his eyebrows were knitted together, and his mouth twisted down as he watched her.

"Okay, okay. Then in that case, why did I black out?" She tried taking another deep breath instead of several shallow ones. In response her lungs burned a little, but then relaxed enough to allow it.

"You…Seriously don't remember? Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm not dead, Conner. And I'll feel better once I remember what-" she stopped as she lifted her head enough to look out the windows of the ship, expecting to see a blue-black sky and a few wisps of cloud. Instead, she found herself staring out at a solid black curtain, dotted with a few bright points of light.

"…That's not Earth's sky in the center of my window." She was also certain that Earth, or the normal spots she docked the bio-ship, didn't had long cylinders of machinery looking like they'd been glued to the underside of her ship poking out from the bottom of the window.

M'gann shut her eyes, let her thoughts get back up to speed and spread outward, picking up some of the sensations from her ship. The hull was slowly adapting to the changes in pressure, while keeping a clamp like grip on the rocket underneath them-

"…A rocket?" It was only when M'gann said that out loud that she started to remember; the mission at Cape Canaveral, speaking with Conner in the ship (and thinking back on that, she had a fresh new bit of hurt trying to chew into her chest, which M'gann quickly tried to blink and shrug away) and how everything had suddenly gone spiraling out of control.

"What happened to the satellite? Is it still-?"
"It's fine. You tore out whatever was onboard the ship, once Nightwing told you about it." Conner stayed crouched next to her, still watching her with a careful, worried look.

M'gann rubbed at her forehead, frowning as she thought back on the memory slowly unfolding in her mind's eye. Even though it felt like her eyes had already been given plenty of rest (even if it had only been for a few seconds) she shut them as well, to better focus.

It was easy to remember the water swirling around her head as she was tossed through it. How she'd started to feel her thoughts flickering out and trying to keep them in sharp focus. How her vision had blurred out, as the shock from the explosion underwater burrowed through her body...And how Nightwing's voice had snapped through the link, and that it had ultimately been his orders that pulled her out of her daze; 'Bomb on board the shuttle.' They'd been hurriedly relayed into her head, along with him thinking hard on his information, and where he needed her.

The memory of air howling past her ears and face also came easily; she'd thrown herself out of the water, not bothering to pause while her shape snapped back to her preferred form. M'gann had felt her blood pounding loud enough that it started to drown out the roar of the wind...And the low rumble of the ship engines flaring up. Even several stories up, M'gann could feel the heat trying to claw its way into her skin as she altered her density, sliding into the point Nightwing had identified, right as the shuttle started to roar to life and push upwards.

Even then, it took time to find the bomb, and ate into any time she could spend disarming it. In the end, she'd torn it free from the wall it was anchored to, pushed it into an intangible state, and shoved it right through the wall.

"...Glad I learned how to density shift when I did. I don't know if I could have gotten to the bomb, otherwise. Or done anything about it." M'gann commented from her spot on the floor, letting her thoughts drift back to the present.

"It was close enough, anyway." Superboy muttered, half to himself, half to her. M'gann nodded, remembering how the explosion had still rocked the shuttle and thrown her backwards. How her lungs had suddenly needed to work much harder as the air began to thin out, and how she was sure her thoughts were beginning to fray when she heard a familiar hum outside the ship.

"...You came after me, though." She looked back up at Conner, who was still giving her that more-worried-then-normal scowl, just subtly different from the usual frown she saw on his face.

"Having you suffocate in space didn't sound like a good idea. I'm just lucky I was in range, and could get the ship to follow you." M'gann gave another nod, and thought that her neck muscles were cooperating a little better then before.

She could remember how that clunk pierced through the haze clouding her thoughts, as the bio-ship responded to her presence and grafted itself onto the shuttle to hold it steady. And give her a pressurized space to get into, if she could just focus long enough to shift her density one more time, and throw herself through the space between the two.

It had been harder then she'd even thought. They might not have been completely in space, and there was just a few inches to pass between...But it had still torn away at her, almost molecule by molecule as she passed between the two ships and drifted in the near-vacuum for that brief second. Before she finally passed into her ship, and twitched back into being solid as her lungs got back to work. Between that, and the explosions on the ocean floor, her body had chosen then to give up. Which explained all the different aches and soreness that stretched along her now.

"I thought..." Conner glanced away from her, back at the pilot's seat. "I was worried. Until you
phased through the floor, I didn't know what was going on…Or if I'd been able to pilot the ship well enough."

"You got the bio-ship into range of my mental command," M'gann pointed out. "And that gave me time to tell her what I needed, so I think that counts as a good job."

She looked back out at the window, before glancing at him just out of the corner of her eyes and adding "Thanks."

"…Don't mention it." There was a flicker of motion in her eye, and when M'gann glanced over, she saw that he was holding his hand out for her to take.

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"So, no permanent damage." Superboy found himself confirming that as he watched her, still keeping his hand stretched out to take if she needed it. In response, she briefly stretched her fingers out to touch his, just a light brush, before she turned her focus away from him and over to her own body.

"Yeah…I'll be fine. I just need a chance to breathe…So you don't have to worry about me." He watched as M'gann's arms and legs both twitched as she pushed herself back, trying to get onto her feet. After a moment she had to settle for propping herself up on her elbows, enough to open her lungs up and focus on getting those deep breaths of air.

"Well, you didn't look so good at first. What happened out there?" He kept one ear open for her answer, and the other listening to make sure she was breathing properly.

"Space isn't the most friendly place, even when you've shifted your density. I don't want to try doing that again any time soon, if I can help it." She glanced over his shoulder, and Conner followed her line of sight to see that she was looking out the ship windows. They'd left the blue Earth sky far behind at that point, leaving them with stars and a pale half circle of the planet beneath them…And that was fast fading.

"But you'll live?" He still asked, eyes on the shrinking view. His voice sounded a little less harsh in his ears, probably because her heartbeat was starting to even out.

"Y-Yeah. Yeah, I'll live. I might be breathing hard for a few more minutes, but I'll live." A flash of white in the corner of his vision, and Conner realized that she was trying to put on a grin, although it was a shaky one. "And like I said…I do owe you some thanks for that."

"Like I said," he felt a little silly for echoing her, but continued. "It's not a problem." He muttered, wondering if he should go back to offering his hand…But by then she'd gotten her thoughts back in order, and was floating up. M'gann hovered in the air, just long enough to find her seat and fall into it.

"So, what is our situation?" She didn't wait for an answer, either, already tracing her fingers over the control orbs as she spoke and pulling up a screen. "Bio-Ship, contacting Nightwing. Requesting immediate response, please."

Static, and then,

"Looks like you're pretty far from the psychic link range, M'gann. Radio signal sounds a bit strained, too." The voice of their leader echoed into the ship, and with a light whirring sound a screen flickered on to show a black haired, black masked face watching them.
"The last thing I heard was your plan to phase into the ship and throw the bomb free. Looks like
Superboy got to you on time, though." M'gann bobbed her head as she smoothed back her hair, so it
looked a little less tussled by the vacuum of space. (Conner also found himself thinking that it didn't
look quite so bad like that anyway, and quickly wrenched his focus away from her and back to the
screen.)

"Yes, he did. But is there anymore news we should hear?"

"Judging from the readings I'm getting from NASA…The shuttle itself has some damage. Enough
that it might not reach Mars under its own power." Nightwing’s eyes narrowed as they looked down
at his own screen. "But all the equipment onboard made it out with minimal damage. It looks like our
mission isn't a complete loss—"

"What do you mean 'complete?'" M'gann's voice was sharp, masking over that tell tale waver in her
voice he'd learned to detect over the years, and what the meant; worry, apprehension, and trying to
hide it and work through it. He found himself thinking that she'd been using that tone more
frequently, as well.

"...I'm sorry, M'gann. Artemis and La'gann both took some bad hits during the mission. They're both
on injured leave, now." M'gann reacted to that only with silence, glancing down at the floor as her
hands balled into fists, and a tenseness started biting at her shoulders. Which left Conner to pick up
the slack.

"So, what does that mean for us? It looks like we're pulling out of Earth's gravity now, so returning—"

"Is going to have to wait. Look, I'm reading these reports, and the only way that satellite gets to Mars
is if it keeps piggybacking on the bio-ship."

"You're kidding me." Conner cut in, moving forward and looking straight at the video screen. "What
about the thrusters and every other chunk of equipment on that rocket?"

"It's working, but only at half capacity thanks to the attack. Look, our priorities are still in place." His
eyes couldn't fully decide whether they wanted to narrow or roll ceilingward at that. Conner settled
for screwing them shut in a scowl as he jerked his head back and forth.

"Your priority is sticking me on a ship with M'gann for a week? I'm not—"

"Going to have to wait for a week." M'gann cut in, sounding a bit hurt, but mostly angry to his ears.
"With the bio-ship. I should be able to cut the travel time in half. It's not like I enjoy the idea anymore
then you." That got him to open his eyes long enough to watch her, still just barely turning his head
towards her. M'gann, from what he could tell, was doing the same. The air felt thicker and tense on
his skin, and he was almost grateful when Nightwing cut in.

"Both of you, that's enough. You're two of the most experienced team members, so start acting like
it." Nightwing's eyes flickered between them, with what looked a lot like exasperation to Conner. He
knew that his own face was a good match for it.

"And the fact is, the mission isn't over yet; just changed. We don't have long before you fly out of
range, so listen carefully. I need you to deliver that satellite to Mars, and get back as soon as you
can...And please, try to stay civil with each other while you're on the job."

"...Understood." M'gann wasn't looking at either of them directly when she spoke. Conner barely
kept her in the corner of his eyes, refusing to turn his head in order to fully look at her.

"Fine, fine. I get it." He forced himself to speak as well. That was the most civil he could manage,
though, and a silence started to awkwardly move through the ship's cabin until M'gann cleared her throat; one of those human gestures she'd picked up and kept mimicking over the last few years.

"Robi- Nightwing." M'gann caught herself, and shook her head while Conner tried not to double take. She was more rattled then he thought, if she was slipping up on names like that. "I know we'll be needed back on Earth as soon as possible...But there's going to be a problem with instantly returning."

"What would that be?" Nightwing asked, right as Conner thought 'Knew it couldn't be that easy.' The way the eyes on the mask narrowed, Nightwing could have easily said the same thing out loud.

"My ship isn't really designed for this type of sustained flight-" M'gann held a hand up before either of them could speak. "She can make the trip, don't worry about that. But once we get there, she'll need to rest...Probably for a few days, at least."

"So that's over a week you'll be gone." Their commander let out a slow sigh, shaking his head. "Nothing for it, I guess. Mars is a priority right now. Are you going to manage, though?"

They both nodded in response, and almost in unison, Conner couldn't help but notice. He thought he could catch an almost smile on Nightwing's face at that, but it was gone as the leader continued. "Okay; if we can make anymore transmissions and updates, we'll do what we can. Until then, good luck. Nightwing out."

As his words left his mouth, the screen was already fading out, and cut off with a short buzz a breath later.

"So...What now?" M'gann didn't answer him right away, instead glancing over at the chairs growing up from the ship's floor. One of them was reforming with a low hum, into something low slung and easier to rest on.

"First, I'm getting some rest. It's still a four day trip even with the boost from both ships, and I don't want to spend all of it with aching muscles."

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Conner wasn't sure just how he felt about M'gann spending most of the first and second day resting. It freed them up from having to talk about anything, or long awkward silences spent trying not to look at each other...But it also left Conner without much to do.

He'd tried resting as well, which worked for a few hours, on and off. But even out in space and without any real daylight to measure by, his internal clock was insistent on keeping to a set schedule. It didn't take long for him to get twitchy from just laying down, or putting his back up against a corner of the ship.

The enclosed space didn't leave him with a lot of room to pace, either. He'd done most of his checks the first day; looking at the inner walls to make sure they hadn't been damaged, quietly checking the command orbs to make sure he hadn't dented or distorted them from how hard he'd been gripping them when he flew the ship after M'gann. (And making certain not to tell her about how white knuckled his grip had been; it was awkward enough for just him, thinking back on it.)

The fifth time his feet took him around the ship in the last hour, Conner found himself pausing at the front. There wasn't much to see when it came to the stars, or their destination; just slightly brighter dot ahead of them that would gradually turn red, the closer they got to it. His hand brushed against one of the keyboards placed at the front of the ship, making him glance back down.
On a whim, he punched in a few buttons, and was rewarded when a screen opened up in front of him. The text blurred for a moment, before coming into sharp resolution…And in perfectly legible English. M'gann had been updating the functions on the ship, from the looks of it. And it gave him something to do other then sit and pace. Conner seated himself, and let his eyes start scanning the text.

It took him a moment to comprehend what he was looking at. Dates scrolling past his eyes, followed by brief sentences: 'attack in the main commerce chamber, fifty dead.' 'Rebel cell found and exterminated at the cost of ten soldiers' 'ceasefire declared, whites surrendering-'

A sharp, grating buzz dug into his ears, pulling him out of the war record he was reading. Text flashed, stating that there was a call incoming, as a new video feed opened up over his reading.

"M'gann-" He started to say, but she was already in the air and gliding over to the screen, punching in a few commands on the console in front of them. The static on the monitor started to clear, enough for him to make out a face.

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M'gann watched as a familiar black masked face came into focus in front of them, and greeted him with a polite, "Nightwing. I'm guessing you found a way to boost the signal, and get an update for us?"

"Yeah." He nodded, looking briefly pleased with himself. "But there's not much time until you pass out of range, so I'll try to make this quick. The readings say that you're on course, and that you should reach Mars in another forty-eight hours. The rocket and the ship should give you a good leg up when it comes to closing the distance. We've also done our best to send a signal ahead of you; let Mars know that the satellite is still on its way, but that there's been complications. It's a toss up on if it'll reach the planet, though, or how clear the message will be."

"That's why we're flying the satellite there in the first place." Conner replied. "We can probably manage; as long as there isn't an active war or something we're walking into."

"There…Shouldn't be." M'gann answered, keeping her eyes on the screen and frowning at Nightwing, instead of the other person on the ship. "It's been five years, so I don't know how much has changed, but…The worst we should have to expect is some unrest. But that should be all."

She dearly wanted to ask how Conner knew about any past wars, but was interrupted when she saw a fuzzy green head poking up at the bottom of the screen.

"Gar." M'gann felt a smile working onto her face.

"I wanted to say goodbye before you shot out of range. Nightwing said that'd be okay, after he got through the important stuff."

"Well, thanks. You're going to keep up on your studies, right? And your training, and-"

"Don't worry, sis! You can leave everything to me and Nightwing! We'll hold the fort down until you come back. You just have fun on Mars with Conner…Riiiiiiight?" She didn't know what put her closer to bursting out in embarrassed laughter; the way he rolled that word, or waggling his eyebrows between the two of them.

"Kid," Conner started to growl…And was thankfully cut off as static began filling the screen, and the image flickered. Once, twice, and then it cut out entirely.
"So…That's it. Communications are down for the rest of the trip.” M'gann still found herself looking at the space where the screen was, wondering if she could somehow will it back to life if she just stared at it long enough.

"You've been reading the files?” She asked the empty air, but got a response from Conner all the same.

"It gives me something to do. If it's fine by you, I can go back to doing that; give you a chance to finish resting up." She somehow wanted to argue that, say 'no, it's fine, we can try talking to each other instead,' before the memory of one of their last conversations caught in her mind. She didn't want a repeat of that, of hearing their voices get raised in anger before dying out into something painfully quiet. So instead she nodded, and replied "S-sure. I can leave you to doing that."

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Gentle. She keeps her touch gentle as she kisses him on the lips, and runs her fingers across his forehead. Conner's thoughts and words are pleasant, a low thrum against her, and M'gann lets her hair fall down to curtain them both as she curls up against him, brushing their foreheads together.

There is a sullen, red splotch burned into his thoughts, which she wraps her focus on. "I can handle this," she whispers in his ear, making sure that her voice is soft and reassuring. Both for him, and for herself as she works on easing that stain in his mind loose. His hands wrap around her wrists, so that her hands remain cupping his face as she works at the distortion in his thoughts.

M'gann keeps working on it, almost has it worked out completely when she finds another snarl in his mind, underneath that. And it doesn't burn at only his thoughts when he touches it; it sears her as well, and M'gann finds herself trying to untangle that from his mind as well-

Which is when those hands curled around her wrists snap tight and wrench her fingers away from her face.

"GET OUT OF MY HEAD!"

M'gann snapped upright as the voice cracked across her mind, harsh enough to make the dream shatter and jolt her awake. Her eyes were stinging, and her hands shook as they reached up for her face, pushing her hair back-

Feeling just little strands, barely enough to worry about tucking behind her ears. It wasn't as long as she thought...Or as her mind tried to trick her into thinking. Over the roar of blood in her ears, she could hear Conner stirring on the front half of the bio-ship. He muttered something in his sleep before turning onto his side...And thankfully not waking up. M'gann tucked that dull feeling of gratitude into the back of her mind, letting it smother any sharp feelings or thoughts before they could develop.

'That's done with.' She reminded herself, looking away from where he was resting. 'Stupid to dwell on, too; not when we've got a mission to accomplish.'

The bio-ship could have been waiting for her to have that thought, as a green light started flashing. Followed by a quick beeping sound, which was enough to get Conner awake and on his feet as well.

"M'gann?” He asked, glancing around, and turning to look ahead when she told the ship to lighten the windows.

"Don't worry, Conner." She nodded towards the windows, and he followed her gaze. "That's the signal we've been waiting for."
As she spoke, a red orange globe, easily the size of Conner's fist and growing bigger, tilted into their point of view as the ship rotated. "Right on schedule; four days in, and we can deliver the satellite with no hitch."

"Mission successful, then?" He watched the planet with an odd, contemplative look on his face. Eyes narrowed, brows knitted together…But not angry or upset.

"Almost; we need to drop off the satellite first. THEN we can get some breathing space." Conner turned back to look at her at that…And lost that contemplative look, giving her a brief smile. "I've been with you for four days with no problems; a few more minutes won't break either of us. Boy of steel, remember?"

M'gann didn't expect a chuckle to come out of her mouth at that, but it did anyway. Likewise, Conner blinked at her in surprise, any more words he had lost.

"That reminds me," she quickly filled the silence. "We'd better get communications going; they were expecting the satellite, but not a bio-ship. We're probably coming into their radar now."

Right on cue, a low static drone echoed through the ship. No video screen…Which was honestly fine by M'gann, since it meant she could stay in her green skin for a little while longer.

"No hailing?" Conner muttered, as the hum continued.

"They're waiting to see if we'll go first, and probably getting someone who speaks English on hand; we might as well oblige them." M'gann kept her voice low as well, before raising it to address the audio channel.

"Hello? This is a delegation from Earth, speaking. We'd like to open communications before formally entering your orbit, please." A pause, and then what sounded like a male voice crackled through.

"That would explain the message we received a few days ago. It was fragmented, but we could decipher 'communications' and 'incoming ship.' Is this related to the communications satellite?"

"Glad to say it is," M'gann found herself smiling as she replied. "We needed to come along as an escort, but we've arrived with the satellite, and can place it in orbit. We'd also like to receive permission to land and recover for our trip home." There was a brief, low drone before the voice came back.

"We can grant this request, as a diplomatic gesture and thanks for delivering the satellite. But…You do not sound like J'onn J'onzz. Who should we identify you as?" M'gann's breath caught in her throat, which she forced out with her next words; she wouldn't allow herself to stumble now.

"My escort is Conner Kent of Earth…And Krypton." She added after a moment of hesitation. If the control was surprised by that, though, she didn't give them much time to register the sensation. "And I am M'gann M'orzz. Of Mars."

"…M'orzz?" The channel crackled again, static filling a long pause before the Martian on the other end spoke. "…Affirmative, Miss M'orzz. There will be a reception waiting for you on landing. Control, out."

"…Understood." M'gann spoke clearly into the transceiver, before the link went dead. "I just hope it isn't an armed reception." She whispered to herself.
They dropped in through a thin layer of atmosphere; less than what was on Earth, it felt like. Below them, jagged red rocks were already reaching up towards the ship, forming mountains with valleys of orange and brown sand between them. The sun carved dark lines into dunes, which became easier to pick out the lower they dropped towards the planet surface.

Conner kept his eyes fixed outside the entire time, narrowing them as the sights swept by underneath the ship. He’d read about Mars before, had the rotational information and distance from the sun placed into his head courtesy of Cadmus…Seeing it in person was different, though. The pictures in his head didn't have the same clarity, didn't let him see how light and color changed and sharpened as they skimmed through the sky and went gliding closer to ground.

"Docking up ahead," M'gann commented, sending the ship in towards what looked less like a mountain and more like a massive plateau carved out of rock. Following the flight path, he could just pick out thin dots of black that looked like they could be entrances for ships. Seeing a few specks of red coming in and out confirmed that.

"Still don't know what sort of reception it'll be, but…I guess let's hope for the best?" M'gann offered cautiously, and Conner found himself nodding.

"Yeah…" And then, just barely glancing back at her, he added "What's it like, being back home?"

"Earth is my home now, Conner." M'gann kept her eyes away from his, instead focusing on every movement her fingers made over the control orbs. "There's some things I miss about Mars, sometimes…And I was born and grew up here, but my home is where the Team and y-

She stopped short, and Conner was sure he could hear the 'and you are' hanging in the air. M'gann's voice, when she continued, was more hushed, and carefully paced as she picked out each of the words.

"'Home is where you make it' is the right saying, I think? To be honest, I miss Earth more then I miss Mars." He felt like he should have said something more to that, but before the words could start forming in his head, his eyes noticed something sleek and red cutting through the air towards them-

Right as M'gann's hands yanked over the spheres, making them drop out of the way as another ship streaked past with a low roar.

"…My mistake." M'gann spoke half to herself as she glanced at the panels. "Should've been watching our airspace while working out the angle of approach. No harm done, though."

"Uh…Right." Conner glanced back out the window, noting that the rock wall was looking uncomfortably close. "Do you usually come in this steep?"

"Actually, I've never landed a ship here; when I left Mars, I was stowing away in the back of my uncle's ship. Mostly I'm figuring things out as we go." M'gann didn't even blink as she said that, while Conner yanked his head back to stare at her. "Oh, but the good news is that I think we'll be down in just a few more seconds, judging by the angle we'll have to take."

"…Wonderful." Conner grumbled, just before he threw his hands forward to brace against the console as the ship took a sharp dive. That wall turned into a solid blur, and he could feel his stomach trying to work its way up into his chest before doing a sudden turn over as the ship began to level out and slow.
A long rock tunnel filled his vision, and the ship slipped inside as M'gann made a satisfied sound. "There we go! Just have to pick our way down from here...And there's no worry about running into anything with how wide the tunnels are!"

She was right on that, at least. While he could hear a low roar as another few ships went overhead, there weren't any more sharp turns or dives. It was after they passed the fifth ship in a drone of displaced air that the tunnel suddenly opened up, into a large...He wasn't sure if he could call it a room, as much as a cave where he couldn't pick out the ceiling. All of the light came from long, reddish tinted oblongs of something glowing, pushed into the surface of the walls. It wasn't empty, either; one side of the room was lined with egg like objects, spaced out widely, while the other was left open for landings.

And he could make out a sizable group waiting for them in that space. Conner counted out at least ten heads, sharply angular in that odd light filling the ship hangar. He also instantly realized that they were all green tinted...And that he wasn't sure about those long rods a handful of them were carrying.

"At least they aren't all carrying weapons?" He offered to M'gann. She only gave a nod, bringing them to ground level. When the ship touched down, it was with a soft hum that he could barely feel through the floor.

He expected her to open the rear hatch right away. Instead M'gann stayed seated, slumped in her chair and eyes fixed forward. He felt his skin start to crawl as she didn't blink or break that line of sight...Until Conner realized that she wasn't looking at him. Just straight ahead, at where their welcoming committee was now moving forward.

"They're going to wonder what's taking us so long," Conner pointed out, glancing between his ex and the escort.

