No Perfect Sunsets

by DanieXJ

Summary

What if Lord Nor hadn't come to Earth to try and take it over, and Clark hadn't come back from New Krypton to save Earth?

Notes

This is my freakin' Fanfiction white whale right here. I’ve written this story so many times it’s not funny, or at least tried to write it. Once I sort of did it as a massive TV series crossover. Putting all the characters into the Metropolis/Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman world, but that sort of worked but not quite. So, then I tried putting stuff from this in here and there. There’s an unpublished version of this that is literally called ‘Fragments’, ‘cause at one point I’d split it into three, or four or five, I forget exactly how many fragments to try and tell the story.

Now, this incarnation. A few years ago (after it had already aired, I didn’t catch it then) I got a whiff of the Birds of Prey TV series. Well, now I even own the DVD, and have watched all the episodes, and... right before NaNo 2012 an idea popped into my head. Why not try and cross my Destiny/Centrifugal Motion white whale story with the Birds of Prey Series. Well... I’m not sure if it worked or not, but I do have to say that it fits together quite a bit better than my other attempts. Is it done well, I don’t know, guess that’s up to y’all the readers. So, here goes nothing.

And for the record, Chloe Sullivan is more like the Chloe in the Comic books than in the TV series Smallville. Clark and Chloe Did Not grow up together in Smallville in this story. They don’t meet until they meet where they meet in this story.
May 12th, 1996

Lois moved to the table and opened a jewelry box that was there. "I never got a chance to wear my wedding ring," she took out a silver chain that had her wedding band on it. "I was hoping that you could keep it for me." She draped it around Clark's neck.

He stared down at it, then up at Lois again, "I will keep this as safe as I keep my love for you." He paused, "Lois, I have loved you from the beginning."

Without a moment’s pause she responded, "And I'll love you til the end.”

"In my heart, I am your husband."

"And I'm your wife," she whispered.

"Always."

Lois wasn’t ready for the evening to end, because when the evening ended then they’d be so much closer to Clark leaving forever, "So, which star is yours?" She moved both of them to the window.

Clark knew what she was doing, and didn’t care. For the rest of the night he was still Clark Kent, tomorrow he would have to be Kal of the House of El, but he would savor every moment he had left as Clark Jerome Kent. "I don't know if you can see it. There." It twinkled.

Lois’ gaze followed Clark’s outstretched hand. "I see it." She didn’t, not really, at least not with her eyes. She could see it with her heart though. She looked over at him. "I'll watch it every night." She let the curtain fall closed, her need overcoming everything else. They were wrapped in each others arms as they fell towards the floor, their lips finding each others. Lois prepared herself for the bang of her head against the floor, but, her head never hit. Being Superman’s fiancee had some advantages. Her eyes fluttered closed as she was treated to a new one of those advantages.

~ 1997 - Metropolis

Dr. Bernard Klein was not, not, not an OB or a GYN. And yet, there he was, totally unprepared for whatever was going to emerge from Lois Lane. The journalist’s water had broken, and her contractions were getting closer and closer. She was dilated to almost ten centimeters, and... Dr. Klein had no idea if it would be like a normal birth, or, what would happen.

He wasn’t sure if these new lives, Lois hadn’t wanted to know if they were boys or girls when Dr. Klein had performed the ultrasound, would be human or what. At least the ultrasounds had gone as normally as they should have. Dr. Klein wasn’t sure if the boy and girl would be different from the start (he’d known even if he hadn’t told Lois), or if they’d get their powers later, or what. The first two alien/human hybrids to be born on Earth. No wonder his hands were so sweaty.

“Dr. Klein....”

That was Martha Kent, Clark’s adoptive mother and Dr. Klein’s new ‘nurse’ for as long as it took for Lois to give birth. Jonathan was somewhere in the building as well, but, hadn’t wanted to be in the room for the actual birth.

“Mrs. Kent, Martha... yes?”
“I think that the baby’s crowning.”

Lois spoke up, “No... where... where’s Jonathan, Martha? What if... if...”

“I’m here Lois.”

Lois had unshed tears in her eyes as she took Jonathan’s hand in one of her own and Martha’s in her other. “Thank you.”

They stood at her side as Dr. Klein successfully delivered the perfect looking, dark haired, seven pound six ounces baby girl, and her slightly smaller but still dark haired seven pound three ounces baby brother.

Practically beaming as Dr. Klein put the girl in Lois’ arms. Immediately the baby threw her arms out to the side, clipping Lois on the chin and let out a yell. Martha smiled, “Didn’t cold cock you. Always a good sign.”

“Martha, she doesn’t...”