"They won't." M'gann's voice was low, almost tired, lacking that energy she had while the ship was still in flight. "I was just talking to them mentally; telling them to give me a few seconds to inform you what's going to happen next, so we don't cause a cross planet incident right off the bat." She looked away from the window, and frowned when she saw his face.

"I thought you wouldn't want to listen in on that conversation; last time I checked, you're not on good terms with psychic powers." Then, before he could think of a counter to that, she let her breath out in a sigh. "I...Was kind of lying a little, though. I'm pretty sure you won't do anything other then glare and look a little threatening and alien in their eyes. But just so you know...There is going to be psychic talk. A lot of it, because not all of us know English. I'll see about getting a link open to translate everything...But you could always stay in the ship, if you'd prefer; they left that option open to you."

"...What else is there to this?" He didn't give his answer right away. "Why did you stall for time?"

"Just...Needed to prepare myself for what's next. I think I'm ready, though." M'gann slowly pushed herself up to her feet as she spoke, head still turned down. With how still the ship was he could hear her hands squeezing together, so tight that the skin on the knuckles was going white-

Going white and spreading up through her hands, while her face also went pale. When she blinked her eyes open to look at him, the irises were bright red, and filled up most of her eyes.

"...You can't wear a false skin in a society of telepaths." M'gann whispered, looking down at her hands. "And it'd be stupid for me to even try...But I can go meet with them now." Her shoulders were hunched forward, and it looked like there was a knot forming in both her back and her throat.
"I'm ready, too." Conner said, and forced himself to look at the back of the ship when M'gann jerked her head up to stare at him. "Sitting around in a ship isn't something I'm good at. I can handle a meeting between telepaths."

"O-of course." He could hear how fast she grabbed onto his words, turning on her heel and raising a hand. The back of the ship melted apart in response, almost jumping open. M'gann's footsteps were a sharp contrast, hesitant and slow; it didn't take long for Conner to catch up and move ahead of her, taking the first steps out and into Mars.

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M'gann ran her hand over the hull of the ship, tracing the shape with her fingers as the fins slowly retracted into the body, and all the hard, streamlined edges smoothed out. "I hope you can sleep easily." She murmured as it shifted into that egg-like, at rest state.

"Your ship will be kept safe here." A new thought cut into her head, casually batting her concerns aside. "More pressing is understanding what your intentions are."

Turning, M'gann got her first good look at the escort without a layer of ship between her and them; ten greens, five of them armed and all of them watching her carefully. The poles were at rest though, which she was quietly grateful for; she didn't want to spend her first hour on Mars feeling heat try to strip away her psyche. She also noticed they all kept to a near human form; that facet of life apparently hadn't changed since she left.

"I'll do what I can to explain." M'gann kept her eyes level on who she'd identified as the speaker for the group; a tall woman with grass colored skin, holding herself in a way that commanded attention. "But it would be appreciated if you could enable translations for my teammate. I don't think everyone here speaks English, or the native tongue."

It was only as that steely gaze continued, turning harsher, that M'gann remembered meeting someone of that rank eye to eye wasn't the best idea. At least not when her own skin was several shades lighter. M'gann dropped her head a little, eyes looking up instead of directly at the speaker.

Which seemed to do the trick, as a low hum moved through the air and Conner rubbed at his temples for a moment. He wasn't under the same stipulations, it seemed, as no one bristled at him when he glared at everyone in the room.

"Thank you." M'gann switched to speaking out loud, hoping the others would do the same. "We're grateful for this gesture."

"It's a small enough thing." The woman replied, eyes flickering over both of them, never settling on either. "Moving on, we still wait for an explanation on why there is a white on Earth. We did a brief check on our records, and while you may be J'onn's niece…That does not fully excuse or explain your actions."

"You just said she's the niece of the Martian Manhunter. He's a big shot on Mars, isn't he?" Conner cut in, while M'gann tried to hide her wince. "Shouldn't that be enough?"

"Our communication with Earth has been sporadic, at best." The speaker replied, coolly. She also apparently decided that her eyes would settle on Conner, and make eye contact with him. "J'onn's deeds are well known…But even if she carries a trace of his blood, we find a white on Earth suspect. How do we know she's been upholding the integrity of Mars?" And just like that, the speaker
switched from talking with her to talking about her. M'gann forced a deep breath into her lungs, fighting between a hot angry knot trying to tie itself up in her thoughts, and a cold one attempting to stop up her throat and keep her from speaking for herself. She wedged the thought of staying calm into her head, reminding herself that she had to stay composed and confident if she wanted to keep this situation in control. As good as Conner's intentions might have been, she wasn't sure how long they could keep this dance going, of him being alien enough to be allowed some leniency, and her being both suspicious and beneath attention.

"I'm…Prepared to answer any questions you have, to prove that I've been doing just that." Stillness, as M'gann prayed she'd struck the right balance between diffident and outspoken. Then there was a slight stir, as the speaker gave a single nod back towards her own forces. The ranks parted, and just past those green shoulders and faces, M'gann could suddenly pick out a flash of red that was much brighter than the rock walls around them.

"An interrogator." M'gann whispered quietly to Conner as his shoulders started to tense up in confusion, her eyes fixed on the red. "Probably some minor son from one of the royal families since he's in the field…But still given specialized training. Enough to know if someone is lying."

"We will begin," ordered the green in a voice that also urged her feet forward. All M'gann did was nod in response, steadying her thoughts and her heartbeat before looking straight ahead as she closed the gap between herself and the interrogator. When she lifted her head, those gold eyes were waiting for her, almost piercing straight through her.

"I've been assigned to a covert group on Earth; the work I do isn't high profile or puts me in the public eye. Not compared to my Uncle J'onn. But it still is meant to help people on Earth." She spoke that all without hesitation, jumping straight into what she thought they'd want to hear first.

"Truth," the red answered, never once breaking eye contact with M'gann.

"What sort of work is it?" One of the greens pressed.

"It's heroic work; safe guarding people on Earth by fighting and detaining people who could be a threat, or gaining information for the Justice League. J'onn has been acting as my mentor in all of this."

"Truth."

She kept her mind focused on those events, and nothing else. Not on what happened when things required a more brutal touch, or Conner yelling at her to get out of her head…But the thoughts tried to flicker up in the back of her head, anyway.

"There's more then just that," and the red caught those little sparks behind her eyes, starting to turn both of their focuses towards that. "Something regarding her teammate-"

"M'gann saved me." Conner broke in, stepping forward so he stood between M'gann and the red, looking straight into those piercing gold eyes. A tiny, barely whispered "Conner?" slipped out of M'gann's mouth as she watched, but he didn't turn to face her.

"She's watched my back on several missions, just this year." If the red was surprised by this turn of events, he didn't show it. His gaze transferred to Conner, staying trained on him.

"Truth," the red's voice rang out. "But isn't there more? Her mind…"

"…Also saved me. Five years ago, I lost my mind…She pieced it back together again. Kept me from going crazy." Cautiously, M'gann stretched her awareness out a little, just enough to listen in…And
tell that he was keeping his thoughts squared on that, and only that. The stubbornness in his thoughts was enviable. "Is that enough proof for you?"

"...Enough to determine that she is not an immediate threat, either to our people, or to our relations with Earth." The speaker stepped forward, nodding as the red Martian moved away, slowly blinking as he and Conner broke eye contact. Conner's head twitched back and forth a little as well, and M'gann got the faint impression he was clearing his thoughts before she pulled her awareness back into her own head. "For the time being, she is allowed to move through some quadrants of Mars, and will not be detained. You may make your way to a suitable dwelling."

No, 'when you are ready.' That was both a dismissal and an order...Which M'gann simply nodded at. She couldn't figure out a different response that wouldn't catapult them straight back into suspicion, or detainment.

"For your own safety and good, be sure to stay out of the green neighborhoods. Your friend may wish to cover himself as well." A motion forward, and there was a robe getting shoved towards Conner. He absently picked it up and shrugged it on, the weave a near mirror for what he'd worn on Rann. The delegate paused as he tugged the hood over his face, and she gave M'gann a long, measured look, focusing on that black bodysuit. "As well, I would suggest changing your clothing to something that will not give you trouble."

M'gann could make out the confusion spreading across Conner's face underneath that cowl, and how his mouth started to open...Likely to ask what was meant by that. She couldn't keep a soft sigh from easing out between her lips, while her clothing began to shift to something more faded, and worn. The rich black and red leached out, leaving her with bleached gray colors as the cloth settled back over her skin in a less fitted and more tattered fashion. "I know...Don't dress or act like I'm above my station."

"It will make things easier for you." The green replied, and apparently satisfied, she motioned for the group to move away.

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It was a relief to put the hangar and its residents behind her, and M'gann didn't breathe easy until there was close to a block of curving passageways between her and them. Her shoulders wouldn't even consider relaxing until those tunnels opened up, and she moved to the exit of the docking block with a relieved sigh. Her memories of the layout were holding up, and in another few steps they were standing on a balcony and staring out into a massive chamber.

Three rings of city stretched below them, long sprawling circles of building growing and carved out of rock terrace, some structures planted firmly on level ground and some clinging to the sides of the cliffs. Threading between the clusters of spires were streets, and if M'gann stretched her thoughts a little she could just pick out a low, background hum coming up from the hundreds of small forms going about their business.

"We're still underground?" Conner asked, looking across the gap and down at the teeming streets.

"Yeah; the mountain is big enough that it's easy to hollow out chambers like this, and still have several miles of dormant volcano to spare for the support." He blinked at the word 'volcano' before his mouth opened, and the words fell out on their own.

"Olympus Mons is what it's called on Earth. Fourteen miles high, in width close to the size of the state of Arizona..." Conner trailed off as M'gann glanced back at him, wondering how long it had been since she'd heard him rattle off information like that.
"And currently a thriving capital for life on Mars." She finished for him. "I guess I don't need to tell you much about it, though."

"Knowing how we're supposed to get down would be useful." He replied, glancing down again at the cityscape, and M'gann guessed that he was gauging the distance, and if he could make the leap… Before shaking his head. "I'm guessing it's going to be flight."

He didn't sound too pleased by that, either. M'gann tried to couch her voice into a neutral tone, as she lifted a hand up to help her concentrate. "That's the only way down; I'll keep it brief, though."

She was true to her word. Conner simply hung limp in her mental grip while that robe snapped around him in the air, half sulking and half trying to ignore the sensation of being weightless. *It wasn't always like that.* The thought sprang to her mind before she had a chance to squash it, and she pushed any memories of flying together into the far back of her head, before they had a chance to take root. The roof tops of the ring below them were already coming up, thankfully, and she focused on drifting between those and picking out a small side street to set themselves down in.

"This doesn't look like a main street." Conner remarked once she mentally let go of him. They'd floated separately to the ground, and stood apart as he finished speaking.

"It isn't…But I'm used to navigating the side paths instead." She didn't add that it was easier to avoid contact on roads like these…But from the way Conner's mouth twisted into a frown and his eyebrows knit together as he glanced between her and the closed in, quiet road, she didn't really need to say it out loud.

"It's been a while, but I think I know where we should be going. The second ring should be cohabitated," she gave a shrug as Conner glanced back up, towards that top plateau of city. "The first ring is completely off limits for us. But we shouldn't run into any trouble here. Hopefully." That said, she started walking, and he quickly fell into step with her.

"Why the clothing change?" M'gann tried not to duck her head in a wince or embarrassment at Conner's question as they picked their way down the streets. Despite her efforts to couch her reaction, her feet still dragged scuffed a little, and she couldn't find it in her to will them up into the air.

"…There's a lot of rules when it comes to the different Martians, and customs." She answered slowly, keeping her voice low and tasting the dust stirred from their footsteps. "It's just accepted that what I was wearing is reserved for the majority of greens. It would be…Really crass if I wore the same thing as them. It'd look like I was trying to put myself on the same level as them."

Her hand ran over the rough weave her clothing had shifted to, scratchy against her fingers. "It's another way of distinguishing between the classes, and keeping the difference clear." She kept her gaze trained on the ground, noting that it was looking smoother paved and swept than before. "And I don't want to invite any more trouble by breaking that rule."

"…That's a stupid reason." Conner finally growled, and she could just catch him watching her, frowning over her clothing and the way it hung off her instead of fitted her form.

"Maybe." She admitted, "But it would also be stupid to challenge it. Even if we're in a mixed neighborhood. I'll still feel better once we get-' into an all white district' she was going to say, or at least a place where they could get a room without having something thrown at them in the process. That's what M'gann was going to say, until they turned another corner, and that little side street abruptly opened into a crowded main avenue.
What she saw wasn't quite the same as what she remembered. M'gann found herself facing a near tide of green, doted with a rare few reds…And it seemed like an even smaller number of whites. Few enough that the tiny flashes of white she could see were almost eye searing bright against the rest of those colors.

Her own skin felt just as out of place, given all those eyes that turned towards her once she was out of the alley. It was strange, how those red eyes that looked bloody and sullen on white skin normally looked better when surrounded by green…But could manage to pierce her either way. Part of M'gann wanted to do nothing more then slip into camouflage, to get those eyes off of her. She started to back up, and felt her shoulder bump into Conner's chest before she remembered herself.

"M'gann? What's going here?" Her teammate had noticed the shift in the crowd as well. A few of them glanced at him, but she found herself at the center of attention as their eyes slide off the hood obscuring his eyes and face.

"I don't know; things in this part of the city wasn't as bad when I was here before." M'gann risked glancing between him and the crowd; there was no mistaking that they were drawing attention now…And that out of the handful of whites in the street, she was the only one without a green escort. That was the most nauseating thing to notice, and what settled that this wasn't the neighborhood she remembered. "We should just keep moving…Hopefully there won't be any trouble."

And maybe she could keep Conner from returning those dark looks they were starting to get. She didn't want anyone meeting his eyes from under that cowl, and noticing that they were a startling blue instead of red. She hurried forward…But not fast enough to outpace some of the remarks from those watching.

"Garbage pickup is slacking off; there's a lot more trash ending up in the neighborhood." In the corner of her eyes, she could see Conner narrow his eyes as the language was filtered through her mind and into his.

"Better throw it out, quick. Or-"

"Or WHAT!" Conner snarled, swirling around to glare back at them. M'gann could see how his shoulders were bunching up, and even though she wasn't translating or broadcasting his words to the rest of the crowd, she knew there was no mistaking the challenge in his tone.

Whites, and those with them, didn't challenge the majority. She started to reach for his shoulder, while her mind raced on how to keep a bad situation from growing worse as the crowd began to draw in tighter.

"Conner, don't-!" That was when the crowd rippled, and M'gann thought that she wouldn't have time to do anything at all, as someone burst out of wall of bodies and ran straight for them. Green skin, and tall enough to easily make the crowd separate and reach them in a few quick strides. M'gann tensed up, waiting for him to strike at her or Conner and hoping she had the reflexes to get them both out of the way.

"THERE you are! We've been looking everywhere for you!" That, however, was the last thing she expected to hear. "You shouldn't head out on your own like that; people here aren't exactly known for their patience when it comes to you guys walking around without an escort."

As M'gann blinked at the speaker, she couldn't help but feel like the way his features were set, and the tenor of his voice should have been more familiar. He kept his tone friendly, the same with his expression…While a white moved up next to him, carrying a few bundles under his arms and
carefully watching all of them. The paler Martian could have been a younger, more gauntly built J'onn; the only thing that wasn't a near match was the bone colored skin. That slightly stern, completely serious set to his face was almost exactly the same, though. She wasn't the only one who noticed it, given how her ex's eyebrows stopped furrowing together and got traded out for a confused blink…Even though she could feel that anger still boiling off him, and guessed that he still wanted to give the entire population on Mars a good, long death glare.

"Who the hell are-" Conner was already ahead of her when it came to asking questions, and she belatedly remembered to patch a quick link between the four of them. The other two didn't miss a beat, folding her link into their minds with an almost welcoming presence.

"Both of you, play along." The white cut in with a low voice, while the green continued at normal volume.

"I get how much you want to show the new guy around the city, but mom's going to have all our heads if I don't get you back…Thirty minutes ago." He grinned at them, looking embarrassed. "Let's hope she'll settle for just one of our necks and call it good, if we get going now." And with that, he put a hand on M'gann's shoulder and started to steer her away from the crowd…Who thankfully let them go, outside of a few blinks at the small group forming up.

"That was too close," the white said, as they began to move out of earshot. "You're lucky we figured out who you were when we did…Although I almost didn't recognize you at first; your hair was a lot longer the last time I saw you, but your thoughts are mostly the same. Don't hear a lot of people thinking 'Hello Megan' to themselves over and over when they get in trouble."

That was when the familiar angles of their faces, and tints of their skin snapped into place in her mind. M'gann stared openly at them, her skin going even paler from the shock as she looked between the two.

"L'aonn! And J'aal? Both of you-" And then she gave up talking, and grabbed one hand each into her own, giving them a tight squeeze. The white Martian finally dropped that stony expression, and smiled when he heard his name.

"Missed you too, sis; but we should probably get inside before we start hugging. This isn't the best place for it, and the rest of the family might feel left out." He and M'gann both glanced back at Conner, who was looking at all three of them with a 'does someone want to tell me what's going on?' expression.

M'gann nodded as they sped up, and gave Conner a relieved smile. "This wasn't what I was expecting, but I'd like to introduce you to L'aonn and J'aal…My white and green brothers."

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As far as buildings went, it wasn't much to look at; just a long oblong hole cut into the rock and acting like a door. The outside looked more like a section of rock that had something that roughly resembled a porch carved into it then anything else. It actually took Conner a second glance, and seeing M'gann's brothers leading them towards it, for him to even register that could be a house. M'gann relaxed as they neared it, smiling for a moment as a thin sheen of material covering the door melted open in a near mirror of the bio-ship.

Inside, it did look a lot more like a home; pieces of furniture scattered around what looked like a slightly more elongated version of the team's den. And, if Conner was any judge, made of decent quality. Enough that it was a sharp contrast to the façade outside.
Their surroundings had been quiet, once they turned off that main street. But when they paused inside, everything turned into a rush of excited babble that tried to force itself into his head. Multiple voices, and what looked and felt like a dozen more people trying to find purchase in his thoughts as they rushed through doors branching from the main room and towards the little group-

Which M'gann jolted at when she looked over at him, and quickly glanced at a tall jade colored woman who seemed to dominate the room. There was a sudden thought of 'enough' that ran through his mind…and then abruptly, he was cut off as his head went blissfully quiet.

"Sorry," M'gann whispered to him. "We can handle introductions later…But you've already met my mother, R'aon. She'll do what she can to take care of you." With that, she moved towards a knot of her family, and her expression started to shift back to a more sunny one.

Watching a conversation and reunion unfold without hearing any of the words was weird. Conner thought that he could hear a slight hum in the air as M'gann got pulled into her mother's arms, and the rest of the family gathered around her. But for his part, he was satisfied with picking out a corner of the room to sit at and…if not watch what looked like a private reunion with her family, then at least keep one eye on it as he took a second look at the place they'd been guided to. It was actually a lot like the cave, if a little more close spaced, and with a much redder tint to the rocks. Almost like if a giant bowl had been turned upside down and dotted with a few lights and furniture. M'gann was still looking between her siblings with a bright smile that he hadn't seen in…

'A long time.' He tried not to dwell on that, instead starting to shift away and try glancing at something else.

"You must be Conner Kent." A voice cut into those thoughts, and he was all too eager to look up and focus on the speaker. He found himself looking back at that same woman from before, as M'gann's mother had detached herself from the group, and stood over him. It was amazing how someone with no visible pupils could still manage a piercing, measuring gaze. And with just a hint of judgment, Conner thought uncomfortably…but found himself meeting her eye to eye anyway, as she cleared her throat to speak with him.

"My daughter said that you aren't comfortable with telepathy, so we will try to oblige you with translation in place of that. It's still psychic, but I hope it will help."

"Uh…Thanks," Conner managed, trying not to glance back at M'gann. "It's…Appreciated?"

"Glad to hear. Now, you all came in good time, since dinner is almost ready. This way, please." Her voice didn't allow for argument, and she motioned for him to step through one of those gaps in the wall, hung with cloth. And as he moved towards it, the fabric parted on its own with a familiar psychic hum. Conner knew that if he turned back, he'd see M'gann's mother focusing on the fabric. But since he was still getting used to a planet of psychics, he settled for looking forward, instead.

The dining room had been carved from the same rock as the rest of the home, with just a slight shift in pigment telling him that this room was set deeper into the stone. He glanced around, noting a few more bolts of cloth running along the ceiling to break up all the rock, and he touched the edge of the table to get a feel for it; carved from stone and trimmed with metal, from the cool feel under his fingers. The entire room was colored in a warm tan, shaped into an oval, and it looked like it could easily house thirty more people…Which, Conner realized, made sense if M'gann's family was as large as she claimed it was.

"Twelve of my children have enlisted in the guard. And another five have either graduated into the ranks, or are working their way through the collegium." R'aon spoke directly into his ear, and Conner gripped at the table to keep himself from jumping. He thought that the stone cracked a little
under his fingers, although R'aon didn't comment on the noise. "And sadly, my husband is out on his work with attending and mending ships frequently as well. It's proud work for all of them, but it does leave the dining hall slightly more empty then before."

"What, were you reading my mind?" He tried to keep that from coming out as a growl, but given the arched eye ridge from M'gann's mother, he doubted his success.

"Given how much you were looking around at the empty spaces, I didn't need to. Now, take a seat over there, if you will." R'aon gestured to one space over from the table corner, and Conner found himself taking it without any more complaint.

Maybe he was still used to taking orders from Martians when it came to dinner. R'aon turned to her family, who were starting to drift in through the wall openings. M'gann nervously pushed aside one of the curtains instead of willing it to part, and for a moment Conner wondered why she was so ill at ease-

Until he remembered several of their movie nights, and how one of the reoccurring themes was taking a boyfriend to meet the family over dinner. Except he wasn't her boyfriend now, which somehow made the situation worse. And made his hands go right back to gripping the table edge enough to deform it; the M'orzz family was going to have some interesting aesthetic changes to the dining room, before this was over.

"The rest of you can see about setting the table- Except for you, M'gann. Go have a seat." That got his former girlfriend to lift her head up, long enough to blink at R'aon.

"Mom, I can-"

"Be a dear and know your limits. You haven't been in this dining hall for nearly six years, and you just spent four days in space. You'll do more good if you relax out of the way." And with that she gave M'gann a gentle shove between the shoulders-

Over to the seat next to Conner. Both of them stared at R'aon, even as she guided M'gann into her seat.

"Family manners, M'gann. Plus, I think your friend would feel better if he had someone familiar sitting next to him." Conner wanted to argue that point, he really did. But he was having a hard time figuring out reasons on WHY this wouldn't work…And by the time he figured out a nice way to say 'I'm still nervous about your daughter who is also my ex' she was sitting down next to him.

And not making eye contact, at least, although she was talking. "So…You should do fine with everything on the table; as far as I know, it's all an analogue to Earth food. And it does taste really good?" She offered, a hopeful note in her voice.

"…Right," Conner managed, as the table filled up with both dishes and family members. L'aonn and his brother took places across from them, while R'aon sat at one end of the table, next to Conner and M'gann. He noticed that the other end of the table stayed empty, and other then L'aonn and M'gann, everyone at the table was tinted in some shade of green.

R'aon seemed to pay a lot of attention to them, as she telekinetically pulled all of the plates over to herself, and Conner reminded his hands to stop deforming the table as his own plate was whisked out from under him. It helped that he could focus on just how much she was levitating with her own mental power; the only time he'd seen M'gann try half as much had been that time she'd asked him to make dinner with her…Which started to bring up memories that he wished would stay quiet.
"Don't ask what things are like with us. Do NOT ask what things are like with us-' He kept repeating that while R'aon divided up the servings and sent them floating back to each place. He wasn't fully sure what sort of meat he was getting on his plate, but his stomach growled enough to tell him that it made no difference.

"M'gann, I'm quite curious what things are like-"

'No, NONONONO-'" 

"On Earth." As her mother finished, Conner allowed his breath to come out slowly…And thought that he could see M'gann doing the same in the corner of his eye, her shoulders relaxing.

"Well…Not quite the same on Mars. It took me a while to learn how to fit in there, but I think I'm doing well now! My team is really…Good about telepathy, most of the time. It's also dangerous, like what we've seen with uncle J'onn…But amazing, all the same."

"Sounds like it won't be long until you're on the broadcasts being sent to Mars." Someone that could have been a sister commented warmly, and M'gann flushed in response; it was strange, seeing her cheeks color when her skin was so pale.

"IF M'gann is allowed back to Earth." Her mother frowned down at the table, "It sounds like her visit came as a surprise to our royal family…And perhaps not a pleasant one."

Conner felt like he should have said something to that…But L'aonn was the one who beat him to it. "Why wouldn't she be! She's done more good there then half those tight laced reds on the watch!"

"L'aonn!" M'gann's mother jerked her head up to shot a half angry, half shocked look across the table at him. "Don't speak like that-

"But it's true! I bet you do more then just walk around the streets, stopping people because you don't like how they look paler then usual." L'aonn glanced back at M'gann…Who didn't look like she knew how to answer that, especially when her mother sat up straighter, demanding attention.

"They do more then just that-" R'aon seemed to bristle for a moment, one eye on L'aonn and the other on those empty spots on the table.

"Not in front of me. They must have stopped me five times this past week, even when I was with J'aal. I don't think they even believed me when I said I was out running errands for you."

"It would be better if you didn't go out so often…" R'aon started to say, before trailing off in a sigh. 
"...But I can't tell you to be a shut-in, either. That's not any more right, even if it isn't always safe to be outside."

An awkward silence hung over the table, and Conner tried to be silent as he swallowed that mouthful he'd been working on.

"...I know. I promise, I'm careful." L'aonn finally said. And R'aon sighed, easing back down into her seat.

"Well…Either way, we'll work out a way to get M'gann back, if we must." R'aon put a smile back on her face, oddly calm and decisive. "We do have ways, and I can't argue that my daughter is doing well by the family." She smiled at Conner as she spoke, before passing something that could have been mashed potatoes on Earth over to him. And that seemed to be the end of that conversation.
Unrest

After a day like that, M'gann was surprised that she and Conner still had appetites for dinner. All the same, they'd managed to account for a good amount of food on the table, and her teammate didn't seem to mind that some of it was colored differently then what was on Earth. Then again, after having nothing but granola and water for the last few days, she was inclined to think he was just as desperate for something new as she was.

"You look satisfied." She commented as she led him away from the table. Once again, her mother had waved off her efforts to help, instead telling her to see Conner to the bedroom and get some sleep herself.

"It was a lot better then ship rations." He replied, echoing her own thoughts. "And we survived one day on Mars, so yeah. I'm happy enough," even though she knew he'd be far more relieved once they were back on a planet that wasn't full of telepaths. "By the way," he continued, glancing back at the kitchen as they moved through the house. "I saw that everyone on Mars,"

"Looks human?" She finished the thought, and allowed herself a brief smile over his surprised nod. She hadn't lost that knack for guessing what his questions would be. "We're a shape shifting race. Sometimes the...Other shape you've seen is common, but having thumbs and more human like limbs can be useful. We've been using that form a lot more often, ever since J'onn's activities on Earth became more well known. I guess...You could think of it as a sort of homage and respect."

"And not just you being an Earth fan girl?" Maybe she couldn't predict his questions quite as well as she thought, M'gann decided once her cheeks colored at that question. At least there wasn't any malice behind it, and he dropped it quickly enough as they entered the guest room. The sleeping chamber was a quiet little space with the lights dimmed. Just an oval of a room with a few beds scooped into the walls, and a bit of cloth thrown over the floor to keep it from looking completely like a cave.

"I hope this is okay," she began, when Conner waved the concern off.

"I can sleep in closets and shower stalls; this is fine." To prove it, he walked over and put a hand on the bed sill, before sitting down at the edge and ducking his head in. "Don't worry about me."

"R-right." M'gann moved towards another empty cot that looked comfortable enough. Her own room, she knew, was just a few rooms away ...But she wasn't certain about going back to a place that belonged to a girl from five years ago. She could hear Conner shifting around, finding a comfortable spot to rest in. It helped fill up some of the quiet, but she found herself speaking anyway. "By the way, I'm...Sorry about all the complications."

A pause, and then Conner muttered, "It's nothing. We finished the first half of the mission; now we just need to figure out how to get h-home again." She could hear that pause over the word 'home,' and even though their mental link was still quiet, M'gann found she didn't need it to tell what he was thinking; if that had been the right word to use, since they were with her family now.

M'gann tried to solve it by giving a soft "Of course. We'll figure it out." Which seemed to be enough for him, as a few minutes later she could hear his breathing ease up. Her own eyes drifted shut as she listened to him, while M'gann lay back against her own space of wall, half sitting and half reclining as her thoughts began to slow down.

Red, hurful...But she can fix it.
Their foreheads brush together, and M'gann reminds herself to be gentle as she holds his head in her hands, opening her eyes to look into his.

His eyes cut into hers, full of rage as his hands suddenly slam into her shoulders. He shoves her away, while her confusion buzzes through their link.

GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT! His voice echoes in her mind and deafens any thoughts she tries to send to him, as she tries to curl away from it. She feels a hot anger start to spark in her chest while her eyes sting, and the words wrench themselves out of her throat.

"I didn't-!"

M'gann's eyes opened with a jolt, right as she whispered "I didn't do anything wrong." Something about the words felt heavy and unwieldy on her tongue, and she tried to push the memory of them and that dream out of her head. She could feel her neck growing stiff from where she'd been leaning against the rock wall, and eased herself up and away from it. Sleep wasn't going to come easily to her after that, she knew. So instead, M'gann found herself sitting on her bed, stretching out her thoughts into the rest of the house. Not speaking with anyone, but just listening; hearing her mother speaking with her siblings, a few buzzes of stray thought on where to go to market tomorrow, how studies were progressing…Voices that she'd almost forgotten about, but were a comfort now.

There was a faint, gentle nudge at the edge of her mind, which M'gann picked up on long before she heard the footsteps. L'aonn paused outside the doorway, casting a shadow inside the faintly lit room. No knocking, just waiting for a mental answer and invitation from her instead.

"You can come in," M'gann said aloud, turning to fully face him as she also sent a trickle of encouragement over to him. She kept her thoughts open, inviting, and was rewarded by him nodding and stepping over the threshold.

"Were you dreaming?" L'aonn asked as he moved up next to her bed.

"Not over anything I want to dwell on," she replied "and I don't think I was asleep for long. Talking with you sounds better, anyway."

"You speak a lot more."

He touched his fingers to his throat to show what he meant.

"It's a habit from Earth," M'gann heard Conner stirring a little from his section of the room, and shifted her words over from her mouth to staying in her thoughts. "Telepathy isn't how most people talk, there. It's been a while since I've even had someone knock through a mind link, instead of on a door."

"How do you manage?" L'aonn's thoughts were drenched with disbelief as he sat down beside her.

"It took some getting used to, but after a while you adjust to knocking on doors, or...Sometimes not understanding people as well as you used to." Conner had subsided, and she fought to keep her eyes from going over to him, instead focusing on her brother.

He was watching her, curious from the way his head was slightly tilted. "You sound a little more mature, compared to the last time I saw you. Earth must be teaching you a lot; pretty soon I won't be able to call you little sister any more."

"Well, I ended up with a little sibling of my own, back on Earth." M'gann didn't bother hiding her grin once that revelation finally got L'aonn to lose that stern look in favor of a bewildered one. "So
I'm starting to learn all about the joys and frustrations when it comes to being a responsible and protective older sibling." She made a face as she continued. "L'aonn, if I ever did half of what Gar manages, I apologize. But...I hope I did more then half of everything else he does."

In response, L'aonn ruffled her hair enough to get a soft laugh out of her.

"Sis, you're one of a kind. I doubt he could ever make me groan or laugh as much as you do." She missed seeing that spark in his eyes; while his smile looked a little thin, there was a clear joy showing up in his eyes as the red lightened a little, and lost some of that harsh glare. That, at least, hadn't changed in the time she was gone, and M'gann was glad that she could still pick out the spark in his eyes. "Still, I'd like to hear more about this new little brother."

And for the next hour, she told him. About how they met in Qurac, the blood transfusion and what came out of it, Marie Logan's death...He never knew her like she did, but he still lowered his eyes at that. In a little while she had him laughing again through their link as M'gann told him about how her catch phrase got Garfield experimenting with one of his own.

"I thought Conner was going to break a new doorway when Gar was in his 'here comes Garfield' phase. Lucky he settled on 'noted' instead." As she pressed that mental image of Conner sulking in the hallways and actively avoiding a child half his size, M'gann found herself glancing over at where he was resting.

"What's going on between you two?" She couldn't shrug L'aonn's question out of her mind, even though she wanted to. "There's a weird cloud in your head whenever you focus on him; kind of grey and heavy. Did he...Hurt you?" Those last thoughts began to coil up like fists, and she rushed to ease them out.

"No! Well...Not entirely." M'gann sighed, and let her memories flow a little more easily. "It's probably easier to show you." Or at least show him part of it. Strange as it felt, a large part of her didn't want to give up those quiet moments between them to someone else.

"He's...Been important to me, for a long time. Ever since I arrived on Earth and joined the team, actually." She let a bolt of warmth pass between them, sweet and slightly painful with how it settled in her chest. "We're...Not together any more, though."

To her relief, L'aonn didn't follow that train of thought any further...Even though he must have felt some of that emotion pushing its way out of her head and drifting between them. Instead, he simply glanced over at Conner, and then back at her, eyes narrowed and thoughtful.

"Oh, right...That reminds me, there was a reason I cam to see you. Here." L'aonn dug something out of the pocket in his shirt, and pressed it into her hands. Blinking, M'gann brought it up to better look at it...But it was the smell, slightly sweet, with a clear, cleansing sharpness to it that gave her the details.

"H'alas?" She blinked up at him in surprise, and saw that gentle light was back in his eyes. "It's been forever since I had any..."

"It's probably not the same as all that Earth food you've been eating...But I figured you might still have a taste for it." She could only nod at that, staring at the treat in her hand. Maybe it wasn't the same as baked desserts or the fruit on Earth...But she found her mouth starting to water anyway.

"I picked one up while I was out running errands, a little before we found you." She could hear a little bit more behind his thoughts; surprise that he'd managed to find one, and for a price that wasn't robbing him. "And..." And she knew he'd originally gotten it for himself; he had just as much of a
taste for it as she did. "I thought that since it's been five years, you might enjoy having something you like, on your first night back."

She was already nodding, before she could catch herself. "Yes, but... I wouldn't want to cheat you out of something-"

"That I can have anytime as long as I'm on Mars, luck permitting. You should enjoy it." He pushed her hand back, leaving her still holding the treat.

"Split it, maybe?" M'gann offered anyway, and felt a quick flash of confusion as he laughed.

"Like I said, M'gann, you're one of a kind. But fine, we can split it." And at his words, the food trembled a little in her hands before a crack ran right down the middle, and it broke into two mostly even halves.

He still took the smaller half before she could stop him, though. Leaving M'gann to nibble her share with a slightly exasperated, slightly amused feeling before soaking up the tangy flavor on her tongue.

-o-o-o-

Conner wasn't exaggerating when he said the beds would be fine. M'gann was smart enough to keep from calling them 'pods,' which helped when it came to sleeping. By the time Conner opened his eyes, he had the impression that he'd spent a good eight or nine hours asleep. The lighting in the room had gone from dimmed to completely off, and he could make out M'gann standing in the doorway, outlined by the lights from outside it, eyes and head downcast.

It was still different, seeing her with all the color leeched out of her skin. Judging by the way she leaned against the doorway, it didn't seem like she enjoyed it. Her eyes were fixed on her hand, and her expression seemed to fall the longer she looked at her skin. Her other hand rested on her elbow, squeezing at it. Something she only did when she was looking for comfort.

He swallowed a lump before it had the chance to form in his throat. How long had it been since he'd seen her do that? Conner thought about speaking to her. Something to help raise her head-

But a different voice beat him to it.

"I'm guessing you're not enjoying being back home." Turning a little in the bed, he could just pick out the speaker. Another pale Martian in the doorway, resting a hand on M'gann's shoulder. "Or that you're getting much in the way of sleep."

"I like seeing the family," M'gann offered, lifting her eyes just enough to look at L'aonn. "All of you are still sweet, and friendly."

"But?" Conner could also pick that out in M'gann's voice, while her brother remarked on it.

"But... That's not the case everywhere else. I feel like I'm suffocating, sometimes."

"That's a problem with everyone else. NOT you." For a moment Conner wondered if he was listening to himself, with how decisive L'aonn's voice was. "Hey... You want to get some fresh air, for a change? It would fix that suffocating problem." Her brother's lips lifted just enough for it to count as a smile. Difficult to pick out in the dim lighting, but still there.

"Is that really a good idea?" He could pick out the excitement in her voice, even with that question, while L'aonn's smile widened.
"There's no law that says we have to stay indoors all day; just stay in the designated areas." And then he switched over to a definite smirk. "And if we cut across a few blocks while no one's looking… Well, who's going to report what they never see?" His hand left her shoulder, giving her wrist a gentle pull instead. Which seemed to convince M'gann that it was time to start moving. "Besides, there's something that I want to show you."

"...I want to come, too." Conner let the words slip out of his mouth as he pushed himself up off the mattress. Across the room M'gann started, just barely jumping in surprise from hearing his voice. He pushed the blanket aside as he swung his feet out from the alcove, looking up at both of them.

"Conner? Didn't know you were up." She wasn't touching her arm any longer, which he guessed was a good thing; he wasn't feeling that stupid weight in his chest from watching her, at least.

"I've been awake for a bit…" He admitted. "But it's not like there's a lot to do. I'm ready for a change of scenery, if you've got room for one more."

L'aonn glanced back at his sister at that, and M'gann gave a very slight nod. "I don't mind; it won't trip your plans up too much, will it?" L'aonn gave him a measuring look, which Superboy met straight on, until M'gann's sibling finally rolled his shoulders in a shrug and gave a nod.

"No, it shouldn't; three don't move much slower then two. Let's just get going now."

-o-o-o-

Conner's strides were a near match for L'aonn, both of them moving with a surprising amount of purpose. L'aonn intent on leading her through several blocks towards someplace, and Conner determined not to be left behind. M'gann found herself floating between them, tying the group together. Her eyes kept glancing between them every time they turned a corner, until L'aonn finally slowed as they ducked between a set of buildings, and into a low and short scoop of a tunnel.

What was waiting for them beyond that was just a tiny cup of carved chamber, barely flared out from the tunnel they were in. But as her eyes ran over it, M'gann started to pick out familiar shapes; that curve of rock that sloped out from the wall and into the ground, that had stood in for a house or a spaceship depending on the mood. Or the sharp slabs sticking up on the other end of the little cavern, for the more risky adventures. Even the soft ground under her feet brought back a wash of memories; how she'd preferred playing on this, because it didn't hurt as much when she took a fall.

"Remember this?" L'aonn's voice was soft, not wanting to break the moment.

"Remember what?" Conner, by contrast, was a little rougher, but he borrowed a cue from both of them and didn't raise his voice. Instead he glanced around as well, his eyes narrowed; not suspicious, but clearly confused.

"This…" M'gann paused next to Conner for a moment, not able to look away from the scenery. "I used this as a playground with my siblings."

M'gann stepped forward and into the cavern in a daze, feeling almost like she was walking on air instead of the gentle sands under foot. "I can't believe this is all still here…" She whispered as she traced her fingers over a sloping bowl of rock. Looking at the tiny half circle opening in the bottom, M'gann had a hard time believing she could ever fit inside it.

"Guess it's not something they care much about developing. I'm kind of glad it's been overlooked, though; there's a lot of good memories here for me."

"The same goes for me…" M'gann paused as she moved through their playground. "I still remember
how exasperated you used to be when I asked you to change into Megan's dad."

"Because I didn't want to be a dad. It was good practice with shape shifting, though." L'aonn rested, half standing and half leaning against the rocks as he looked around. "What I really remember is the last few times we went here...After we found out about J'onn being on Earth as a hero."

"Oh...And how I kept asking you to be J'onn?" She could still remember that fierce desire to live out what she'd heard. The few images on the television they'd seen from the news. And how L'aonn had grumbled a little, but had looked satisfied with himself once he gave in and darkened his skin to green.

"It would've been our necks if anyone saw us shifting to green. But...To be honest, I liked that it gave us a chance to break the rules." L'aonn breathed out slowly. "Although I never would have guessed this would convince you to actually DO any of that. I was terrified when you didn't show up back at the house; I thought you'd been found out, or detained, or something, and it was my fault..."

"L'aonn, I'm sorry-" M'gann stopped as L'aonn held up his hand, and gave a gentle, telepathic shush, stilling some of those heavy and guilty feelings trying to knot up in her heart.

"Don't say you're sorry. I meant what I said, that you're doing a lot of good on Earth. And I hope that you'll be able to get back there WITHOUT mother having to throw her weight around, or dad using his tunnel network." He stood up, and crossed over to rest a hand on her shoulder as he spoke. It was larger then she remembered; her brother had been doing some growing as well.

"But...I kind of hope that you'll be able to do some good for us as long as you're here, too. Even if it's just for a few days."

His words took her by surprise, and M'gann started to try and form some sort of reply, which would hopefully be equal parts affirmative and asking what prompted him to say that. But as that 'what' started to roll off her tongue, M'gann heard something else; not from her, or L'aonn, or even Conner. A sort of low, familiar thrum building in her ears, which she hadn't heard in a few days. But recognized quickly enough after a second of staring.

So did Conner, as he turned and yelled at them both "GET DOWN!" M'gann grabbed L'aonn by the arm and threw herself to the ground, right as a furious roar of an explosion shook the buildings and slammed into her bones. Her ears rang as she tried to reshape them, and her vision swam for the first few blinks as she opened her eyes again.

She picked out a dark shape overhead, blocky and sharp against the dust that was starting to chock the air, and a low, ruddy glow that was bathing the walls of the city. Another heartbeat, and she picked out the dark hair and realized that it was Conner, crouched in front of both of them and acting as a shield.

"M'gann, are you okay?" His voice stayed low and cut through the ringing in her ears. She managed a shaky nod, and then realizing that he was only looking at her out of the corner of his eyes, convinced her lips to move enough for words to come out.

"Y-yeah, I'll be okay. What just-"

"An explosion." L'aonn cut in, pulling himself upright and kneeling beside her. "Close, too; we're lucky we were outside the worst of the blast and shockwave." He guided her up, with a murmured 'on your feet' in her mind.

"About a block down from where we are," Conner turned his attention fully towards the street and
pushed himself up when he saw that M'gann was able to stand. Looking between them, M'gann noticed the surprised blink L'aonn was giving her teammate, and couldn't help but smile.

"Super hearing; it's a specialty of his. Can you pick out anything else?" Conner narrowed his eyes, tilting his head for a moment as he listened.

"...No more explosions, but there's something going on. People are shouting...Sounds like there's a fight." Straining her ears, which were finally starting to work normally, M'gann could make out something similar. High pitched sounds that could have been screams or shouts, echoing through the streets. Conner was already moving forward as he spoke, but paused when L'aonn gave a low hiss.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to help. We should be able to-" He stopped short, frowning as he heard something else...And while M'gann's own hearing still felt muffled, she could pick out what sounded a lot like foot falls on stone.

"Both of you, get back." Conner was already turning on his heel and ducking behind one of the sheafs of rock. A heartbeat later, M'gann and L'aonn joined him.

"Keep quiet," He and L'aonn whispered at almost the same time...And paused long enough to blink at the other in confusion. That was when M'gann picked out the gaunt silhouettes of several Martians running by. They carried themselves like members of the guard; confident, assertive, and knowing how to use the pole arm weapons they carried. M'gann fought to keep herself from shrinking back when she saw a low crackle of energy and wavering heat at the edges of those weapons, held well away from the soldiers. Their voices echoed, loud and commanding, off the rock walls.

"Fire in the northern block! Take a detachment to smother the flames. If you have to drop the entire tunnel on it, then so be it; don't let it spread." M'gann swallowed a gasp; but that did explain the ruddy colors staining the walls. She could faintly remember hearing about something like this before; how during the civil war, concoctions of napalm had been created that could soak into and spread across rock...How that was supposed to be a weapon of last resort, too. That food from last night sat ill in her stomach as she looked at the harsh light flickering over the walls, as the voices rose and the soldiers rushed past their section of tunnel.

"Rioting in several branches of the tunnels, too; all whites, and we're getting calls for more detachments to protect the people-" The voices were already fading as they rushed past the hiding spot.

"We're short handed! But...Take five, and sweep through the area. Meet up with the main unit at the edge of the neighborhood. Don't..." She couldn't catch anymore, the voices blending with the footsteps and low rumble of the attacks. Once they'd completely fallen out of earshot, Conner stood back up. His eyes found M'gann's, and there was a decisive light settling into them.

"M'gann, let's go-"

"Back home." L'aonn cut in, frowning at her teammate. Conner shot him a half angry, half confused look, but L'aonn didn't let that slow his speech. "You heard the guard; there's some sort of riot going on, with a bunch of whites at the front of it. If M'gann or I go out there, whose side do you think they'll decide we're on?"

She could remember those glares they received on the street, that tight angry knot of greens that had almost closed around her and Conner before her brothers had arrived. That had been on a calm market day, but this-
Her skin crawled under that coarse weave of fabric, as Conner blinked, and angrily shook his head.
"So you want me to stand around and do nothing?"

"I want you to think this through." L'aonn's voice was more even, more measured, but to M'gann's
surprise had that same amount of strength…And even anger in his voice. "How are you going to
help anyone if we end up under custody, or facing down an angry mob? And it's not as though you
blend in either, Kryptonian."

Conner bristled at the name, and before he could say anything else, M'gann stepped forward.

"Please, Superboy." M'gann switched into his field name easily, and that at least got him to turn and
look at her. "We'll figure out something to do…But L'aonn is right. We can't come up with a plan
here; we need to regroup."

She didn't know she was holding her breath until Superboy's shoulders sagged forward, and he
transferred his glare to the ground. His growled "…Okay" was just barely audible, but that was
enough for L'aonn to take the lead and guide them away.
Boiling Point

It would have been easier if M'gann and her sibling had asked him to punch through the rock walls. It wouldn't have weighed down on his head nearly as much as turning his back on those screams. At least it seemed to sit heavy on M'gann's shoulders as well, as she stayed unhappily curled and hunched up while she trailed after L'aonn. Once her brother put them on a street instead of the pathway, she barely glanced up, instead keeping her head down and watching her feet skim over the rock.

"Just keep going," L'aonn kept repeating as they moved, which somehow seemed to urge M'gann to shift her feet a little faster. Conner simply satisfied himself by matching his pace with theirs, and trying to focus on that instead of how they were getting further and further from where it felt like they needed to be.

He stayed so focused on keeping the pace and not using his hearing, that he almost ran into both of the aliens once they halted. Over their shoulders, he could pick out another split in the road, and a set of Martians taking up the space on the stones lining the road. It took him a moment to realize that their skin was green…And just what that meant, judging by the looks of anger M'gann and L'aonn were both getting.

"Whites," the lead green spat the word out like a curse, his voice hissing through M'gann's link to Conner's head. Even if he didn't have the translation, Superboy could still hear the venom in his voice…And see that the green was tensing up for a fight, with the others following suit. "You've got a lot of nerve, being here. And you've got a lot to answer for."

"We're not looking for trouble. We just want to be let through-" M'gann started to say, stepping forward to speak. She didn't get far before having to push herself backwards and into the air as the green sprang forward with a roar.