Martha put a hand on Lois’ shoulder and spoke, “Just... wait a moment.” To Lois’ surprise the little girl fussed for another moment, then gave a yawn and seemed to settle against Lois. After a moment, “See... she knows her mother. Do you... do you have names picked out?”

“I...” Lois sniffed back tears, “I wasn’t even sure that... I mean... I didn’t...” She paused and looked up at the ceiling for a moment, “Lara, for... for Clark’s birth mother. I mean...” She glanced over at the Kents, “Martha I...”

Martha cut Lois off, “It’s okay honey. It’s a good name.”


Lois looked over at Jonathan who had taken the boy baby from Dr. Klein’s arms, “And... Clark Jerome Lane Jr. After his father. Can you even do that, name him a Jr. even if...” Lois trailed off as she brushed back the baby girl’s hair, “Lara Joanne Lane. Do you like that?”

Jonathan carefully placed CJ on Lois’ chest as well, “They’re very good names Lois.”

Lois smiled at her two children, already they were so different. LJ kept trying to get out of her mother’s arms, and once Jonathan had placed CJ on his mother’s chest he just curled up and lay perfectly still. “Clark Jr. Do you like that?” Lois smiled just a bit, “I think that he’s asleep.”

Martha leaned down and kissed Lois’ forehead. “They’re beautiful.”

Lois looked up, “You’ll... be here?”

“Whatever you need...”

Jonathan finished his wife’s thought, “...and whenever you need it Lois.”

~ 2003 - Metropolis

“Lara Joanne Lane!”

LJ froze in place, one foot off the ground, the other on the landing. She’d just shaken most of the house after she jumped from the top stair to the landing. She smiled at her Mom, who was at the
bottom of the stairs, “Perfect ten Mommy?”

Lois pointed at the floor in front of her, “Don’t...”

Before she could finish her thought LJ jumped from the landing and crashed to a stop right in front of Lois with only inches to spare. “…jump. Young lady. There is no running in the house, and that also includes no jumping. What were you thinking? You could have hurt yourself.”

LJ bit her lip, “Sorry Mommy.... I...” She stared down at the floor, “I wanted to fly like you said Daddy did. But I didn’t, I just fell. I’m sorry.”

Two days earlier Lois had sat down with LJ and told her all about how Clark Kent had been Superman and how he had fit into their family before he’d had to leave, and how Lara could never ever tell anyone.

Lois was surprised by how well LJ took it. She had questions, mostly about how her Dad being Superman related to her, or if he’d come back and teach her about flying and stuff. But, Lois had no answers to those questions. So, instead, LJ was jumping from the stairs to the ground, nearly knocking her mother and herself silly.

Lois sat down on the step so that she was on eye level with LJ. “Listen to me okay?” LJ nodded, she knew the difference between Lois’ serious tone and all her other tones, “We don’t know if you’ll get powers or not, but, right now, I don’t want you to get hurt young lady. No more jumping off of things. Understand?”

LJ blew out a breath, but nodded, “Yes Mommy...”

“Good.” She hugged LJ to her for a moment, then let go. “Now, go to your room until dinner.”

“But what abo...”

“Room LJ...”

LJ sighed and nodded. She slowly and ploddingly made her way up the stairs to her room.

Lois sighed as well as the front door opened and Martha came in, her arms filled with groceries. She frowned when she saw Lois’ face, “What’s wrong Lois?”

Lois put her head in her hands, “I can’t... I just... I feel like no matter what I do, it’s wrong Martha.”

Martha said nothing, but put down the bags and wrapped her arms around Lois and they sat there like that for awhile. She finally spoke, “What did she do honey?”

Lois extracted herself from Martha and they both stood, “She was just jumping around the house.” Lois paused, “Maybe, maybe I shouldn’t have told her. Now, I mean, she wouldn’t have known, she’s only five. And he’s not here, he’s never coming back Martha.”

Martha frowned, “Lois, do you... do you want her to get powers?”

Lois looked down at her hands, then back up at her almost mother-in-law, “In all honesty, I don’t know Martha. She’s just too... no.” They moved into the kitchen and up above them LJ frowned as she peered from around the corner.

She slid down the wall and looked down at her hands for a long moment, then put them over her eyes and the tears leaked out, silently.
“You, Mom, you came?”

Lois put her hand to LJ’s cheek, “Of course I came honey, if your father was on Earth he’d…”

“No. He didn’t want me Mom, or you, or any of this or he’d be here. Okay? Thank you for coming Mom.”

Lois opened her mouth, then closed it again, “I didn’t come here to fight with you kiddo. How are you doing?”