In the back of his mind, Conner thought that she might have been able to dart away from that attack, if she was facing a normal human instead of a shape shifter. But the green lengthened his arms in a heartbeat, as his fingers went from soft to sharp and parted the air with a hiss. When they slashed across her leg it was with a startling amount of smoothness, which made his thoughts halt. Any observations in the far corners of his head went silent as Conner rushed forward with a roar, bulling into the green and tearing him out of that attack. His shoulder checked the other two, knocking them aside in his charge. The green twisted around with a shout that echoed the anger in Conner's voice, bringing that blade of a hand down on him as he tried to part Conner's skin-

The air around them shrieked, and it was like something wrapped around the green to throw him backwards. Conner glimpsed M'gann stretching a hand out as the Martian slammed hard into the building, eyes going wide before rolling back and sliding shut. When he fell limp to the ground, the fight went out of the other two. They scrambled away, and Conner strained after them for a moment, ready to chase. The only thing that stopped him was when he heard M'gann crumbling to the floor, and remembered seeing that cut opening along her leg.

"M'gann-?" His voice was still rough and strained in his ears, wanting to roar instead of speak. He forced the words out anyway. "You okay?"

"I wish I'd been faster," M'gann replied from her place on the ground. "But I should be okay. I knocked him out, at least."

"You've got a lot of fight and stubbornness in you, M'gann." It was only when L'aonn spoke that
Conner remembered he was even there; a part of him wanted to glare at him for not pitching in with the fight. But his teammate managed a brief smile as she listened, even if it was a bit strained around the corners of her lips, and her eyes were still narrowed as she tried to stand.

"You have to be tough, once things get tough." She remarked, lifting her head long enough to look her brother in the eye. Conner thought he could see a glimmer of approval in L'aonn's eyes…Almost like what he'd seen in his father-now-brother's eyes, before.

M'gann wavered before falling back into a kneel. She started to dip her head back down to examine her leg again, but paused halfway and blinked towards her brother.

"What-?" She started to say, before shaking her head. L'aonn said nothing, and Conner managed a confused look of his own at M'gann. "I…I thought I heard you say something. But maybe my ears are still ringing from the explosion."

"Don't worry about it, sis. Things are stressful, but you're holding up pretty well." That approval was still in her brother's eyes, clearer then before…Although for a moment, Conner thought that he could catch a sharp edge to it. He didn't watch for long, though, because a low hiss from M'gann pulled his attention over to her. M'gann's eyes were almost squeezed shut as she ran a hand along her leg. The dull grey weave of her clothing had gone dark and sodden where she put her hands, and he could see the gash in her leg through the tear. Her clothing was already trying to mend itself, and Conner thought he could pick out her skin trying to do the same…But regenerating too slowly for his liking.

"We can't afford to wait around here." L'aonn echoed his thoughts, and Conner simply nodded as he stepped forward and scooped M'gann up before she had time to argue.

"I can help her; just get us out of here, before more of them show up." L'aonn paused enough to give him a nod, before motioning for them to move forward. Conner followed close behind, holding M'gann close to him and trying not to jostle her too much.

"Superboy, you don't have to fuss over me like this." M'gann protested in his arms. "I'll be find in just a second-"

"Once that second comes, I'll let you move on your own. Not before then, though; we have to move." She huffed a little in response, but said nothing. Instead her eyes slid shut, and he could feel her shifting her concentration to mend that gash stretching along her leg. Already, he couldn't feel any new blood against his shirt, which made it easier for him to draw those deep breaths he needed to run.

They didn't need to move far, as L'aonn took them down another narrow, pinched street. Above the closed in buildings, Conner thought he could just make out the wall of the city terrace rising up above them, faint in the gloom.

"Power is cutting out, judging by how dark it is." L'aonn murmured. "But we should be close…There!" He stopped at what looked a lot like a dead end to Conner. Solid rock wall hemmed in by buildings that he might have been able to jump, if he had a running start. L'aonn wasn't looking at the roofs, though, instead craning his head up at that uncarved rock. As he followed L'aonn's gaze, Conner could just pick out a black cut in the wall face above them, just above the roof level.

"That's our way out-?" Conner's words cut out as something echoed off the walls. Faint and muffled at first over the distance…But growing louder fast. Enough that even M'gann stirred and craned her head over his shoulder, showing that she was starting to pick it up, too.

"Someone's coming," she kept her eyes focused behind them, watching their backs. "Not in eyesight
yet...But I don't think we want to be around when they arrive."

"Right. Straight up!" L'aonn's voice stayed low, but with an urgent edge as the noise grew closer. "We need to get to the next terrace if we want to get out of the immediate trouble." With that he launched himself skyward. Conner narrowed his eyes as he watched him float upwards, trying to pick out the distance.

"I can make it, just." He decided, legs tensing before he leapt upwards. Conner kept his eyes fixed to that blotch of black in the rock face above him, the rest of the buildings and cavern streaking past in the corners of his vision. M'gann barely had time to make a startled gasp before they were half a building up and into the air. He let his breath out as the jump carried him and M'gann upwards, measuring it out, knowing from constant trial and error that he'd start to feel gravity pulling at him once his lungs were empty. The entrance loomed close, and he stretched out a hand—

As his breath ran out. Inches from the opening. It may as well have been a mile, as his fingers strained towards the hole and he watched it fall away between his finger tips.

It had been years since he'd fallen like this. Conner stared in disbelief, trying to will his jump to last those few seconds longer, knowing it wouldn't...Feeling something buzzing in the front of his head almost angrily as he started to fall back to the ground. And knowing that the impact was going to at least hurt...When suddenly, things stopped moving. And for the briefest second, he floated as he felt something seize onto him and pull him forward. It wasn't him, though, and realizing that made him thrash for a moment, before he heard a loud "Conner, stop!" from under his chin.

M'gann. Her head was leaning against his shoulder and her eyes tightly shut in concentration, but still speaking. "Just hang on for a second-"

"Why are you doing this?" He growled, twisting free the second that lip of rock came close enough for him to grab onto, and pull himself up. He hugged M'gann against his chest as his feet scrabbled against the rock, giving him a kick to help scale what was left.

"Conner, you were in trouble!" He pulled them inside as she spoke, and she shrugged out of his grip. The camouflage settled back over her, although he could just make out her eyes scowling at him. "What was I supposed to do, leave you to handle things alone?"

"I...Guess not." He admitted. "I just didn't expect that, and lost track of you for a second." He not quite apologized to that distortion in the air. Conner thought he could make out the motion of M'gann nodding her head in acknowledgment as a patch of rocks blurred.

"I'm hoping we get to drop out of sight soon, too." He turned to L'aonn as he spoke, and felt the cloth on his gloves tighten as his hands balled into fists. He could taste a light electric sensation trying to slide out of his head and coat his tongue, and he tried to swallow it enough to growl out those words.

"We can now." L'aonn replied, motioning for Conner to move forward—

...Into another cave. Conner blinked as he half stepped, half fell into the new passage. It was less of a street and more like an actual tunnel, where the floor had been slashed into a long ribbon through the rock.

"Old pathways; to be honest, they're not much other then hollowed out tubes in the mountain...But they work. And they're a good way to get to places without attracting a lot of attention. There's been a lot of whites having to use them lately, with the pressure and climate around here."
Conner nodded, leaning against the wall and forcing himself to take some deep breaths.

There was still a light buzzing settling in at the tips of his fingers, sticking to the roof of his mouth and trying to seep deeper, into his muscles. Conner's response was to squeeze his hands into tighter fists and bite his tongue enough to kill most of the sensation.

"Conner?" M'gann's voice filtered in through the darkness of the tunnels, and even though he could barely make her out, he still turned in the direction of it. "What's-"

"Nothing." He replied, way too shortly, before she had the chance to even ask what was wrong. He forced his voice into something more measured and leveled before speaking again. "Nothing; just had to catch my breath for a second."

And wait for that sensation to leave him, or at least dull enough that he could focus on walking. Still, he swore that his feet felt lighter as they moved down through the tunnels, and there was still a sense of vertigo from that jump trying to cling to the back of his head.

- o - o - o -

They stumbled fast through the door, M'gann feeling the back of her neck burning and trying to escape those sets of imagined eyes watching them from the streets. That might have been why she didn't see the real red set looking at them as they staggered into her family's home, until she bumped up against Conner's shoulder. Looking over him, she saw R'aon staring at them, her gaze fighting between a glare and clouding over with relief.

"Where were you!" Her mother settled for demanding instead. "Didn't you-" she cut the sentence short when she saw M'gann shaking, and her brother putting a protective arm around her shoulders. Conner remained rooted in front of her the whole time.

"...Never mind. It looks like you know all about what's happening. Did anyone see you?"

"No one." L'aonn answered. "I got her back safely, and we didn't bump into anyone; they were all busy with whatever was happening in the main ring hub."

M'gann felt her mouth opening, about to say that wasn't fully true. She could see Conner also turning to look at him...But that all was cut off as R'aon steered them deeper into the cave.

"All of you, stay in here." She ordered as she guided them into a room carved in the far edges of the home. M'gann blinked as she saw a familiar arch opening up in front of them, and wanted to protest being herded into that particular room...But R'aon didn't give her time to argue as she pushed them in. "I'll do what I can, but don't come out until I tell you."

She didn't leave any time to argue, stepping back towards the entrance and leaving the three of them standing in a darkened room. Which at least made all the pink and blue in it slightly less obvious. Although apparently not muted enough that her teammate couldn't pick up on it, looking around with a few surprised blinks.

"What's-" Conner started to ask, before cutting off as he turned his head towards the door. Probably hearing footsteps outside. M'gann found herself wishing that she had sharpened hearing, so she could focus on them too; anything would be better then looking around that room, just then.

Marie Logan's smile was taped up on several of the walls, the pictures clumsily stuck to the rock, but still in place after several years. The globe of Earth was also still carefully balanced on a shelf of rock, and she could pick out the mirror next to it with several more clippings of popular (for the time) clothes on it. Her face couldn't decide whether it wanted to go bright red or smile, and M'gann
wondered why her old room had to also be the furthest space from the entrance.

It was almost a relief when she heard voices in the doorway. She lifted her feet up from the ground, floating as close to the door as possible without being seen by anyone outside of it. In the corner of her eyes, M'gann could pick out Conner and L'aonn also edging forward. They all stayed quiet, listening to the conversation unfolding a room over.

"No one is accusing you of anything." She could hear a new voice speaking, and that alone made a shudder run across her shoulders. That the situation was precarious enough to be using spoken words, instead of mental speech…But it did at least make it easier for the three to listen in.

"Your side of the family has proven to always be an example of what to strive for. But the other side has some bad blood-"

"My husband," R'aon snapped the word out with the force of a slap. "Has never done anything against the law. He's been a better citizen then some pure blooded greens I could name. The same goes for my son, and especially my daughter." M'gann felt her cheeks go pink from the words, and ducked her head as Conner glanced over at her.

"…Your daughter ran away from home, to the best of my knowledge-"

"To help her uncle! I've been listening to her thoughts, and she could never lie to me." Then M'gann could really feel Conner's eyes on her, and half wanted to phase into the wall. Instead, she kept her ears open as her mother continued. "She's done more good then this practice you're trying to instill. This is my family, and my husband and I have the final say in what happens to it."

"We have orders to gather any suspected whites,"

"You can try to take them." R'aon corrected, her voice oddly level considering the harsh tones of the soldiers. "But I can't guarantee any success if you attempt to get through me to arrest my children."

"We aren't arresting anyone. Just detaining them-"

"This isn't up for debate, or semantics." Her mother cut in, a flash of steel in her voice. "And it will only open up for any of that once my husband returns. Not before then."

"He's suspected, and evaded capture…" Another voice offered, more timidly, and R'aon bulled right over them. "He was only in the same area as the attack! That doesn't prove anything!" Her mother's voice snapped with real, palpable anger, while M'gann had to fight to keep her breath steady. And to swallow that little cry trying escaping out between her teeth.

"They went after your father?" Conner whispered, and she could have sworn she felt the very tips of his fingers brushing against hers in the darkness. But when her hand tried to close around them, the touch was gone.

"It…It sounds like it." Even with her efforts, her voice still shook. "If he was in the same area as the attack, that was probably enough to make him a suspect…"

"…And us, by simple fact of being related to him." L'aonn growled, feet starting to scuff at the floor before he caught himself and forced himself to go still as the voices were raised.

"You will-!"

"Take it up with the royal family, if you continue to press the issue. Or remind you why I used to be one of the best in the guards, if you don't leave now. We are done here."
Footsteps, as her mother turned on her heel and strode back into their home. M'gann held her breath, only letting it out when she didn't hear any more steps following and trying to force their way in. Next to her, L'aonn did the same, as R'ao stepped into the doorway.

"That buys you time, at least." She murmured, glancing between M'gann and her brother. "I don't know if I'll be able to scare them off a second time, once they come back." Not 'if' M'gann realized with a jolt. And she could hear the resignation in the other woman's voice.

"You need to get out of here while you can...And off of Mars, once the opportunity presents itself." M'gann started to open her mouth to argue, when she felt a pair of arms wrap around her and pull her close for a moment. "I don't want them to even try arresting you, too. Better if you just vanish, before things get worse." R'ao let her breath out in a low sigh, and whispered "I'm sorry, M'gann," as she stroked her head for a moment before letting her go. "I wish I could do more for you."

"I'll take care of her." L'aonn spoke up. Right as Conner began to say nearly the same thing, and M'gann blinked in surprise at both of them. Her teammate closed his mouth, while L'aonn continued.

"I've got some practice in going unnoticed; I'll try and get her and her teammate to someplace safe, and then to her bio-ship." He nodded as R'ao looked him over, putting a confident, if strained smile on his face. "Leave taking care of her to me; you focus on how to help dad, once he shows up here. If he hasn't been arrested yet, he'll probably come looking for you."

R'ao paused over them, before giving a slow, sad nod.

"Alright...Take the back entrance, and grab what you can on the way out. Less chance of you being spotted. And all of you, please be careful." M'gann had enough time to nod, before L'aonn guided her away, back to the tunnels as Conner fell in pace behind them.

-0-0-0-

"Your mother just happened to have a bag stuffed with rations and medical supplies hanging around?" Conner blinked down at the bundle in his hands, trying to gauge just how much was in it going by just the weight. Enough that he was glad it was him shouldering it, instead of M'gann, or their guide.

"She's always been prepared; she might be retired from field work, but she still keeps things ready, just in case. Old habits die hard, I guess." L'aonn offered as he ran a hand along the tunnel wall.

"No point in leaving it, though. Some of that might come in handy." Superboy gave a slight nod, eyes scanning the layers of folding and twisting rock making up the passage. When L'aonn took them onto a mostly straight section, he found himself moving forward by several steps.

"So...What's the plan?"

"First, I get you and M'gann somewhere safe, where we can lay low. I think it'll still take a few days for her bio-ship to be ready...And hopefully we'll have a plan on how we can get to it." L'aonn's footsteps faltered a little as he spoke, and he cautiously added "circumstances permitting, I also want to see about doing something for our father. I don't like the idea of M'aal on the run for something he didn't do."

"That's his name?" Conner found himself glancing back, and received a quiet nod from both of them. There was a moment where he wanted to point out that maybe they could have helped him if they HAD gone towards the scene of the riot instead of running away...But going from M'gann's downcast eyes and L'aonn's rigid shoulders, they were both thinking something similar.
'You were in a hurry to leave and focus on getting away once M'gann go hurt, too. The thought rumbled around in his head, which he tried to push out. Superboy also pushed forward a little further when that awkward pause stretched out, making L'aonn clear his throat.

"Careful; some sections of the tunnels don't hold up as well as they used to-"

The ground could have been waiting for L'aonn to say that, because as Conner's foot touched the floor, he felt it start to shift and slide out from underneath his boot.

"Conner!" M'gann shouted over the rasp of gravel in his ears, as the bottom of the tunnel dropped out beneath him, and he started to fall down-

And down. He tried to twist around and get some purchase on the rock, but whatever he was falling through twisted at odd angles. All he got for his trouble was a set of bruised knuckles and elbows as he was bashed against the sides.

And he just kept falling. He felt his back dig a few furrows into the rock, until with a lurch everything stopped spinning around him. Superboy managed a deep, slightly bruised breath, noting that he'd apparently found his way into a new tunnel. And, looking up at the shafts above him, he had no idea how to get back up to where he'd been. He pulled himself to his feet with a groan, looking around the sandstone colored corridor he'd been dumped into, and stepping out of the small crater he'd made in the floor.

"Superboy, wasn't it? Can you hear me?" His head snapped around, and he couldn't keep his lips from pulling back to show his teeth in an angry snarl.

"Who the hell gave you permission to get into my head!?" He glared up at where he thought the voice might be coming from, while a mental grumble echoed around in his ears.

"No one. But common sense tells me you should have some directions, before you end up getting lost in the tunnels." Conner glanced around in the dim lighting, noting several branching paths from where he was standing. And that he didn't have much of a notion on where to go.

"…Fine." He grudgingly admitted. "But I don't like other thoughts in my head. How fast can you give me those directions?"

"Swiftly. I have an idea of where you are, and where you should go from here. Listen closely," L'aonn's voice droned out a set of directions, which Conner instantly set to memorizing. He wasn't about to ask for a repeat of them, if he could help it. "That should get you outside somewhere safe, but it will take you outside of my range...And probably M'gann's, too. She IS worried for you."

He wasn't used to hearing L'aonn's voice in his head, but Conner thought he could pick out a small grain of dissatisfaction getting rubbed at his mind in the other man's voice. "And she was hesitating on establishing a link. Still, will you be able to manage?"

"…Yeah." Conner did what he could to make his thoughts a little more level, before adding, "tell her I'll be okay, and to focus on taking care of herself."

A brief sense of 'yes' from L'aonn, and then that presence faded out of his head completely. Conner still found himself staring up at where he'd fallen through, wondering if M'gann was also looking in his direction and worrying about him-

With a frustrated shake, rippling from his shoulders and up to his head, Conner wrenched himself around and turned towards the first passage towards the surface.
"I should have stopped him. Grabbed onto him before he fell." M'gann stared back over her shoulder at the pit behind them. "You're sure we can't-?"

"Sorry, but I'm sure." L'aonn shook his head, still guiding her away and down the tunnel. "The way those passages twist, he could have fallen anywhere. We probably would have ended up getting lost along with him…But like I said. I'm certain he can find his way; I did my best to guide him before he dropped out of my range."

There was a strange buzz to his thoughts as he said that, but M'gann didn't pursue it. What surprised her more was how limited his telepathic range apparently was; she could still get a vague impression of Conner, although that same hesitation that had kept her from grabbing him also muddied her telepathic link. She was debating trying to stretch her mind a little, to get just a slight impression of Conner's mind, when L'aonn gave a quick hiss, and clamped a hand over her shoulder.

"Don't say anything. Don't use your telepathy, either." He whispered as he pulled her forward, into a fork in the tunnels that had opened up. As he motioned for silence, she could just pick out a few footsteps coming up from one of the tunnels.

"A patrol." L'aonn growled. "I don't know what they're doing here, but…"

There was a low hum in the air as she listened, and a strange pressure as L'aonn narrowed his eyes in the direction of the voices. His eyes gleamed green for a scant heartbeat, and he gave a murmured "go left,"

Right as the footsteps suddenly changed, fading away. L'aonn slowly let his breath out, leaning against the cave wall for a moment.

"That was too close. I didn't think we'd have to face any greens down here…But we'd better go now, while they're still convinced they're sticking to their route."

M'gann stared as he pulled her along, before reminding her feet to pick up the pace and walk beside him. "Then, those times they stopped you…"

"When they tried to stop me, is more accurate. I've been getting good at lying. A lot of them don't think a white has the sophistication to cloud minds, anyway…It's not like they even guard against it." L'aonn breathed out slowly, as the sounds of the patrol dropped out entirely. "Come on, let's keep moving before they decide to check again. I know a way through here."

"If Conner were here, he'd be furious." M'gann whispered. "He doesn't always understand when it comes to telepathy…"

"Well, maybe it's a good thing the floor swallowed him when it did." Her brother's voice was almost flat at that remark, while she yanked her head up as though she'd just been stung.

"L'aonn!" Her voice echoed loud off the walls of the passage, making her wince and L'aonn frown.

"Don't get yourself all worked up, M'gann…I wasn't serious." That odd buzz was back in his head as he spoke. She found herself thinking back, to one of the times they'd snuck out to that play spot to practice their shape changing. And how M'aal had given them both a stern look when they came back, asking if they'd been courting any trouble. L'aonn hadn't met his father's gaze when he lied…And the hum in his mind had been similar to what it was now. He didn't have any trouble meeting her eyes just then, though.
"M'gann, don't worry." He ran a hand over her hair again, giving it a gentle ruffle. "I said I'd keep you safe, and I still mean it; there's a place we can hide out until this dies down." His grip on her hand stayed strong, in contrast to the gentle pat he gave her on the head. "You can count on me. Now let's go, before they get the idea to check this stretch of tunnels again."
Chapter Notes

As an advance warning for this chapter, theme wise things take a turn for the darker. People nervous and uncomfortable about abuse, both physical and emotional, deserve an early heads up. The content is probably not beyond what you might see in an episode, but worth noting. With that said, thank you for reading and hope you enjoy.

As L'aonn guided her deeper into the tunnels, light became harder and harder to come by. M'gann shut and opened her eyes, letting the build of her iris change a little with each motion. First blink, she could make out a faint outline of the walls, twisting into a narrow corridor that almost brushed against her shoulders, and forced L'aonn to move at a slight angle so he wouldn't get caught against the rock. Second blink, she could see the floor moving at a slight upwards angle, taking them closer to the surface, and the first ring. Third blink, and she could see a solid rock wall that the corridor went straight into.

"A dead end?" She asked, her voice uncertain as she looked over the wall. It didn't seem like L'aonn would be so confident about getting them lost in a maze of tunnels.

"You already know it isn't." L'aonn shook his head as he looked over the wall, still guiding her forward. "It took some work, getting bio-material down here, but the effort is worth it when it comes to last ditch safety measures." He held out his hand as they approached, and the wall gave a low hum as it rippled and parted. M'gann shut her eyes as a light, low in brightness and intensity but still surprising after so much dark, shone through.

"Come on; it'll be safer once we're inside." His hand gripped at hers as he spoke, helping to guide M'gann over the threshold. The light was still harsh, as she blinked her eyes again to adjust. It only took two to shrink her pupils back down to the right size, and another one to start distinguishing what she'd stepped into.

The rock walls had been pushed, sculpted, and almost torn out from where they were standing, forming a wide, jagged scar of a space. Enough to house her entire family, M'gann realized as her eyes traced over the ceiling…And have room to spare. A muted light leaked down from the fungus and bioluminescent plants that had been carefully grown into folds in the rock; just enough to see by, as M'gann listed off the space and tried to estimate the size. Definitely enough for all of thirty six of them…Perhaps as many as fifty.

And as a rustling sound of feet moving over rock tore her eyes back down, M'gann realized that the space was being used by more then just herself and her brother. For a moment, she wondered if J'aal had also guided more of the family down into this sheltered place. She stretched her thoughts out…But what she picked up wasn't familiar. And in a moment, that light from above helped her pick out the skin colors of who she was looking at. The skin was white; sharp and pale against the red-black walls as the Martian moved towards her and L'aonn. M'gann could see more behind, some standing in a human form while others crouched in their natural shapes.

"We've been waiting for you." The thought whispered into M'gann's mind, low pitched as the white motioned for the wall to close up behind them. "And you've brought another." L'aonn nodded to the white, and gave M'gann's wrist a tag, leading her deeper into the crowd and the room.
"L'aonn, what is this?" M'gann dropped out of telepathy entirely, half afraid that with so many like
her in the room, it would be easy for any of them to pick up the worry and uncertainty clouding up in
her mind. "This doesn't look like a safe house."

She felt a hand resting on her shoulder, the touch gentle and reassuring. "It is a safe place, M'gann." L'aonn also shifted to using spoken whispers. But unlike her, his voice was full of confidence and
certainty. "Not just for our family, but for our entire people." M'gann started at the low growl seeping
into his words, and how that gentle presence on her shoulder transformed into a tight grip, digging
into her skin.

"You've seen what the greens do to us, first hand. It's time for us to get out from under their foot,
M'gann. We're going to make our home safe and welcoming for us again." She could hear sinew
snapping and stretching along with his words, reforming. Extra points of pressure clutched at her
skin as new joints grew into his fingers.

"And now that you're here...It's time to show you how." He dropped back into mental speech, and
M'gann glanced over to see that his throat had distorted, and he hunched over her on long,
matchstick limbs. The claw wrapped around her shoulder gave her a shove, enough force now wired
into his body that M'gann stumbled forward with him.

The crowd was thinner where they moved, flowing around a cut in the rock where the wall met the
floor. L'aonn let go of her as they reached the edge, and stalked forward. Looking past him, M'gann
could pick out another pair of whites, crouched over a third form-

Whose skin drank in the light in a different way from hers, her brother, and the others now crowding
in close. His eyes blazed red as he looked up when L'aonn drew close, bright and angry against his
green skin. L'aonn's face was a sharp contrast, calm as he loomed over the green. The outsider tried
to struggle up, off his knees, and the guards on either side wrenched at his arms while pushing at his
back. M'gann could feel them bending both of their thoughts into his mind, keeping him locked in
that one form. The green still kept struggling against them, and M'gann realized it took both of them
to keep him captive.

Looking at the green, she could pick out bruises on his face. A little hard to distinguish in the dim
light, but still clearly there. From the way they were spread along his head and arms, it looked like
someone had smashed him into a solid rock wall before bringing him there-

Or a building, she felt the realization lurch into her head in a way that made her stomach knot up.
That WAS the same green from before, when they'd fought; somehow he'd been brought down with
them as well.

"L'aonn?" Her thoughts shrieked out as she stared at the green, reaching to her brother for answers.

"Watch." Was the only answer he gave her, not even looking back at her.

-o-o-o-

Five turns after the first fork in the road, Conner reminded himself. He counted them off, alternating
between right and left as L'aonn had instructed. While his hearing wasn't good enough to pick out
the exact change in pitch to tell if there was a change in the shape of the hall, Conner still kept an ear
open and focused on his footsteps anyway. He'd avoided tripping once or twice, thanks to that. The
other, he listened for other noises; other people walking in the tunnels, or the distant possibility that
he'd hear voices.

None of that, though. As far as he could tell, L'aonn was right about this being a deserted stretch of
tunnels. Which was relieving…And unnerving, which Conner could admit to himself. He was ready
to get out of them, and back into the open, even if it was full of green and unfriendly mind readers.

That was the fourth turn. Conner ran a hand over the wall as he took the left fork, feeling just-shy-
this-side-of-warm stone under his hand, while dim lighting from something organic overhead gave
his skin a slightly red tint. The feel of rough stone was the only thing keeping this place from being a
near mirror of the lower levels of Cadmus, something Conner wasn't sure if he was grateful for or
not.

He DID know that he'd be grateful for Wolf or Sphere just then. Some sort of company in the
tunnels, to watch his back. Or a teammate-

'M'gann.' The thought flickered up in his mind before he could stop it, and in response Conner gave
the wall a frustrated smack, hard enough to make the rock under his skin creak and shatter.

His teammate would be fine, Conner reminded himself; she had her brother watching over her, and if
he hurried up and finished these directions, he'd find them both soon enough.

Five turns. With a low sigh, Conner stepped forward-

And found himself faced with another twisting network of tunnels, instead of that exit L'aonn had
promised him.

-o-o-o-

M'gann found herself following L'aonn's command. Her eyes remained fixed forward, darting
between the green and her brother. L'aonn moved with an almost predatory grace forward, keeping
his focus locked on the captive. When he spoke again, his voice hummed through far more minds
then just hers.

"No one will find you here, green. You're cut off from your shape shifting thanks to my comrades,
and we can drown every distress call you try to send out. Be glad we haven't made you suffer
more…As you have information we need. Share it now; to make things easier for you." L'aonn's
voice was level, but there was an undercurrent to it that pushed a shiver past M'gann's skin and into
her hands. She clasped them both in front of her, trying to keep them from shaking as she watched.

"H'ronmeer Ma'alefa'aak, white." The green Martian spat back in a curse, and M'gann could feel
him mentally square against L'aonn, digging his feet and will into place as he glared up. "I don't
know anything!"

'And I wouldn't tell you anything if I did.' M'gann could just hear that thought running as an
undercurrent, not thrown in their faces, and meant more to steel the green. It also seemed to work, as
he swept them all up in his glare, even while the two whites on either side wrenched his head
upright. M'gann flinched as his gaze flickered over her, and her shoulders twitched again as L'aonn
gave her a mental shake.

"Don't let him or ANY of them brow beat you, M'gann." And then his thoughts branched out, and
M'gann found herself stepping forward from that light mental tug, as L'aonn spoke more loudly.

"Your call; but you underestimate us. And your cooperation is not necessary." As the green's mouth
parted in a sneer, L'aonn snapped a clawed hand around his head, fully wrenching him up so they
were staring eye to eye. "I said speaking freely would make things easier for you. Now, talk."

At the last word, M'gann could feel the air ripple as a high pitched hum cut into the air. Familiar
sounding too, she realized as L'aonn's focus bore into the green's mind, pushing against that resolve
with a savage intent…And then tearing past it, as every muscle in the prisoner's neck and face spasmed as he tried to wrench away. L'aonn kept his fingers locked around his head, while the other two whites kept him shoved forward.

"Talk." L'aonn's thoughts hissed through the air, vicious enough that M'gann flinched, even though she wasn't the target of them. Her brother kept his eyes locked on the green, the red in his irises glowing green gave a pained jolt, eyelids twitching as he tried to shut them and block out L'aonn's gaze. His mouth hung open, a low gurgling sound coming from his throat.

"G-Go...Burn in, in-" The green's thoughts were venomous, but didn't have the same bite. They shrieked the same way M'gann had heard a cornered animal struggle and cry out on Earth. L'aonn wrenched past that feeble push against his thoughts, eyes blazing red. His technique was sharper then hers…But still similar, and leaving her with a sick feeling in her stomach as she watched the green go slack and slump forward.

A low mental hum swept through the assembled whites as L'aonn and his escort let go of the prisoner, letting his body fall limply to the floor. M'gann could pick out curiosity and interest buzzing around…But the worry that was worming into her head as she looked at the body belonged only to her.

"He lied poorly." L'aonn addressed the crowd. Those who were still in a humanoid form began to lose that shape, as they all leaned forward, using longer arms to prop themselves up and give them a better height to stream thoughts from. A part of M'gann wanted to join them, as L'aonn gave her a brief glance before sweeping his gaze over the others. The rest of her was busy trying to keep that shiver confined to her hands and from spreading to and through her shoulders. "He overheard plans from the guard. The greens will try and move equipment in closer, to corner off our neighborhoods and push us up against a wall. We strike first, take and use their weapons against them, and deliver a blow to stagger the oppressors!"

There was blood on the ends of his talons, from where her brother had dug his fingers into the green's face. It was starting to leak out from the puncture wounds on the prisoner, pooling on the floor and rippling a little as a dozen feet stamped against the ground, and a low roar swept through the crowd. As M'gann glanced around, she could see those white bodies blurring and shifting into something leaner, more predatory…But it all happened in the corner of her eyes, as her brother moved back towards her. With each step, he melted back into that smaller form he'd guided her with.

"See what we need you for now, M'gann?" His voice had gone back to gentle, and didn't seem to belong in the cavern where the white Martians were slowly coiling up for war. "I could tell the second I found you; you're one of the best telepaths of our generation, and I know you're no slouch when it comes to fighting…Or doing whatever it takes to win for our people." The blood on the floor and his hands looked almost black, and seemed to suck in the light and her attention.

"With you on our side, they won't be able to keep anything from us. It'll only be a matter of time until we sweep over them." L'aonn paused, waiting for her to speak. When she didn't answer, he rested a hand on her shoulder again, running over it gently. "M'gann, you're shaking. What's wrong?"

"This...This isn't right." She whispered to herself, starting to pull away from his grip. Instead, he moved with her, still giving her a worried look of his own.

"What? M'gann, speak up." It made her sick, how he acted like nothing was wrong…How she could still hear the echoes from his method humming around in her mind, familiar and powerful in equal turns.

"This isn't right!" The words slipped out as she stared at him, eye to eye. "L'aonn…You're talking
about killing people that haven't done anything! This isn't…This isn't heroic, or for a greater good—"

"It's for US!" He cut her off, eyes starting to narrow. "We're taking what should have been given to
us, M'gann. If the greens and reds won't treat us as equals, then we'll give back all the punishment
they've thrown at us. EVERYTHING is right about that!"

The fire was back in his eyes, and M'gann forced herself to meet it. And as his words faded, the
blaze slowly died with them. "This is all right, M'gann. We can't keep living like this." Amazing how
he could snap from angry and full of fire back to gentle in a heartbeat. She could still hear the echoes
from his interrogation, though, and she threw that off along with the calmness he was trying to ease
into her mind.

"L-L'aonn..." Her voice wavered, even though she tried to keep it firm and commanding. "Let me
go. I don't want anything to do with this."

"No."

-0-0-0-

'M'gann?"

Nothing. It didn't matter how loudly he tried to broadcast his thoughts; she wasn't picking them up,
wherever she was. That didn't keep him from trying anyway, as he skidded and turned a corner.

Conner gave up counting the turns, or whether he was going right or left. He'd thrown L'aonn's
directions away once he realized they weren't working, pushing them far out of his thoughts. (Or just
what exactly he'd say to her brother once they met up again, although it would probably have a
generous amount of curses.) Instead he settled for a mad dash, not pausing when his shoulder or an
arm clipped a corner as he turned. He kept his eyes stretched wide, looking for a faint hint of light to
tell him if he was getting close to an exit.

Nothing, though.

'M'gann-

"How do you know her?" The thought slipped into his mind, bringing him up short and almost
making his feet slide out from under him. Conner slapped his hand out, felt his fingers break through
stone in order to grab on and keep him upright as his eyes and head snapped around, trying to find
the speaker.

They focused on a lighter shape against the rock, and for a moment he thought L'aonn, before
picking out differences in the face; older, more worn features, and a certain measuring look M'gann's
sibling lacked.

"There's a lot of gentleness in your voice when you speak her name…But I would like to know how
an alien knows my daughter's name, and what you're even doing on Mars."

Conner knew that there was probably a better reaction then just blinking and staring, but nothing
really came to mind. That may have been due to the one thought sticking in his head and tumbling
onto his mouth, though.

"You're M'aal? Her father?" The Martian took a cue from him, and switched to speaking.

"Yes. But you are-"
A hum in his mind, and Conner tried to shut his thoughts back as a presence tried to brush through and pick out information from his thoughts.

"Her teammate." He snapped out. "And don't get digging through my head; I got enough of that from M'gann to last me for years." The words stung in his throat, and made his cheeks want to go red. He hadn't meant for that last bit to tumble out between them…But it at least had the effect of stopping her father.

"I apologize." His voice remained even, polite…And with an odd echo of M'gann whenever she realized she'd messed up. "I didn't realize it was an invasion of privacy. Still, I would like answers." M'aal held up a pale hand as he spoke, motioning for Conner to step forward.

"Perhaps you could give them, while we work on picking a way out of here. I don't want to duck patrols under here longer then I need to."

-o-o-o-

L'aonn wouldn't break eye contact with her, and M'gann found that she couldn't look away from him. His grip stayed heavy on her shoulder, fingers cracking again when they started to shift. As the skin started to pull back from his face, leaving it skeletal again, his gaze only seemed to grow sharper and bore into her mind, along with his telepathy.

"I was hoping you'd listen." His thoughts echoed with a sad, grey tint in her mind...And in those standing nearby, M'gann realized with a horrible start that made her heart start to pound. The others drew away, leaving M'gann and her brother standing in an empty circle of space, and the exit instantly blocked for her by so many gaunt and pale forms. "And listen willingly."

He towered above her now, at full height and his mouth parted to show all of his teeth. "$\text{But if you won't...Then I will make you listen and understand.}"

She didn't get a chance to do more then breathe when a wave of force tore across the thin gap between them, making her breath scream out of her lungs as it smashed into her. The attack was relentless, ripping her free of his grip and threw her down to the ground. M'gann groaned into the rock, feeling her ribs sting as she pushed herself back up. Gravity let go of her long enough for M'gann to tear away from the floor, and she could feel L'aonn's claws rake at the air where her neck had been a breath ago.

She pushed her hands out as he rushed her, leading with his shoulder, and L'aonn snarled as his muscles smashed into a solid wall instead of her skin. He wasn't as strong as Conner, only pushing her back a few feet instead of knocking her off her feet. Her hands still buzzed from the force of the impact, and her edges of her shoes scrapped against the ground as the motion pushed her back down out of the air.

L'aonn was crouching on the ground, quivering as he glared at her. His features looked…Sharper in the dim light of the chamber, and with a start M'gann saw that he was morphing again. His limbs rippled like water, muscles starting to overlap all along his arms and legs, helping to anchor claws that were suddenly growing much larger. His brain sack rippled and contracted as more skin grew over it, before thickening into bone like, overlapping plates, matching the one jutting out of his head.

She couldn't fight him like this, the thought snapped into her mind as L'aonn pushed himself fully upright, claws scrapping at the ground as his spine finished lengthening into something thrashing and blade like, lashing at the floor. Her body was twitching as well, ready to melt into something that could channel her abilities. And give her a fighting chance against the thing showing claws and teeth at her now.
"Better for fighting. Do you really think you can win this?" L’aonn’s thoughts spat through her, and in response M’gann let her skin go fluid. Her muscles all relaxed before stretching out with a low sigh and a hum. Her balance shifted back into the proper place, both mentally and physically. No concentration needed to keep her in one form now, and she shifted all of her focus forward—

Just in time, as L’aonn threw himself at her again. She swung to the side as he shot past, her arms growing out to the right length to catch and spin herself around to face him. She still couldn’t keep from feeling that his teeth and claws somehow looked sharper then hers, but she let her mouth gape open and her hands flex to show them, anyway. L’aonn didn’t pause, and when he turned to look at her it was with a wave of force tearing out of his head and smashing into her. M’gann’s balance spun as she crumpled backwards, long enough for him to close the distance between them.

The crashed together in an angry snarl of limbs and teeth, L’aonn tearing his claws across her skin, which suddenly felt so much thinner then his. Two swipes parting the skin over her ribs were enough to get M’gann to turn her shoulder to him, feeling his third blow screech across a patch of skin that she shifted to hard plate. He still kept his place over her, trying to push her down physically and mentally.

In response, M’gann let herself fall back, before ducking under another blow before it had a chance to connect. L’aonn staggered for a moment off balance... And wide open as she gathered herself up and stood fully upright. Her side burned from the cuts he’d torn through them, but she pushed the hurt out of her head long enough to focus. L’aonn couldn’t turn in time, as M’gann felt a wave of force already curling up in her head and waiting to be let loose on him. She faced L’aonn, saw his claws wet with her blood—

Those same hands that had been ruffling her hair only an hour ago, and telling her that things would be alright—

The muscles in her neck all burned from the sudden motion as she yanked her head to one side, and the attack snapped free from her. A wave of force tore free from her, and clipped him hard enough to shove him around, and snap his arm back. She looked her brother right in the eye for a brief second; saw his eyes widening in shock as the attack went wide and hit the ceiling with a heavy whump that showered them both with dust and flecks of stone. The dust gave his eyes a baleful glow as they narrowed again—

And then pain lanced through her head as something raked down and slammed into her, hard enough to leave M’gann staggering. Her feet fell down from under her as that pain increased, shoving her hard down the to ground. In the corner of her vision, now flickering around the edges, M’gann could make out the shape of a hand, clawed up around her temple... And could slowly trace that up to her brother's arm.

With a snarl, L’aonn threw her completely to the ground, smashing the breath out of her lungs.

"WEAK," his thoughts shrieked in her head, as his claws shifted around and dug into another point along her neck. "You're weak, M'gann; you need to be more ruthless then that, and now I'm going to teach you how."

She could feel his claws pinching, shifting, then piercing straight into points along her mind as they dug in past the thin skin. With another wrench, his claws were anchored straight into her, and M’gann felt a howl rip out of her throat. Her legs kicked out and her body thrashed, almost leaving the ground as she tried to twist free... But L’aonn’s grip never wavered. And then her muscles stopped listening to her, as those pressure points made everything lock up.

"Now," L’aonn hissed, and she could hear his words seeping not just into her thoughts, but through
her entire body. Her muscles burned as she heard him...And began to shift, as if they were clay under someone's hands. "A different form for you, to help you learn."

M'gann screamed at her heart to slow down, her fingers to stop contracting and her muscles to be STILL. But her body wasn't listening to her anymore, only obeying those four points of hurt and pressure digging into her brain.

'Stop-' The thought wheezed out, through that haze of red that was getting pushed through her head and spreading out through her body. She was choking on the dust now coating them both, and her lungs burned as her torso began to shift under L'aonn's direction. Her back muscles contracted and bones howled as her spine began to lengthen and push sharp points out through her skin, and with another yank L'aonn shifted his fingers so they weren't pinched by the plates he was pushing and forming over her neck.

'Stop-' Her teeth were cutting at her tongue as they lengthened, and for a brief second her hands scrabbled against the floor as another set of nerves fired through her skin and turned them into curving claws...And she could feel them turn into a match for what was still pushing commands into her head.

'STOP!' L'aonn didn't pay her any mind, locking the last of those changes into place with a few mental pushes. And no matter how much she tried to shove back, she couldn't get him out of her head-

Until he snapped his talons out from her neck, and left her battered and gasping for air on the floor. She could just get her eyes to follow him as he loomed over her, teeth showing in what looked almost like satisfaction.

"First lesson over." Was the last thing she heard, before all of her gave up and folded away from the pain and exhaustion. M'gann fell into oblivion as those white shapes above her melted into blackness.

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Another turn brought them into a different network. Conner thought that they might have been heading up, but between the conversation that had unfolded, and the twists the passages took, it was hard for him to say for certain.

M'aal's questions had been almost unnervingly direct, even without telepathy. Conner still found himself answering them; that he was the same Kryptonian that had arrived with M'gann (and he had the nauseating hunch that M'aal knew that being Kryptonian was only half true) and that they'd been working together for the past five years...And while M'aal didn't ask what that entailed, Conner was reminded of how the Martian had picked that desperation and softness out of his thoughts when he was calling for M'gann.

That realization was enough to drive him to silence, and take the lead once M'aal took them into a long stretch of tunnel.

"You spend a lot of time in your head." M'aal remarked, voice just audible over their footsteps.

"I have a lot on my mind." Conner knew that his reply was curt, but since they were still lost under several feet of rock, he couldn't bring himself to care. His feet kept scraping against loose scree and dust, adding to an obnoxious ringing noise that seemed intent on working its way into his ears. Added to that nervous buzz trying to knot up in his throat, and he wasn't feeling all that social.
"Clearly." It was also set his teeth on edge, how calm M'gann's father was. The way his voice never rose or lost anything other then a mild, polite tone just added to that, and made his jaw hurt. "Your thoughts are buzzing-"

"Why do you people keep looking into my head!?!" He snapped as his head jerked around to glare at M'aal. He'd been needing to scowl at something, Conner decided as he frowned over his shoulder. "It's not really looking; just overhearing. Your thoughts and emotions are both loud."

"Not encouraging." He grumbled, and tried to find something else to focus on apart from telepaths and his head. "How do you know so much about this stretch, anyway?" To his surprise, that actually got a pause out of M'gann's father, and Conner thought he could hear him carefully considering his answer in the silence that stretched out.

"...I used to travel through these tunnels a lot. Back when I was younger, and considered joining some less then savory movements. Not that much has changed about them, even after all this time." When he looked over his shoulder again, Conner found that his glare had deserted him.

"...You were in a rebellion?" M'aal glanced at the floor, giving a half nod and a rueful shrug.

"Almost was. That was around the time I met R'aon, thank the stars. She steered me away from a dark path that I could have gone down." If anything, his voice dropped lower as he thought back. And Conner found himself glad for the lack of telepathy, since he could easily pick out the affection and almost shame in M'aal's voice. "I hope that the same will happen with my children, if they ever find themselves facing temptation like that."

'Don't know if that'll happen with M'gann. Although I wish it would.' Conner worked on keeping that thought hushed, and hoping her father didn't pick up on it. And it seemed like M'aal was leaving it alone, as he continued.

"Sometimes," M'aal's voice was just at a whisper, and Conner doubted he would have been able to hear it normally. "You need to be reminded that there are people who love you, before you do something reckless and throw yourself into something that will hurt you all."

He couldn't think of anything to say in response to that...But M'aal didn't seem to expect anything. Especially once the Martian moved up a pace, frowning as he looked around.

"Although...This doesn't look all that familiar. I'm worried we might have made a wrong turn-"

Conner had to fight to keep from raising his voice in a furious "WHAT!?!" This wasn't helping him, or M'gann, and knowing that was enough to make him want to put a hole through the wall.

He paused, trying to get his breath again and keeping his pulse from trying to hammer angrily out of control in his head and ears. He needed to keep his thoughts straight, needed to-

To focus. Especially on that sound he could hear faintly through the wall, now that he was leaning up against it. Conner turned his head, putting his ear against the rock; it felt thinner where he was resting his hands and head, and he was sure that he could hear faint, distant voices on the other end.

M'aal started to turn as Conner's hands tensed up against the wall. He thought he could just hear a 'what are you-?' starting to form on his tongue, but Conner pushed that from his head. This might not have been the best plan in the world, but it was better then running around a maze.

He felt the muscles in his back all bunch up at once as he threw himself forwards. The scrape and slam from his boots and shoulder drowned out any protest from M'aal, if there even was time for one.
There was that brief moment of shock that ran through him when he made contact with the rock wall, pressure building along his fist and shoulder as the wall tried to push and hold firm against him.

And as usual, the wall lost before he ran out of energy and strength. He stepped out of the pile of rubble collecting at his feet and pattering at his shoulders, blinking from the sudden change of light-

And at the set of heads turning to look at him, as Conner stepped out into what looked a lot like a busy street. And found himself wondering, as a low psychic hum started to spring up around him, if he going with angry green mind readers really had been a better choice then wandering the tunnels.
In her dreams, they try to take Conner away from her. Long, black-tinted limbs stretch out from shadows cast all over her dreamscape, trying to draw him in as he stands slack and vacant. M’gann screams at Conner to fight them. But her words fall in deaf ears, and his limbs stay weighted down and motionless. When she looks into his thoughts, she can see that ‘red sun’ command tied up in his mind, practically pushing poison through him as it burns an angry, darkened red color.

When she wipes it from his mind, it isn’t with the gentle touch she should be using, M’gann knows. She dimly has an idea on how it’s supposed to be; easing it out of his head with his help, smoothing over the rough areas until his mind is calmed and healed over.

But he's leaving her, and she doesn’t have TIME to be gentle. She rips the command out of his mind the same way she tears apart Mister Twister, angry and brutal as she focuses on sheering that hated lump of thought out of his head. She'll mend it later, she promises herself.

But then Conner looks up, as motion and thought flows back into him, and the anger and hurt on his face makes her freeze up. She thinks she catches a flash of white stuck to the skin of her hands, and bites down on a knot of hate trying to curl into her chest.

He's still moving away from her. His back turning to her, leaving her behind…She can see that anger curled up in a tight ball in his head, so close to the surface it would be easy to wipe it away, just like that command.

'It's close enough to being the same thing.' She tells herself, while a low, grating buzz runs through her head, a near mirror for how L’aonn sounds when he lies-

L’aonn-

"L’aonn!" The name didn't make the transit from her mind to her mouth, as she burst into the waking world. It got caught somewhere in those distorted vocal chords twisted up in her throat, coming out as a snarl that could also just pass for a hiss.

The floor was hard against her face, and every inch of skin resting against it felt like a day old bruise. Sore, worn out…And not listening to her as she tried to push herself upright. Her muscles remained locked up, unable to do anything more then twitch as her eyes jolted open.

Her throat barely opened enough to let a low moan slip out between her teeth, echoing around in that massive gullet that had been shoved into her neck. By the time it came out of her mouth, it sounded less like something human and more like a hurt animal.

She was more like an animal then anything else just then, M’gann realized as feeling started to wind back through all of her limbs. Claws, fangs, armored skin, a tail that all lay limp and battered against the stone floor. When her eyes rolled, she could catch glimpses of what L’aonn had pushed her body into.

And she hated it.

"You'll thank me for this, once you come to your senses." Her eyes darted over, seeing the shape of her brother kneeling over her. He was back in a humanoid shape, and frowning down at her. "You know…This didn't start as my revolution. I just joined up as a soldier, and ended up climbing through the ranks. Maybe like you did on Earth…But I found out pretty quickly that I had the talent to go further, especially when we took some losses thanks to the greens. I'll bet the same is true for
"L'aonn!" Her thoughts worked, even though her throat didn't want to. She made up for the lack of speech by howling at him through their mind link. "Let me go! I don't want anything to do with this or you, or...Or..." Hate was pounding through her, and she wanted to do nothing more then break through his thoughts and wrench control away from him, back into her own hands.

But there was a moment, as L'aonn sighed down at her, where that emotion paused. And M'gann could actually hear those thoughts echoing in her head...And just how much rage was burning through her.

"It's not like I had to alter much, M'gann." L'aonn shook his head as he crouched down. "You just needed an outlet for all that anger and energy building up in you, and I gave your body and thoughts a nudge in the right direction--"

"You tore through my head, L'aonn!" Her breath came out in a snarl, hissing through her teeth as she tried to snap at the air. "You picked through my thoughts, and made me-"

"You think we're not alike?" He cut straight into her sentence, not letting her finish. "Haven't you been tearing information out of people's heads? Granted...Your technique is a little different from mine, but neither of us can argue with the results." She couldn't keep alarm from rolling off of her, and his mouth twisted into a deeper frown as it washed over him.

"M'gann, you've got an amazing amount of talent...But you're rusty at shielding your thoughts from another telepath. Your dreams have been loud, too; it's been easy to skim through them, and learn what I needed to." He rested a hand on her head, and her skin wanted to crawl and bunch up; it didn't listen to her, though, and her commands couldn't get through the block L'aonn had shoved between her mind and her body. It was deceptively strong, even though his voice was still level.

"I know the lengths you'll go to save what you care about. A mind or two you have to destroy along the way doesn't matter, compared to what's important. Same with a few worthless green lives." Her skin stayed still under his fingers, as L'aonn traced his hand along the ridges he'd pushed into her head with the same gentleness he'd used when he ruffled her hair or patted her on the shoulder. She wanted to bristle, but could only push that sensation into her thoughts.

"Y-you're talking about killing people..." She trailed off as his eyes blazed.

"You can't think of them as people, M'gann. They sit around and let us get beaten, brutalized...They aren't even victims. They're evil for what they do. For what they allow." For a moment she swore she heard her own voice, bitter and determined.

"We're helping OUR people, M'gann. You can't get caught up in little details like some blood we have to spill to make things better." The fire in his eyes died down as he watched her, and listened to how she tried to pull her thoughts away from his. "I was going to apologize, once I was sure you'd see things my way. But now it seems like I was right to do everything; you're going to need more time and convincing--"

"L'aonn." A new voice cut in. "We're ready...But what about your sister?"

"I wish I had that time," L'aonn replied, talking to both of them. "But we're going to have to rush things." His hand ran across her face, until it was resting square on her forehead. "And right now, I need you to fight."

The last word snapped through the air and burrowed into her head like a hot shard of steel. The hold
on her body started to let go, but that order stayed rooted in her head. M'gann wanted to tear herself away, get far, far away from her brother, but the pull on her psyche stayed strong, and she couldn't flee or lash against him anymore then dig through the rock surrounding them.

L'aonn stood away from her, his form rippling for a moment until he was back in that shape full of sharp edges. A match for how he was pushing her mind into something furious and savage…But still tied to his and held under his mental grip. Feeling like a puppet on a string, M'gann's arms yanked herself upright while her legs pushed her forward and followed him into the tunnels.

-o-o-o-

At least this section of the city town didn't have a high concentration of guards. Although judging from the stir in the crowd, some were fast on their way towards him. Others, women and children judging by their smaller frames, were moving away in nervous, not-taking-their-eyes-off-of-him darting motions.

His fingers bit into his palms, but Conner still forced his thoughts into something more fluid and 'loud' like M'aal was describing. And then cast them out to the Martian behind him while he kept his eyes on the crowd ahead.

"M'aal?"

"Still here." Came the reply, sounding strangely hushed and muffled in his head. "Once you knocked down that wall, I switched into camouflage, and did my best to mute my thoughts."

"Seems to be working." Conner shifted under all those stares, still all directed at him instead of the white hiding behind him.

"Yes…But I would be much obliged if you could create a diversion, and keep them from noticing me." Superboy felt his head twitch up and down in a very slight nod, as his lungs expanded for one last deep breath before things dove straight into chaotic. This really hadn't been the best idea, looking back on it. No one had opted to try mind blasting him yet, but judging by how some of the crowd were edging away from him, and those who were standing their ground started tensing up, Conner had to wonder if the possibility was starting to occur to some of them.

He decided not to give them a chance to settle on it, and rushed forward. THAT got the reaction he was hoping for, as even the greens standing their ground stepped back for a moment, and gave Conner just enough time to build up his momentum, throw his shoulders forward and his weight upwards as his feet pushed off the ground.

Then he was airborne, at least for a second. It wasn't the same as flying; leaping things in a single bound was never the same as flying, but it at least was getting him into the air, and hopefully away from any angry fire-psionic-blasts-first-and-ask-questions-later Martians. All while still keeping their focus on him, and not the alien who, if he was anything like M'gann, would probably be using the attention on Conner to quietly slip away.

"Exactly. And it seems to be going well." His eyebrows scrunched together at the voice, but he didn't snap at it.

"Good: I can probably keep them on me for a few minutes at least, before I need to find a place to drop out of sight." Conner was also glad to see that he'd judged the height of the ceiling correctly; high up and cavernous, and he ran out of momentum long before he was at risk of smashing into the rock. That building he'd set his sights on was also coming in, just at range, and he straightened his legs up. When his feet hit it, it was still with enough of a shake that he knew he'd just painted a large
"I'M HERE" sign for whoever was inside.

Not that he planned on staying around. Superboy pitched forward again, running along the roof and giving a brief mental thanks that the whoever had carved the buildings hadn't been too generous with the space between them.

"You're falling out of range. Going to-"

It was almost like hearing static on a radio, how those thoughts flickered out.

"Find R'aon. But be care-" And that was it. The presence cut out…But hopefully it meant M'aal was safely out of the way.

Now he just had to figure out where M'gann was, and L'aonn.

And stay out of the grip of any authorities or people angry about that hole in the wall. Or who remembered him being with whites the day before.

All told, not the worst assignment he'd been given, even if it was a frustrating one.

-0-0-0-

They ran close together; all around her she could make out lithe, pale bodies and the glow of bright red eyes. She knew that she was a match for it as well, pulled along by L'aonn's control and eyes blazing the same as the rest of them.

There was a spark pushed and wrapped into her chest along with L'aonn's commands. It made her thoughts almost burn, and her blood sing as the hearts he'd split and molded between her lungs beat a frantic pace of hurry, hurry. Every muscle that wasn't in motion twisted and writhed, trying to push past her skin, while her legs and arms lashed the ground with each step, throwing her forward. And even that didn't feel fast enough, no matter how her breath rasped out through those shark like teeth.

There were a few pale outlines that darted ahead of the main group, and she wanted to do nothing more then increase her pace to join them. Only the mental wire between M'gann and her brother kept her in place, and caused her breath to take on a frustrated growl.

L'aonn was the same; she could hear him close by, running in the same rhythm as her. She couldn't tell where his frenzied need to get to the first ring ended, and her desperate need to run began. Ever since they left the chamber and plunged into dimness, that haze from his command wrapped through all of her. Staying still was unthinkable, and even running with the others barely felt like enough to satisfy either of them. There was a flicker of fire running through their minds, and the others too, she could just sense.

L'aonn did his best to fan it as well, and when he stopped M'gann felt him struggling to clamp down and halt the rest of them. M'gann's body fought him the same it fought that tiny, still rational part of her thoughts; the ones that didn't want to be with him, didn't want to be here…But also didn't have any say in it. And were being smothered by the desire to fight, which stayed rooted at the front of her mind. It urged her to move past that mental command to stop, and she started to brush past L'aonn.

His answer to that was snaking a claw out and snagging at her feet. The tunnel ceiling pitched up as she stumbled and snaked her head back around to snap at his hand…But she found herself meeting him eye to eye instead.

"Be still." He growled into her head, and it felt like that haze was pulled out of her head for a moment, lifting just enough to give her a chance to think, and almost speak to him.
"L'aonn-" But that was as far as she got, before his thoughts bulled over hers and stretched through the entire group. And with a low hiss, L'aonn sent another command forward. Not just through the ranks, but out, to those that had moved ahead during the march.

"We're in place. Begin the attack."

The tunnel seemed to pitch under her feet at the end of his command, and a low, muffled boom tried to push through all the rock surrounding them. Another explosion, M'gann knew, and it pushed them all to move faster, clawing their way up towards the streets while L'aonn urged them on.

"We don't know fear; that's for THEM to feel. We're here to strike a blow for our people. If they try to fight you, show no mercy."

A low hum traveled through them, orders slipping into their minds. She could hear those near her breathing faster, and she couldn't slow her heart or kept it from hammering as her breath came out in fast, almost growling gasps.

"Now…Go."

-o-o-o-

The roof line here was a lot more complicated then the district M'gann's family was in. Less like cinder blocks and more like sculpted spires and plates. Another glance up at the ceiling pointed out that he must have picked his way up to the first ring, given how much closer it was then before. The stretch of city was harder to navigate, but still with plenty of room to land and jump from. He was in mid leap between one of the buildings and something that almost looked like a squat ziggurat, when the situation suddenly got a lot more complicated.

The first warning he had was when a low, roaring sound started building in his ears. A second later, a change rippled through the air that made his skin start to itch a few steps short of blistering. That was when the building below him stopped being solid, and decided instead that this was an excellent time to erupt into a ball of smoke and fire, throwing fist and Sphere sized chunks of rock into the air. One of them shot past his head with an angry whirr, and he had to twist, awkwardly, out of the way in midair…Which was when the shockwave of the blast caught up with the debris, and he stopped falling towards the ground and was instead thrown back up, into the air.

He might have blacked out for a second there, because the next thing Superboy was aware of was how there were several shards of glass trying futilely to dig into his skin. And as he blinked his eyes, he could make out a vaguely Superboy shaped hole in a window above him. The air inside wherever he'd been thrown was surprisingly still-

‘Inside?’ He pulled himself upright with a groan, brushing the glass off as he worked his way up to his feet. Some bruises from what he could feel, but that was it. And wherever he was…It didn't look occupied, at least. Which gave him time to get over to the window, and look back out.

He could practically trace where he'd been thrown, from the trail of smoke now rising from the ruins of the building. And-

Fire. Sticking to the carved buildings like globs of napalm, and pushing more smoke into the air. He didn't need super hearing to pick out the screams from below, as people ran for cover or cried for help.

He gripped the window sill with a hand, and vaulted over and downward, into the city. M'gann and her brother would have to wait, for the moment; maybe this wasn't Earth, and he was an outsider, but
trouble and stopping that trouble in its tracks looked pretty uniform, at least from where he'd been standing.

Conner threw himself forward again towards the smoke and cries, already scanning for the source of those screams. And in the back of his head, although a part of him cringed from the idea, he also kept a portion of his thoughts open and listening. And with any luck, M'gann would hear him before someone got the bright idea to force their way into his head.

-o-o-o-

Her head was a roil of anger, both boiling up around the thought her brother had pushed into place, and flowing into her mind from all those around her. It pushed her forward, not even balking when she had to shut her eyes against the sudden bright fissure in front of them. The cool feel of the tunnel air on her skin was leech out by fire and super heated air as the tunnels opened up and pushed them out into the streets. Above, she could just make out the shapes of spires, twisting and elegant… All things she associated more with the greens then anything else-

Who were pushing towards them now. She could see them, somehow less tall and imposing then she remembered. The smoke made them cough and stagger, and more of them were laying on the ground, moaning from the first attack.

A blur of white in front of her, and she could see her brother leading the attack as he threw himself at the greens. He slashed down at one, spun to sweep the legs out from another, before folding into a crouch and springing on a third. She was carried forward by the rest of the whites around her, right into the seething knot of claws and scoured skin.

Right next to her brother, and the people he was doing his best to tear open.

"You fight or you die, M'gann. And I want you to fight!" He showed teeth at the green squirming on the points of his talons, and then threw the soldier at her. She could hear the scream, impossibly loud in her head as he yanked his claws out-

And then a harsh pain spreading across her shoulder as the green slammed into her, already trying to bring his weapon up. It wasn't conscious action that she did then…Just pure reflexes as her arm shot out, fingers spread and tore two long rents across his face. He screamed as blood ran into his eyes, falling back. A blur of motion in the corner of her eye, and M'gann turned and caught another trying to attack her with a vicious backhand. Her claws found his throat, wrapped around it, and she threw him down onto the street as well.

"Better. You've got strength in you," She didn't have time to see what would happen to them, as L'aonn yanked her forward, deeper into the churning mob. She had no choice but to follow, as that hidden line between them went tight and she stumbled after him. Her arms felt heavy from what she'd done, and M'gann hunched forward. "You'll become a fighter for the cause, yet."

"I'm not a killer," her voice sounded impossibly hushed and muffled, even in her own mind. The words crept out slowly, while the rest of her was a blur of violence that made the hushed part of her sick. If she could have changed back into her human form, she would have. If she could have even cloaked herself and pulled away from everything here, she'd have done so without hesitation.

Instead, she felt the plates on her back bristle, as her brother and she both lashed at another pair of green that had sprung up out of the smoke. They crumbled as well, one torn up by L'aonn's talons, the other hamstringed when she lashed out with her feet and tail.

"No. You just leave what you fight almost dead anyway. M'gann, stop lying to yourself and stand
UP. Stop acting weak when you don't have to be," L'aonn was further ahead now, but still forcing
her along with the rest of the whites. "You're my sister. You're strong."

"I'm a-" She started to hiss that protest, which blared louder then before through her thoughts, when
something else cut through the blood and smoke.

"M'gann?" It wasn't L'aonn's voice, either, and the name was doing its best to sink in past his
thoughts, and reach the rest of her.

-o-o-o-

The smoke stung his eyes as he dropped through it, made his breath want to come out raspy and
coughing. Instead, Superboy kept his eyes squinted almost shut and his breath shallow as he dropped
through the haze. Blinked anytime his eyes tried to water up, and kept his focus on the black cloud
he was cutting past. Waiting for it to part-

When it did, the ground and building walls were both a LOT closer then he would have guessed. His
feet shook for a second from the impact as they formed a new crater on the ground, another dent to
go with the others that had been torn and blasted into the street.

He heard the screams before he saw the people scattered on the ground, half in and half out of the
rubble. Off to his left was a cluster of broken building, mostly caved in on itself. He could see the
stones quivering, and picked out a green form underneath as someone tried to keep the rocks from
crushing whoever was underneath them completely.

They were hurt, crying for help. There was also a low hum in the air, different from the roar of the
fire or explosions; mental distress calls that were just on edges of his senses, most likely.

Well, maybe they weren't meant for him, but he was going to respond to them anyway. He rushed
over, dug his fingers into the rock tight enough that his nails dug furrows in the stone, and heaved. It
came free with a crackling of stone and sand, as he dropped it to one side. A pause, long enough to
catch his breath and make sure those underneath weren't trapped by anything else. When he looked
up, Conner found himself facing another green was hobbling towards him, favoring one less gashed
up leg over the other. Those red eyes were darting between that rock he'd just tossed aside, and then
over his Caucasian but not bone white skin with no small amount of confusion and bewilderment.

Conner's response was to unsling that bag of supplies from his back, and throw it at the Martian's
feet.

"You can probably use those better then I can." He had no idea if the Martian could speak English,
or hear over the roughness of his voice...But at least when the bag spilled the supplies onto the
ground, that was understood.

He left them and sprinted towards the next spot he'd seen someone down-

Had seen someone down. Conner blinked at the two shapes that had suddenly shown up, charging
out of the smoke and circling around the prone Martian he'd spotted.

They were pale, gaunt white shapes; he'd seen something like them once or twice before, long before
coming to Mars. For a moment he wondered if he was looking at M'gann...And then he picked out
that there was more then one standing around the bodies. And that they were pulling someone out of
the wreckage...Not by the shoulders, but by the neck. Those were claws at the ends of their hands,
too; not like the long, agile fingers he'd seen on M'gann. And they were closing tight around the
green's windpipe. Those red eyes were fixed hard on the form choking and thrashing under its claws-
Not on him. Not even when he left the ground in a low jump, pitching him over the ground and slamming shoulder first into the alien before it had the chance to turn. They both went crashing headlong into the building, the wall almost caving in as Conner threw his weight into it. The white went slack from the blow, and the other was slow to react.

It gave him time to weave to the side, just away from those claws and punch again, catching the other Martian across the jaw. Two blows, and two out. He let his breath out, looking down at the green at his feet, who was now trying to stagger upright and staring around…But still breathing. And not in danger of dying.

He didn't wait for the green, or the others approaching from the cleared area, to see him. The smoke was thick in the air, so he didn't leap into it, instead running along on the ground level, eyes and ears both open.

'M'gann?' He found himself trying again, grasping for even a flicker of her thoughts. 'Where are you?'

His sight was getting yanked everywhere as he ran. Looking at gaps in the buildings, shattered windows, narrow and wide street ways, and constantly trying to find a familiar face as he kept searching for her. He kept his focus on that-

And didn't notice the group of whites until it was almost too late. His hand snapped out and gripped a wall to slow him down, yanking Superboy back as his run was cut short. He dropped into a crouch as he stumbled, letting go and bracing his hands against the street…And watching over another pile of rubble at the group.

They were also on the move, turning into a side street just a few yards ahead of him. And they moved with a certain, vicious amount of purpose that Superboy had only ever seen in something determined to wreck everything between it and its end point.

There was a brief flicker in his head again as he watched them, and without thinking Conner cast his thoughts out again. "M'gann!"

And as he did, one of the forerunners in the group froze, swinging its head around right to where he was hiding. The white stared at him, its gaze piercing all the smoke and dust to find his eyes, and pausing when they met eye to eye before stumbling forward. But it still didn't look away from him.

Something was scratching at his thoughts, scrabbling to be noticed as he watched the white Martian, and it only took one sharp intake of breath to realize there was something familiar about it.

"Conner?"

Her touch was desperate, like someone scrambling to hold on and keep from drowning. And it was M'gann's presence, Conner knew that in an instant; the way he heard his name, the soft quality that was still buried underneath that harsh fear and brittle edge…All of that was unmistakably hers. And it was all trying to find purchase in their link, dusty and disused as it was. He didn't even pause to consider or second guess, instead opening his thoughts up to her and trying to grab onto M'gann before she fell away again.

-o-o-o-

It was him. Faint, and she wished she could shift her eyes that tiny bit more to make him out completely through the smoke, but there was no mistaking his thoughts. She strained towards that voice in her head, trying to focus on it, not wanting to move any further from him as her feet slowed-
And stopped.

She was standing still, M'gann realized. Staying in place, focusing on Conner, and not following her brother's commands. Ahead, L'aonn noticed as she fell back. His eyes were red slits in his face as he turned to stare at her.

"What are you doing?" She didn't answer, even though his hooks twisted a little deeper into her. M'gann forced her focus away from them, instead reaching towards those blue eyes that were still watching her through the haze. Focusing on them, and that faint, tips-of-the-fingers touch she could feel in her thoughts. And as she turned her focus on that, felt Conner opening up the link between them, the grip L'aonn had on her didn't feel as all consuming anymore. And not absolute when it came to obeying.

"M'gann!" L'aonn's voice snapped in her head, and she flinched for a moment before shrugging away from it again. "You'll listen to me."

"You're not the only one in my head." There was a jolt of pride that went through her, as she could feel her brother's presence stagger for a moment when she talked back. "And not the only one I have to listen to now."

She gave a harsh twist, and felt his grip rip out in a way that left her head feeling like it had just been split open. M'gann clutched at her skull with her claws as pain burned through it. Harsh, searing… But also the only thing left from her brother's grip in her head.

That shape she'd been molded into fell away, streaming off of her like mist as her hands and face lost their sharpness and began to soften out. Her breath came out in a ragged wheeze as her lungs were finally freed up, and M'gann dropped to her knees when her legs snapped into something more human-like. When her hands touched the floor, it was with five fingers instead of two, with enough skin and nerve endings on them to feel the stone under her palms.

L'aonn's eyes were waiting to find hers, when she looked up. He was bulling through the soldiers, all milling around in confusion from the sudden pause in their charge. The red in his pupils was practically blazing in the dim, clouded light, catching a few stray flickers of fire. He looked like he was going to leap the rest of the way to reach her, when something flashed out of the smoke in a pale green blur, lashing at him. It took M'gann time to focus her eyes on it, and pick out that there was a green going toe to toe with her brother. More, cutting into the flanks of his force with those pole arms.

Between that and the murderous look her brother had been giving her, M'gann started urging her arms and legs to pull her back to her feet. She got as far as her shifting off her knees when the air around her snapped to hot and scalding, driving her back down to the ground. A second later, her lip split open as something crashed into her face. Stars swam in her vision, and it took several desperate blinks before M'gann could make out the green standing over her, and being joined by several more. All glaring down at her.

"MONSTER!" A voice screamed in her ear. "My child is-" Another blow caught her across the face, and M'gann crashed to the street with her ears ringing. The voices were muffled in her ears, but words still managed to claw their way through the noise.

"Where's my wife-"

"You killed him! I saw freaks tear him open!"

'That wasn't me,' she wanted to say. But the words weren't forming in her tongue, and her mind
suddenly focused away from talking and on that long metallic pole being leveled on her by a furious eyed green. When it jammed into her shoulder, hideously hot and scalding as it bit into her skin, and all she could do was scream. She wanted to thrash, but her limbs felt like lead as that hot poison was pumped into her veins. M'gann could hear her brother howling in rage, followed by a harsh metallic crack as something broke. When her head listed to the side, she saw him standing over a shattered weapon and another broken green, a hand clamped over his shoulder.

He was still moving towards her, although his run had dropped to a stagger. His teeth were still all bared, shown at both her and the greens being fought off.

"DAMN YOU!" His voice crackled across her mind, furious and trying to find a grip. "Why did you fight it!? Because of you-" just as quickly his presence melted out of her mind, in the face of all that heat.

But he was still moving towards her, and at the edges of her thoughts M'gann thought she could taste rage, hot and burning the back of her brother's throat the same way she was tasting blood in her mouth. And at the edge of it, she thought there was almost something like…Fear, as he slashed at one of the greens flanking her.

"Get away from her!" He snarled out, and she found herself feverishly wondering if she wanted to be caught by the greens, or by him instead.

"M'gann!" A new voice cut in, as a black and pale figure cut in past the ranks and smashed straight into the green pining her down. The weapon was ripped out of her shoulder, and M'gann sobbed for breath as her vision blurred and focused. There was already a pair of hands grabbing her by the sides and pulling her up, and a second later she could pick out a pair of blue eyes staring at her.

Conner's hands were tight around her shoulders as he lifted her up, and M'gann tried valiantly to stand on her own feet. She had to settle for one foot and Superboy's shoulder instead.

"I'm-" she gritted her teeth as Conner wove an arm under her shoulders, jostling her for a moment. "…Not okay." She forced herself to admit.

"Just hang on." He replied, a second before she could feel his legs bunching up underneath her. That gave her a single, precious second to tense up, before he flung them forward and up in a leap. Over the wind howling in her ears, and blood pounding in a valiant attempt to drown it out, she could barely hear Conner muttering something in her ear.

"That white is yelling something,"

"I can hear him," she whispered, hearing the edges of his thoughts blaring through her head.

"We're done here; pull back and cover our tracks!"

"How is L'aonn going to manage a retreat," M'gann gasped, right as Conner stared at her and managed "That's your brother?" a second before they hit the ground. Looking up, she could make out a few outlines of white…Running away from them, she realized.

Rock crackled underneath their feet, and she could hear it echoing as some stray pebbles rolled off the edge and fell into the drop off below them. "Didn't think we were that close to the city edge," she murmured, her words sounding slurred and feeling heavy on her tongue.

"M'gann?" Conner grunted, looking around. "I'm hearing something beeping. That doesn't sound like a good-"
That was as far as he got, when there was a familiar and unwelcome flash of light and low rumble. Explosions, which M'gann belatedly realized would do a wonderful job of providing a diversion for L'aonn. And which were tearing away at the ledge they were standing on.

The ground shook, and she could even feel the tremors through Superboy as it started to break up underneath them. The rock went from solid to slack underneath her, with a dying groan of earth and slate breaking apart. She felt the floor slip away from her feet, leaving them in empty air as they both fell over the side and into the void.
As he watched the buildings and edge of the city pull away from them, Conner had a pretty clear idea on what was supposed to happen next. The usual strategy was that M'gann would focus on getting them both to levitate, get them away from the immediate trouble, and find some space to regroup. The idea of her using telekinesis on him made his hands bunch up for a second, but he knew it was necessary to keep either of them from ending up as a collection of broken bones on the ground.

Which was why he felt a real stab of alarm when M'gann's hold didn't wrap around them like it usually did. They slowed for a moment, *almost* paused in the air…And then she gave a pained groan, and that floating sensation started to leech out of them. Her eyes were glazed over, her pupils trying and failing to focus on what was going on around her.

"I…" M'gann's voice was thin and fading, the same as her hold on their weight. He could feel gravity slipping in, past and between her focus and loosening her psychic grip. They weren't floating anymore, instead tumbling into a fall that halted and slowed in jerks and starts. M'gann gasped again, screwing her eyes shut in concentration, and he could feel all of her shake as her hands dug into his shoulders—

Before suddenly going slack, and they dropped straight out of the air. Conner twisted as he heard the wind start to roar in his ears, grabbing and holding M'gann tight as they plummeted.

"M'gann, hold on," he kept it so his back was to the fast approaching ground of the second ring, doing his best to cushion her…Even though he knew, as he felt the pull increase, that it wouldn't matter much once they struck the rocks. "Please, just hold on…” he whispered in her ear as he tried, tried to find that spark that had slowed their fall and rekindle it. Do *something* to pull her out of that pain coma she was slipping into, and help her get that concentration back. He wouldn't let either of them die; not like this.

"I'll protect you, somehow—" the thought and promise cut out as he felt something slip into his head. A light, almost weightless feeling that snapped into place, that he could just register in his forehead and his stomach. And at the edges of it, that familiar electric crackle that had constantly tried to soak into him. Instead of pushing it aside, Conner latched onto that the same way he held onto M'gann, as it sparked and flared up through him.

That was when the wind stopped trying to twist his hair into knots, and his stomach did a strange loop as the pull on them just…Stopped. M'gann's weight briefly pushed into his chest before he gathered her up in his arms, looking around. The city ledge wasn't blurring past them anymore, and the buildings below weren't racing up to meet them. They weren't falling.

They were *flying*.

Well, technically floating. But it still counted. And they weren't in imminent danger of getting smashed into the ground. M'gann stayed unconscious against him, her half of the link gone silent. All that weightlessness, feeling gravity suddenly slip off of him…That was all coming from *him*, Conner realized.

He probably looked like an idiot with how he was staring, and that weird half stunned, half euphoric look that was settling over his face. He couldn't bring himself to care about that, though. Not when he could kick off against the air, and leave the smoke and fighting behind. No way anyone could catch them now—
Unless they decided to levitate, Conner remembered, and changed the angle of his flight so they were heading back down, towards the ground. Past the second ring and well away from the chaos on the first. He dove, letting up a little on that weightless feeling rushing through him (which was weird to feel without any anger or drugs hammering in his bloodstream, or patches sinking into his skin) and took them straight down towards that last ring. The one that belonged to the lower class…But also a twisting warren, even from the air. He couldn't think of a better place to hide and wait.

The section Conner settled on was eerily quiet, but that was probably for the best. No patrols sweeping the streets yet, and hopefully no eyes on them as he picked somewhere out of sight. If M'gann's home on the second ring had been roughly carved into the rock, the dwellings that were rising up around them now were little more then holes punched, often cruelly into the walls. There was one that caught his eye, even from this high up; when his vision first swept over it, Superboy had been ready to pass it off as a crack in the wall. It was only when he looked at it again, that he realized it was supposed to be a door. He could probably just fit through with M'gann, and hide without any sign of being there. That was what decided him on where to go, and where to land.

He staggered for a moment when his feet touched the ground, and gravity pushed that weightlessness out of him. M'gann's weight didn't change much, still the same against him. He felt almost shaky from everything that happened…Which was ridiculous, since he still had his strength.

And could fly now.

'Less dwelling on that until you're inside.' He reminded himself, making a straight line for that hole in the wall. It was a tight fit; he had to turn sideways to squeeze through…But once he was in, Superboy allowed himself to breath easy.

The lighting was dim, and he found himself looking at little more then a single cave of a room. No furniture, just a few scraps of discarded cloth that had been left behind to cover the one window. He moved to a shallow scoop in the wall underneath that gap, carefully setting M'gann down in it. He leaned against the wall next to the window as well, moving his head just far enough so he could glance out of the corner to get a good look at the street.

Nothing patrolling the streets yet, although he could hear the shouts from the rings above, filtered down through all that smoke choking the air. Clear enough with super hearing, and Superboy thought that maybe there wasn't as much chaos and desperation as before. Maybe that meant what he'd been fighting was getting pushed back, now. Which left clean up on the first ring, long before any soldiers could be spared to search out the second and third.

"This is all wrong…" M'gann whispered, from her place on the make shift bed. Conner turned from his look out spot to watch his teammate, as she curled up and started to shake. Her hands gripped at her shoulders, making her knuckles even paler, under that chalky white skin. He could just pick out a still mending tear in her clothing, and something that looked sickeningly like a burn underneath that. As she shuddered, her clothing was growing darker and fitting over her body, almost like a blanket she was unconsciously wrapping around her. And her skin…That was darkening up as well, going back to green, except around the spot where her skin was still trying to grow back.

Watching her hurt made him feel nauseated, Conner realized. That, and furious at whatever had done all this damage to her.

"I'm wrong," her voice was fainter as she breathed in, but still interrupted that smash-everything-on-Mars feeling that was boiling in his head. When she exhaled, her breath was almost louder then her words, rattling around in her lungs and shaking her voice. "What I did was wrong…"

"Conner…" He almost flinched at that voice in his head, but he could also feel her thoughts
desperately trying to grip at something. Her eyes were half closed, and even her mental voice sounded feverish and exhausted, which as a match to how wilted over her face was. Her hair was plastered against her forehead, and Conner remembered how, years before, she'd been utterly drained when in close contact with fire and heat.

When he moved closer towards her, she didn't turn to look at him, or even seem to realize he was sitting down next to her. Her breath fluttered again, just as fragile and stuttering as her thoughts.

"Conner- He was right. I shouldn't have- Why did I do any of that? WHAT did I do to-" Her thoughts felt like they were streaming out of her head like water out of a broken glass. She couldn't hang onto them, any more then she could hold in those sickly feelings trying to curl up in her chest and tear her open.

…He could feel all of that, and Superboy swallowed around the realization. That weighted feeling in his chest wasn't just his, and while he'd felt anger towards himself before, it had always seared at him…Never pulled him down like this, cold and unrelenting in a way that made his throat want to go tight.

M'gann didn't have the same grip on her thoughts as he did, though. When she breathed out, it was in a broken sob. Her eyes had squeezed closed as well, as a pained look settled over her face.

"No control, no restraint…Being a-" There was something hovering over her head, and in another moment Conner realized he'd stretched his arm out towards her. His hand froze up above her face, with a generous amount of inches keeping them from touching. His fingers stayed rigid, almost paralyzed.

"…Becoming a monster." Another shudder wracked through her body, and her hand lost its grip on her shoulder, going slack and falling limply onto the sheets as she tried to curl up into a tighter ball.

His hand also fell away from her face, not touching it, or stroking her hair like he used to. Instead, Conner went down to where her fingers were trying to ball back into a fist, and let his hand rest over hers. Just a light touch, enough to get the feel of the bones in her fingers under his, run his thumb along the top of her wrist, and note again how small her hand was in his…But how they fit together anyway.

M'gann had stopped shuddering, he realized, and looked up from their hands. Her eyes were lightly shut instead of screwed closed, and her thoughts had also fallen out of that feverish rush, and into something a little calmer.

"M'gann?" He didn't know if she could hear him, but he whispered her name out anyway. "You've done some things that are wrong…But you're not a monster. I've never seen you as a monster."

He closed his other hand over hers, holding them close together. "And I won't leave you to face any of this alone. I promise."

-o-o-o-

The first thing M'gann was aware of was the sound of her breathing. The second was how different the air felt, and it took her a moment to realize it didn't have a thick, smoky taste to it or dust sticking to the roof of her mouth. Instead, she was somewhere-

'Safe.' The realization flickered up in her mind, on its own. But it was true; her heart wasn't pounding, and she didn't bolt upright from wherever she was resting. She could feel something resting over her hand, and as her senses sharpened up a little more, M'gann could hear someone else
breathing, almost in time to her.

"Conner…?" She asked before her eyes ever opened. And when they did, she found herself looking at a welcome, familiar face turning to gaze down at her. She could make out a rough opening in the wall behind him, more of a smoothed out hole then an actual window, half covered in debris. What she was laying on felt rough, too, like a rough bed cut out of rock and with a few scraps thrown across it to act as thin cushioning. It was her cloak that provided most of the comfort-

Her cloak. She was back in her own skin, and her own clothes, M'gann realized with a jolt. That was what yanked her out of that secure, half awake state, and into full wakefulness. When she glanced down, she was looking at a human hand instead of something that ended in claws, and her clothing had molded itself back into that familiar, black body suit. Her skin had also shifted to green, a fact that should have made her heart pound hard…But her breath and pulse all stayed steady, somehow.

"I had a dream that I was falling," she kept her voice low as she watched him. "And you caught me."

"…Wasn't completely a dream. But I'm glad to see you're awake." Conner traced a thumb over the top of her hand as he spoke, and M'gann suddenly had part of the answer for why she was at ease. "I was…Worried for a while."

"Oh," M'gann got that word out, before she had to swallow and lick her lips in order to continue. "I didn't mean to make you worry. Or for…A lot of this to happen." She turned her head to look at him fully. "…I'm sorry. I didn't know what would-"

Conner shook his head, looking down at her. "I didn't know any of this would happen, either. But was that really,"

Then it was her turn to cut him off. "My brother." She answered, trying hard not to shake from the memory and feeling her shoulders quiver anyway. "It was. He…Conner, I'm sorry."

Her hand turned in his, her fingers grasping and weaving between Conner's as she tried to let the sensation ground her. "I felt him in my head, tearing out what he didn't want in there and pushing his own version of what was right in…I-I know that I've done the same, or close enough." Her sides shivered as she exhaled, letting the words continue to tumble out of her mouth. "I know what it feels like now…And I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry. What I did wasn't right, no matter…It's the same with him. He thinks what he's doing is for the greater good, but it isn't."

She forced herself to breathe again, and opened her eyes where they'd squeezed shut on their own. "Conner, I-"

"I know. You've already said sorry a bunch of times, M'gann." He frowned a little, and it clicked in her head that his grimace was over his own words. They came out gruff, which was a stark contrast to how his fingers felt as they squeezed back at hers.

"I was waiting for you to figure it out. And stop using your powers like that, but," he was quiet for a moment, before stretching his other hand out to rest on her head. He gave it the slightest nudge, and she realized what he was asking. M'gann opened the link between them.

She had to blink her eyes from what she felt, to keep them clear. There was still a note of caution in his thoughts, wary and unsure (which somehow burned at her worse then that hurt in her shoulder) but also a gentle touch that he tried to cast out between them. She pushed herself up, to fully look at him as his hand fell away from her face. That warmth in her head more then made up for that lack of touch, though.
"M'gann...I'm sorry, too. I wish that I'd been there, and protected you...Or helped you somehow. But I'm so glad you're okay. I don't know what I would've done if you-"

She had a good idea, judging by that dark cloud in his thoughts. Probably broken something. Or someone.

"Guess we're lucky that you did find me. But...Why were you so afraid?"

"Because..." She could feel something pulling away at both their hearts, when it wasn't trying to nestle in and put some warmth back in their chests. Those thoughts of his were a good match for the feeling, too; trying to be gentle, but also with a desperate, nervous energy to them. "...I don't want to see you hurt. Or alone,"

Something about that sounded familiar, she realized through the soft warmth settling around her thoughts. "And...I think I remember that you saved me, somehow. And you risked a lot to save me." M'gann stared at him, before forcing herself to ask "...Why?"

"You were in trouble," Conner pointed out, before his lips slowly quirked up. "Besides, what was I supposed to do? Leave you to face it alone?" She didn't think that she had it in her to giggle over hearing her words repeated back to her, but managed somehow.

"No, I guess not. And I'm glad you didn't."

Blinking failed her then, and her eyes started to sting. M'gann shut them instead, ducking her head...And then feeling it bump up against Conner's forehead as he leaned against her.

Quite suddenly her concern wasn't centered around that still mending tear in her shoulder, or how they'd survived, or even what they were going to do next. The fact that her heart was trying to tear itself in two and out of her chest felt a lot more pressing. Conner's hand left hers, tracing over her shoulders before resting on her back and holding her tight against him. When she leaned into Superboy, M'gann could hear him drawing breath, and it surprised her how shaky it was; a near match for how the air in her own lungs felt.

For what felt like hours they stayed like that, curled against each other and slowly letting their breathing even out. Even though it had only been a few minutes, she found herself wishing that it really could last much longer.

When they broke apart, he was still watching her, eyes focused on her face before dropping to her mouth. When his lips parted, she thought he was going to kiss her...But instead, he leaned back in with a low half sigh, half grumble and let their cheeks brush together.

"So, what now?" Conner kept his voice low, against her ear. "Don't get me wrong, I missed this," "God, I missed this," his thoughts echoed that.

"But there's a civil war about to break out, your brother is hiding-"

"And we need to do something about it." M'gann wanted to sigh that out, but instead kept her voice firm. Conner wasn't the only one who could put on a brave and determined front, when he had to. And knowing what was outside the shack they were hiding in, she definitely knew this was a 'had to' situation. "He's near the top of command. If we can find him, and bring him in...Hopefully, that will keep this from getting any worse. I'm ready to try, at least."

"And I'm ready to help you." She gave his hand a gentle squeeze, before standing up. Conner followed her, one step behind as they moved towards the doorway. Before stepping out, M'gann
paused, looking down at her hand and at the dark cloth circling around a green wrist. She knew that she should let her colors leech out to white...But instead M'gann let her hand fall back to her side, shaking her head. And her clothing stayed dark, with a high quality weave, and designating her as J'onn's apprentice. "I know I said before that I didn't want to cause trouble...But since there's already plenty of problems right now, I don't think anyone is going to complain too much. Not when we're going to be trying to save them."

It felt good to be back in clothing like that, too. M'gann drew her cape a little closer around her, feeling it settle across her shoulders. "Knowing L'aonn...He and his soldiers have hit the upper and middle rings both, now. They'll probably draw back for a while, to regroup before they hit another location. I remember some of where he led us, before. And..."

"What?" Conner rested a hand on her shoulder as M'gann forced her breath to keep moving steady.

"I-I think I can track him. He messed around with my head," and the memory of that was enough to make her want to move straight back into that shack and never come out again. Instead M'gann let her hands ball into fists, and focused on the fact that Conner was still there with her. "Enough to leave a strong psychic signature, which should be enough to give us a lead on where he could be. If you're ready?"

"Always." Conner gave a slight nod, and followed her out, back into the city.

---o-o-o---

"We should be able to manage..." Conner heard M'gann in speak in his ear once they had some space to look around, as a few of the black stained walls shrank back enough so they could walk side by side without worrying about bumping elbows with the rock. Just as quickly, she also trailed off, rubbing at her forehead.

"You're still looking shaky to me." And he couldn't help but notice that she wasn't shrugging off the hand on her shoulder. Although that might have just been because it had been a while since they'd been in contact like this.

"...Just a little." M'gann protested. "I just need some time to catch my breath, and shrug off the rest of that fight. I can-" She shut her eyes, frowning as she concentrated, before staggering back. Even though their link was still muted, Conner swore that he could feel her thoughts swimming around and trying to seep out of her head.

"Okay," she admitted, quietly. "Maybe I can't levitate and search at the same time." That got a grin out of him, and he shifted his arm so it was looped around her shoulders. M'gann's eyes widened, a slightly bubbly feeling just edging out of her thoughts that he could pick up, with a little confusion as well.

"You concentrate on figuring out where to go; let me handle getting there." He said, before M'gann had a chance to ask what he was doing out loud. That light feeling was already starting to flow back into his muscles, and this time he had a chance to really take it in. Feel how his weight eased off the ground, first falling out of his legs, and then draining through the bottom of his feet. The heels of his boots left the ground, followed by the bulk of his feet; he could barely feel that sliver of toe touching the ground before his weight was suddenly gone.

M'gann gave a surprised noise when she saw his feet lifting up off the ground, and took that as her cue to hang onto him. "So that's what happened," she murmured, and there was a slight, nervous laughter trying to creep into her voice as she spoke.
"So…You can fly now?" Before M'gann had finished speaking, he felt her twist in his arms enough to bury her face in her palm, and give a muttered "Hello, Megan. Of course you can." Her voice picked up in volume as she continued, glancing back up at him. "I just…Didn't quite expect it."

"Neither did I. Didn't need the Shields for it, either." Conner frowned down at his arm, picking out the spot those patches used to go underneath the sleeve. M'gann followed his eyes, a thoughtful look clouding over her face.

"Conner…This is a wild idea, but do you think you might just be aging slower, instead of not at all? Maybe it just takes time for your genes to start working and developing more powers?"

He rolled his shoulders in a shrug, giving her a slight jostle, but he could feel his eyes narrow in thought as well. "Maybe…To be honest, it felt like what I needed was an adrenaline kick, mainly. Seeing you in trouble did a lot for that." He was glad M'gann blinked when she did, because he could feel some pink coloring his cheeks. He tried to cover it by letting the corners of his mouth twist up in a slight smile, which M'gann thankfully focused on instead.

"You really love this, don't you? It's also a lot different, being fully aware for this."

"I'm glad you are aware for this." A panicked jolt went through his chest at the thought…But M'gann didn't react, kept her eyes on the receding ground, and he let out his breath when he realized she hadn't heard it. Although there was also a strange heaviness trying to push past his flight and into his chest when he realized that she wasn't keeping the link fully up, and he wasn't sure why.

"What's going on down there?" He asked instead, deciding to focus on those faint shouts that were still drifting up through the air. "I think people are still fighting-"

"I can listen in." M'gann replied quickly, tilting her head up towards the first ring as she shut her eyes. "…There's some conflict, but I think the government received their second wave-" Her eyes flew open, and she blinked in astonishment at the cityscape.

"I…I thought I heard some of my family out there. I think they're helping, too. Rounding up some of the attackers, from how tense R'aon sounds…” She tilted her head as she forced her eyes shut again.

"…They're all in the field…Even my father. Except for L'aonn. It's like there's a gap in my teeth, without him there…” He felt her hands squeeze at his arm as she focused again.

"...But I've got an idea on where he is. Near the tunnels on the second ring, trying to get back to that cave. We can cut him off if we take the entrance down-" He tensed up as he felt her starting to push at his mind, trying to share the information before she caught herself.

"S-sorry. Down there," M'gann pointed instead, and Conner was quick to drop down and follow her hand.

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M'gann's hands could not fully decide whether they wanted to ball up in frustration over not being able to levitate the two of them, or if resting on Conner's shoulders and arms and letting him handle the flying was far more preferable. Both extremes were also cutting into her efforts to track L'aonn, so she tried to push them out of her head. And when that didn't work, settled for tucking the argument into the very back of her mind.

"This should be the right tunnel system," she nodded towards the gap in the rocks, expecting Conner to drop onto the ground and continue on foot. Instead, he managed to duck through the entrance and kept flying, even though the rock closed in around them, tight enough that she could pick out the
dents and cracks in the walls and ceiling.

"Conner!" She managed a slightly outraged, slightly exasperated inflection on his name. And just knew that he was giving a not-sorry-at-all smile in response.

"I can manage this. Besides, you've flown through tighter spaces before."

"I have experience with flying," she pointed out, trying not to wince over how low the ceiling was. "You've got…One day so far, if that."

"I learn fast?" He offered, and M'gann couldn't keep that chuckle down in her throat. Or that smile off of her lips, as she marveled over the fact that they were having an almost-argument without any raised voices or emotions.

'Focus,' she had to remind herself again, as she settled back into Conner's arms, and shut her eyes. And hoped that he really was a fast learner and wouldn't crash them into a wall.

Following L'aonn's trail wasn't hard; the shocking thing was how little interference there was from other minds, making her wonder if he'd chosen to go alone for some reason. His thoughts were starting to feel closer, sharper and jagged against her own, like hot shards of glass. M'gann kept her own mind still, focusing on that distance as she turned her head towards the signature, trusting Conner to follow.

They should have been right on top of him, from how his presence felt in her mind.

"He's close…"

"Closer then you might think, little sister." His presence uncoiled out of that angry snarl, into a cold, almost clinical thought that was wedged into her head, and M'gann yanked around in Conner's arms to look. She found herself facing jagged rock jutting out of the walls, with no sign of her brother. Only stone…And a large shard of it that seemed to pivot in the corner of her vision. It was already flowing into a different shape as M'gann started and turned again, too slowly. Conner wasn't even close to her speed, and hadn't done more then lifted his head when her brother shed that red sand stone color off his skin, and smoothed it over as he dropped from the wall.

He slammed straight into them with a crash that rattled M'gann's teeth, knocking her out of Conner's arms, and sending her teammate to the ground with enough force to knock the breath out of his lungs. M'gann pulled herself up from her place on the floor, mouth already forming Conner's name as she pushed herself up. But before she ever found Superboy, her brother was looming over her.

"Green skin?" L'aonn's eyes were narrowed into slits as he watched her, his voice dripping with disgust. "That's what you decide to adopt after all? You-"

Conner cut him off with a roar as he pushed himself off the floor, swinging a fist at her brother's head as he tried to throw them both into the air. L'aonn almost melted out of the way with how his form flowed around Conner's hand and arm, pushing his weight towards the floor as his arms and back suddenly bristled with sharp edges. They sliced into Superboy as he snapped a claw around his neck and threw him downwards…And then L'aonn pulled that same trick he'd used on her. Superboy barely had time to lift his head up from the ground when those talons dug into the base of his neck.

Through her link, M'gann could feel Conner's thoughts get a weight pressed into them, and she saw the muscles in his arms and fingers go slack one at a time as L'aonn found the right grip on his neck.

"…Useless." Her brother growled, his voice shifting as his throat twitched and formed into something suited for speech.
"I was right, that I didn't need any help to tackle you both. I'm still amazed you see anything worthwhile in him at all." Conner's shoulders jolted again as he tried to break free, and his eyes rolled back in his head as Laonn tightened his claws around the base of his head. He slumped forward, limp, and M'gann could feel her brother digging into Conner's psyche, forcing that into a lock as well.

"I love him," M'gann snapped back, glaring into those red eyes. "There's nothing else that I need to explain to you."

She could still remember how Superboy's hand had felt against her forehead, how that warm, gentle sensation that she hadn't felt in too long flooded back into her from his touch...How much she'd missed it. M'gann tried not to focus on the hollow that was also trying to chew a space into her heart and chest. Tried to keep her thoughts away from that snarl in his voice when he screamed at her to get out of his head-

Laonn's touch in her thoughts was lighter then before, just skimming off the top of her memories, but she could still sense it before he pulled away. His eyes narrowed as she angrily wrenched her thoughts back, trying to shut them away completely...But he had a foot in the door, and was still looking over them.

"Ah...So that's how it is. You don't want to lose him again." At M'gann's stunned nod, he threw Conner down face-first onto the ground. She could feel Superboy's thoughts screaming at his muscles to move, but all he could manage was a weak groan. "I can help with that, little sister."

Laonn flexed his claws again, tearing a little deeper into those neck muscles, and M'gann could feel Conner's psyche start to stretch and strain the same way his skin was starting to break. His thoughts started to flutter the same way his breath was rasping in and out, thin and gasping. Laonn peeled through Conner's thoughts easily at first, before slowing down as he dug deeper and, to M'gann's horror, tore down into the core of Conner's mind. When he spoke again, it was in a smooth, satisfied voice.

"There; come back and help me, and we can rip all that anger and disobedience straight out his head. All of him will be yours, and you won't have to worry about him leaving you again." Laonn's head darted back up to look at her, eye to eye. His jaw hung open in an almost knowing smile. "He's yours to do whatever you wish with. Isn't that what you want?"

She could feel the muscles in her neck start to twitch up, wanting to nod. Instead M'gann bit down on her lip and tongue, staring at the slack body stretched out on the floor in front of her. Conner's throat worked, trying to speak, but no words came out, the same way his thoughts all died before they could move free of his head.

"He'll never leave you again." Laonn repeated, slipping the thoughts into hers. "Never fight you, or hurt you."

She could still remember their fight. Him screaming at her to get out of his head, cutting the mental link off and leaving her stranded and alone. How much that had sliced into her.

"You'd never have to face that again,"

Conner's eyes were blazing as Laonn canted his head to the side, tearing a little deeper into his psyche. Leaving it open for M'gann to make those necessary cuts to tear out all that anger.

...All that passion, she remembered as she looked at his eyes. How warm they were when there was a smile on his lips, the way they hardened when there was trouble and he watched out for her...The
way they were softly lidded when they curled up together on the couch or under the sheets.

She could also remember the hurt in them when he screamed at her to leave, and how her face had been a near mirror for it.

They were dulling over as L'aonn gripped his neck, taking those memories with that light. Her brother showed teeth, and M'gann remembered hearing him whisper how similar they were...How she'd been sculpted into a match for him. And how they did have more in common then she wanted to admit. Maybe, still had in common-

'You aren't a monster.' The memory burst into her mind, in Conner's voice. And somehow over the shaking that tried to latch into her skin, M'gann thought she could faintly feel and remember someone brushing their fingers against her hand. 'M'gann, you aren't a monster.' The thought that followed echoed in her head with that same warmth and strength as his voice. 'You know what makes for them, and what you are, and don't have to be.'

L'aonn found her eyes then, and she blinked them a few times to clear the thought from her head, before he could read it. Her brother extended the claws on his free hand, beckoning her over to where Superboy was stretched across the ground.

"Go on. Make him yours."
He couldn't move. Could barely even breathe as he was pushed into the floor and felt the rock biting at his face. Conner scrambled for words, something to yell, whisper, **beg** if he had to. She was supposed to be better then this, different from what L’aonn was telling her…But nothing was coming out of his mouth other then a few desperate gasps for air.

Conner heard M'gann's footsteps through the rock long before he saw her move into the corners of his vision. She bent down next to his face, resting her fingers on the crown of his head. His heart tried to work up to pounding from her touch, but the claws in his neck didn't allow it. His thoughts moved sluggishly, but they were all coiling into a tense knot that was waiting, any second, for something to wipe them away as he stared at M'gann

Her fingers stayed resting on his head, and gently brushed at his bangs before she curled down next to him and touched their foreheads together. Her contact was gentle, almost like a balm compared to the pressure still digging into the base of his head and neck. When she breathed out, it was with a faint whisper that he could barely hear, even with his ears.

"Conner…No matter what, I love you. Always." Before he finished processing those words, her touch was suddenly off his skin. She was a blur in his vision, there one second, gone in the next.

A shock ran along his neck as those claws were wrenched loose, and suddenly his lungs where back in full working order. His shoulders twitched as he wrenched them forward when he pulled in air, his hands trying to twitch into fists and digging at the ground. A few warm drops spattered the back of his neck and shoulders, and he managed to turn his head and eyes up to look. M’gann’s claws skimmed through the air in a vicious pale arc, as a pair of rents opened in her brother's face, deep and gouged.

L’aonn's eyes were wide, trying to focus on his sister as he began to stagger back. M'gann didn't let him, as she plowed into him with a low hiss as her body finished the shift. When his claws tried to scour her back, they scrapped off of bone and plate that she grew before Conner could blink, and swept over L’aonn's path of attack.

They clashed together in a snarl of white and red sinew, clawing and twisting as they both tried to tear up the other with tooth and claw. Even with them both in their white skins, rippling and thrashing, it was easy to pick out M'gann. More gaunt then her brother…And Conner couldn't keep from noticing, smaller as well. He felt a shudder move through him at the blows L’aonn aimed at her neck, although she kept managing to just twist out of the way, or toughen her skin in time to catch and turn his claws.

His legs gave a twitch as he watched, and Conner let his heart keep pounding. That sour taste in his mouth made his every muscle in his neck pulse from how fast he was breathing…But it was also urging his limbs to start listening to him, instead of staying dead and unresponsive.

M’gann threw herself against L’aonn, pitching them both off balance so they smashed against the ground a handbreadth from him, and with enough force that he could feel the impact through the floor. Another scrape of claws on the floor and a flurry of dust, and they were both upright as L’aonn tried to hook his claws into M’gann and throw her backwards into the wall. Instead, she twisted low and darted out of the way…And then she pulled back, and he wanted to yell at her to do anything but that; not give her brother space to attack, as he swung around and tried to pull her to the ground-

But then she flickered out, intangible, as L’aonn's claws passed through that space where her head
and neck had been. He tried to blink and shake the blood out of his eyes in the same instant, snapping at the air in confusion as he failed to make contact with anything.

M’gann moved forward…Too cautiously, he thought. And when she paused to grow solid again, those teeth chowing at the air lurched around, and bit into her. They sank deep into the muscle of her upper arm, hard enough that Superboy winced as he watched. M’gann's throat pulsed, fluttering as a long high pitched keen skreeled out between her teeth. She lurched, trying to tear loose as her brother rolled, forcing her downwards again to the ground.

That was when his legs finally listened to him. It wasn't flying, and it wasn't leaping, either; just that one second he was on the ground, the next his arms had pushed himself off and catapulted him forward, closing the distance in a blink. L'aonn didn't have time to turn, or even blink, when Conner slammed into him. His shoulder scraped off tough skin, while his fist slammed into something that felt like stone for a brief second…Before his arm contracted, and L’aonn crumpled away underneath his fist. The Martian's jaw went slack as he reeled from the attack, before his eyes blazed as they focused on Superboy.

And not on M’gann. She pulled her arm free from his teeth, almost ghosting away from him. Conner gave himself a moment to breathe when he saw her breaking free, although his eyes caught on the blood running down her arm from the bite.

An angry jolt, as something twisted out of L’aonn's side, and Conner found himself staring at a talon arcing towards his head…Ready to dig back into his neck, he knew. He tried to yank back, already knowing that it was too slow to put him out of reach from those arms. First one talon connected and pressed into the skin under his ear, while another twisted around to put his head in a vice.

"I'll tear your head open if I have to, Kryptonian." L’aonn's voice was a snarl in his mind, trying to beat away at his skull from the inside. Outside, those claws contracted, pressed down on skin that didn't feel as tough as before-

"NO!" The shout made his head spin, while L'aonn's grip on his head went slack again. Conner felt a thread of something warm and with a coppery scent make its way down his face as he slid between the Martian's fingers. His feet chose just then to give up on holding him upright, and he slumped as the rest of his muscles followed suit. L’aonn wavered, not able to move fast enough to seize him again, or do much other then regain his balance as the yell echoed in their ears. The third arm growing from his ribs fell slack against his side, stunned.

M’gann, however, didn't hesitate at all when her arm snapped out and caught her brother across the temple. Her claws hooked onto a spur of bone jutting out from his skull, acting as the perfect handhold as Conner watched her wrench around. She pulled L'aonn with her, all her muscles snapping and uncoiling as her breath cut out between her teeth like an angry snake hiss. Her motion was furious, and she could have thrown her brother for yards…If that rock wall hadn't stopped him first.

Superboy heard the heavy thunk of a body hitting rocks as he lurched forward, eyes focusing on the ground rushing towards him. That fatigue his adrenaline had pushed to the corners of his mind came rushing back in, drowning any orders he was trying to give his legs or arms.

"Conner-! A blur of white in the edges of his vision, and something snapped around his waist, cutting his fall short before he ever hit the floor. A second grip curled around his shoulders, steadying him.

"I've got you, Conner." M’gann's voice was hushed in his head, surprisingly gentle compared to that shriek she'd caused heartbeats before. Her fingers shifted so they weren't digging into his skin,
holding him carefully.

"L'aonn?" He managed to rasp the name out as those long clawed hands lowered him to the ground.

"H…He's out." M'gann's voice was also rough and halting, and he could hear her vocal chords shifting back, along with the rest of her once his back was resting on the floor. His vision blurred for a moment, before he could pick out her face hovering over him, framed by smoothed red rock and red hair. Her skin was back to green, although paler then usual. "I guess that punch and throw Superman used on me worked just as well on him." Her eyes started to glance to where Conner knew her brother was sprawled across the ground, before she stopped herself with a long blink. "He'll be up eventually…But not any time soon."

"Okay…Good." He managed, noting a few footsteps from where his ear was resting against the ground. Tilting his head upwards (and with plenty of protest from his muscles) he could just make out a familiar green shape running down the tunnel. It was moving side by side with a paler form, rushing towards them, and followed by a few more vaguely J'onn and M'gann like faces.

"Everyone..." M'gann whispered as she turned to look at them, and Conner felt his fatigue win against his eyelids when it came to the argument of staying open or drifting shut. While blackness closed around him, he could just make out M'gann murmuring his name, and something that sounded vaguely like 'don't worry' and 'it will be okay.'

'I'm not worried, and I know it will.' He wanted to say, but he plunged into sleep before the words ever had a chance to work their way to his tongue.

-o-o-o-

Once M'gann saw Conner shut his eyes, things started to go by in a blur of green, a few splotches of white, and large amount of telepathic shouting and pushing about. She found herself getting herded by her mother, away from the scene of her fight with L'aonn, and through twisting passageways that eventually started to look familiar. She might have nodded off on her feet as well, a few times. Or at least tuned out everything outside of moving forward. By the time she slipped back into awareness, M'gann found herself surrounded by a familiar set of walls. The lighting had been turned back to bright, giving her a full view of the posters taped up on the walls, giving a bit of blue to the sand color of her old room. A low murmur, and she turned to see that Conner was resting close by, in the alcove that used to be her bed. His breathing was deep and regular, filling the room up and drawing in all of her attention. On impulse, she drifted over to sit down at the edge of the carved rock, glancing down at him. He was alive, and still had his thoughts. They both were still alive, somehow.

"I fought my brother," the words numbly lurched off her tongue in a hushed voice. "…And won."

She kept her hands clasped together in her lap, although a part of her wanted to run them over his face. Instead, she started to look down at her interlocked fingers, and paused at her upper arm. With a quick thought, the sleeves on her body suit melted away, to show the skin of her arms. M'gann could pick out a collection of dark gashes running over her skin, spread out in a half circle that was mirror for that bite she'd received.

"Wish you hadn't gotten those," Conner's voice floated into her ears, tugging her attention back to him. She found herself looking into his eyes…Which still had that same fire in them as before, she was glad to see. "…But I guess it could have gone worse. At least we're alive, and you're okay?"
"I'll live," she murmured, as, he rolled onto his side. His motions were all slow, but his voice stayed steady. "It's different, waking up and seeing you watching me." He rubbed at his head as he spoke, blinking slowly as he eased himself up onto his elbows. "I think it's been the other way around, the last few days."

His eyes flickered from her face to her arms, and she followed them back to those cuts.

"There might be scars," she kept her eyes on the still healing gashes running along her arm. Mostly beginning to scab over, although her shape shifting apparently didn't carry over to healing; she kept her skin green everywhere else, but the edges of her cuts stayed that bone pale white.

"You can heal from scars. Trust me on that," Conner spoke frankly, making her duck her head before feeling his fingers under her chin. "It hurts…But you can work through it."

"I guess you're an expert on that, aren't you?" Largely thanks to HER, M'gann knew. She couldn't keep the bitterness out of her voice, or feel it seep back into the front of her thoughts. But before it could fully take root, those fingers under her chin lifted her head up. She found herself looking back at Conner, and it shocked her to see how soft his eyes were; no trace of that bitterness she felt in them, or harshness. "I've had time to learn…But it does help when you know there's a chance things will get better."

She couldn't figure out how to respond to that, so she settled for using her lips to kiss him instead. Shyly at first, just on the edge of his cheek and brushing against his skin; just a slight tickle of affection. M'gann felt hesitation start to burn along her cheeks, making them go pink and trying to make her pull back for air.

Instead she stayed still, waiting for his response. Conner's answer was to turn into the kiss fully, so their lips were touching and she could feel him sigh into her mouth. Her skin quivered where his hands brushed along her back and combed through her hair. Her own hands mirrored that, surprised at how similar the sensation was under her fingers.

"Short," it had been forever since she'd heard that hint of laugh in his voice, either in her head or from his mouth. Her own giggle turned into a satisfied hum that lasted until they slid apart so her head was resting on his shoulder, and his cheek was brushing against that short hair he'd been so amused by.

"I…Think I see what you're talking about." M'gann hummed against him, as he carefully traced his other hand over her arm. Her cuts stung a little under his touch, but she still found herself not wanting the sensation to stop.

What she got instead was a low hum undercutting that feeling, as someone started to nudge at her thoughts. It was enough to make her lift her head up, glancing into an empty space of air in her room.

"M'gann?" She could pick out her name, along with a request to open her mind a little further. All in a familiar voice, too. Conner was glancing at her, apparently not catching the sound, and she found herself filling him in. "News from my family…" Her voice was quiet as she turned all of her thoughts to focusing on that thread from her father.

"Link me in, too." Conner met her eyes as he spoke, before adding on "…Please. I want to hear, too." She brushed her forehead against his, letting that act as the foundation to patch a new link between them. She could just pick up his presence, as she heard her father starting to speak.

"I'm glad you're both okay," his voice was a low, gentle thrum, soft where her brother's and uncle's were tougher. "R'aon is busy with being called into the trials that are getting set up…And there
hasn't been an attempt to arrest me a second time." M'gann felt a bolt of relief running through her at that...Although tempered with nervousness as she thought back over the events.

"What about me? I...Was actually linked to the attacks, and there's other things they could use against me."

"It's a sticky point for the government. On the one hand, there's the fact that you were and still are masquerading as a green Martian, which calls for charges of deception. But on the other...You've also been acting as a diplomat on Earth. And you just apprehended a...Dangerous criminal." Pain in her chest, both her own and her father's at that.

"Ordinarily, there should be a squad moving towards our home, to bring you to speak and answer for all of this."

"But...?" She found herself asking.

"But...J'aal tells me that any armed forces are slow to respond. And no one is trying to hurry them along, either. No one stopped me when I went to have a look at your ship, either."

M'gann tensed up before forcing each muscle in her back to relax as her father continued.

"She can make the trip back. I did what I could to make sure of that, although I'm not sure about staying around much longer. I think we're both treading on cautious ground with them...Though I can at least stay low key, and shouldn't have to worry about much. But you-"

"...I need to leave now, don't I?" M'gann's hands moved to grip at each other, nails cutting at her palms for a second before Conner covered both of them with his. "I...I wish I could say goodbye to everyone in person."

"I'm sorry." She could almost feel her father laying a hand across her head at that, trying to gentle her thoughts. "But focus on reaching the ship, while people are turning a blind eye. And maybe we can manage something."

She didn't have time to ask what he meant by that, as his presence faded out of her head. Conner, on the other hand, was giving her a confused blink as she eased them both up.

"Do you remember where the hanger is?" She asked as her feet touched the ground, next to his as they walked towards the house entrance.

"Yeah, roughly; almost straight up above us-" Conner stopped right in the doorway, as that hum picked back up in both of their minds, and M'gann just remembered to dampen his portion of the link. She could pick out not just the warm tones from her father, but her mother, shifting in color and tone as her siblings chimed in as well. There were not really any words that she could sift from that flood of voices and presence, but the emotions were as clear and sharp as cool water splashed against her face. A sensation of being held for a moment, and trying to push a little strength and luck into her to take with them on the flight home.

"...So that's how you say good bye?" Conner spoke, his voice low and a little tense, while his eyes watched her with open and clear interest.

"Not always, but when in a situation like this...I think it's the best anyone can do." She tried to summon up some focus through that gentle hum in her head, enough to get her and Superboy into the air. Conner simply wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her close as he lifted her into his arms.
"I should be the one flying us," she pointed out as Conner pushed off, not even slowing down as he listened.

"You've got enough to worry about, and I can manage this again."

"And you like it," she pointed out wryly, with a low laugh building in her chest. She felt the same from him, as he nodded. "Yeah, that too. Let me keep handling the flying, though." To her surprise, he added in a more subdued voice, "I've been wanting to do this for a long time, anyway."

She didn't say anything else to that as they flew back to the ship, listening to her family leaving that final presence in her mind. Mentally holding on in one last goodbye hug, before she dropped out of their range completely. Superboy held her close as they flew, and M'gann found herself glad to be able to soak in the feel of being close in his grip, and not being isolated in her own mind.

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Everything around them felt muted as they climbed higher into the air. In the city below there were less lights on then before, an acrid taste still in the air…But not as much smoke, at least. The fires were over, and so was the screaming; it felt like the entire city was trying to gather its breath after everything that had happened.

When Superboy thought about it, he was still getting his breath back too. And without having to worry about walking, all of his muscles felt intent on getting an inventory on what was still working, after what he'd gone through. His shoulders couldn't shrug off that bit of left over tenseness, even in the air…Which M'gann seemed to pick up on. She blinked up from that hum that he could just pick out between their link, long enough to glance at him.

"We should be okay. I don't think we're on the radar at all, right now." Even though they were well out of earshot from anyone on the ground, M'gann kept her voice low. "I can't feel anyone registering that we're flying…" She shook her head, and her words came out in a sigh against his ear. "So I guess it is good that you're handling this. No one can pick up on telekinesis that way."

"Huh," he wasn't about to argue with another reason that let him fly, but Conner found himself still asking, "What about your family?"

"Static noise, mainly. I don't think anyone could pinpoint us through everything they're sending." M'gann glanced over his shoulder, and he knew that she was looking back towards the city. "…They're also probably busy with my brother, too. Too busy to go looking for me." Her voice was low, still heavy with regret as she sagged against his chest. The whispers from her family also felt like they were getting more muffled, as they city dwindled to smaller and smaller specks of light and stone.

"M'gann…About what happened before." He didn't have to specify what part of before, judging by how her cheeks lost most of that green and she froze up in his arms. He still forced himself to continue with that thought.

"You could have made that same choice as before…But you didn't." She wasn't meeting his eyes, and his hands were too busy with holding her to lift her chin back up. "…Actually," Conner found himself admitting. "You saved me."

"…Conner. I…" She trailed off and didn't say anything else for the longest time. From the way she intently looked at his shirt, it seemed like she was trying to pick words out from that or from the air rushing around them. His eyes could make out the entrance hanging in the ceiling above them, before she spoke. And by then the farewells from her family were completely gone from his ears…
And likely from her head as well.

"I…Learned a few things about myself, too." One of her hands let go of his shoulder, as she started to tick them off on her fingers. "About my powers…What the limits of them are, and not just what I can and can't do. But also what I shouldn't do. That I'm not…What I'm sometimes afraid of." That last was so low he almost lost it over the air rushing around them. But just on the edge of her voice, he thought he could hear an 'and' hanging between them.

"And…?" He said it out loud for them, and saw M'gann blush.

"And…I know that I've done some horrible things. But I love you. Still."

"Always," the thought drifted between them, making her go even brighter.

"…I remember hearing you say that." He found himself speaking. "Before you fought your brother." His thoughts still felt frayed at the edges from that, being pulled and strained to the breaking point…But, it was also a reminder of what the girl in his arms hadn't done. "I learned…To be honest, if I did learn anything about myself, it didn't compare to what I found out about you."

"O-oh?" She was still tense, and coiled up a little tighter as she listened.

"Yeah. I found out that you're strong…Which I had a hunch about already. And I learned about you and your family." He took a deep breath before continuing. "And…That I think we can work through this." That made her go still against his arms, and he could almost her heart pause before she finally relaxed and took in his words. "I want to try, at least."

M'gann nodded, almost shyly…And then ducked her head as he tilted his forehead towards her, and let her feel some of what was still curled up in his chest. Their foreheads brushed together right as he felt his feet touch down on the stone. But he didn't let go of her right away, instead soaking in that feeling of being together. And a slowly mending hurt that had been settled chest deep. He hadn't focused, or wanted to focus, on that gap that had been in him for a long time. He'd been trying to cover it up with anger and focusing on their missions for the team, until they'd been forced back to working together on the red planet.

But just then, keeping their foreheads brushed together and feeling M'gann's fingers find his, he thought he could feel something starting to fill it in again.

"It's the same for me. I haven't stopped loving you."

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With her feet back on the ground, M'gann set a quick pace. The voices from her family had gone still, leaving her with M'aal's advice; get out of Mars and back to Earth while she had that waver. It was close enough to exile, either long term or temporary, she knew…Which made her feet move that much faster. Trying to outrun the regret over leaving her family, while still holding onto those last goodbyes.

Conner stayed with her, at least. He didn't falter or fall behind as they darted into the tunnels. He didn't break their contact, either, and she kept a tight grip on his fingers.

"I'm going to have an interesting time explaining all of this to Gar." M'gann gazed down at their hands, still clasped together as they moved towards the hangar holding her ship. She thought that she could pick out a guard or two doting the area…But they appeared blind to her and Conner. It helped that they both walked in the darker portions of the tunnels, but even then there were points where she thought she could see a green glancing at her before immediately averting their gaze or simply not
holding her in their sight for long.

"They were right, that there wouldn't be anyone trying to stop us." Conner glanced at her, catching how her voice halted for a second. It took her a second to get her breathing and her words even enough to continue, and by then they were drawing up next to her ship. "The last time I left Mars, I had to do everything I could to hide. But…Now, everyone is willing to overlook me. I should probably be grateful-

"It's hard to be happy about people ignoring you." Superboy cut her off, his hand tightening around hers. M'gann gave a small nod, brushing up against him as they waited for her ship to unfold and wake up.

"Not everyone, though." She managed that, and a smile. It did help, that they were back to talking, moving together…And holding hands, she thought as her fingers moved against his. Her ship yawned open then, and they stepped inside.

It was quiet on board the bio-ship, compared to the time she and her former-now-mended ex had spent on Mars. Just a low hum as the engines stirred back to life and pushed them free, first of the caves and then out of the atmosphere. Away from her family, and all that she'd experienced with and because of them; her head was quiet, as even the background telepathy of Mars faded out.

Conner did his best to make up for the silence, though, resting easy against her side and letting her start mending that mental link between them. It was frail compared to before, but she was determined to mend it as the bio-ship drifted back to Earth.

The End

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