LJ grimaced, “Having an alien baby in the middle of nowhere. I’m totally fine and dandy.”

Lois put a hand around LJ’s shoulders, “We’ll get through this sweetie, just like Martha and Jonathan helped me get through having you…”

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Lois was just a bit worried too. With LJ she’d had quite the easy time actually giving birth to the baby girl and CJ, but LJ, she was having quite the time, and something just felt very, off to Lois. “Lara, we need to…”

“No…”

There was a breeze from a window, “Yes. I’m taking you to the hospital now young lady.”

And just like that Lois was alone in the apartment. She didn’t have to wait long for John Jones, J’onn J’onzz, the Martian Manhunter to come back and shapeshift back into his human form.

“She’s under my protection, she saved my life and so I owe her, even if that means that I must protect her from herself. Come with me Lois Lane of Earth and let’s go see your grandson born.”

“She…” Lois shook her head, “Thank you John.”
May 11th, 2017

It was nearly dawn. Gotham City had survived another night, mostly. The figure on top of the Old Wayne Tower hadn’t moved in nearly a half an hour.

A voice that only one person on Earth could hear spoke, “Are you planning to become a new gargoyle?” The figure still didn’t move, or speak. “I know you can hear me-- I know all about you too. Shadow is what most call you, although there are some in Metropolis who call you Superwoman. Your father is Superman, your mother... most think she’s Ultrawoman. But we both know the truth. You’ve been on a...” The voice paused, “...superhero walkabout. The Flash, Aquaman, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow. Learning from all of them. Then, you came to Gotham-- spent time with Two Face for some reason, then Batman, and Catwoman... I could feel left out.”

“What do you want Oracle?”

There was silence, “You know who I am, and yet you haven’t followed my transmission, confronted me yet?”

Shadow raised an eyebrow, “I don’t x-ray women’s backsides either. My mother-- taught me better than that.”

There was silence again from Oracle, “If I told you there was a robbery in progress at First Gotham Bank, would you go?”

Oracle started to speak again when Shadow didn’t answer immediately, but Shadow cut her off, “Next time, tune to the frequency I give you... there’ll be less background noise for you.”

“Wait, what’s... the...”

A piece of paper floated down on a waft of air and landed on Oracle’s desk. It had the information Oracle needed and was signed, ‘Shadow.’

Lt. Ching was dead. Zara formerly of the house of El and formerly his wife, stood on the dais next to Lord Zod, son of Lord Nor. Zod was the one who had killed Lt. Ching, although first Zod had killed his father Nor.

Kal was on his knees in front of the dais. No one had backed him. Twenty-one years of leading the people of New Krypton and he was just as alone as when he’d been pulled into New Krypton’s politics and to their planet by Ching and Zara.

“I am not a monster...” Kal raised an eyebrow, but said nothing to the new leader of New Krypton. “I will give you a choice. Exile, or death.”

Kal glanced out the window of the royal palace. When he’d arrived twenty-one years earlier it had been a desolate wasteland of a planet, but it was that no longer. It was a controlled and terraformed paradise. A Terraforming that Kal had led the push for, had come up with when everyone else just complained about the elements. Perhaps that was why Zod was letting Kal go. Because he thought no one would want to leave.
For Kal it was an easy decision, “Exile.”

Zara’s face relaxed. She’d never been in love with Kal, nor had Kal been in love with her, but, over the years they’d come to an understanding, they had respect for each other and cared for each other. Zara didn’t want to be standing up there, but, she had her children to protect. Her children with Ching, though, that truth would never cross either of their lips.

Zod laughed, “Figures. No doubt you’ll want to run back to your yellow sun and Earth, where you feel the most powerful. If that’s what you wish-- I will agree to it, but-- never again will you set foot on my planet. If you do--”

Kal stood, “Death. I understand. But, you understand that if I am no longer a Kryptonian than I am an... Earthman, and I will defend... my... planet to my last breath.”

Zod stood there and after a long moment he nodded, “Agreed, now, get out of my sight.”

“Earpiece mic?” Oracle got no answer, “Hmm... no. A pick up sewn into your suit then.” There was still no answer. “Did you do it yourself?”

Finally Shadow answered, “You got that from my silence?”

“I work with the Batman... all he gives me is silences. So-- are you going to stay in town?”

“Will you have more banks for me tomorrow?”

“Banks, escaped lunatics from Arkham, muggers, thieves, wannabe thugs and killers-- every night in Gotham City brings new surprises if you work with me.”

Oracle waited through the silence until Shadow spoke, “Hear you ‘round tomorrow night.”

Kal sat down in the ship that would rocket him back to Earth. Just as when he was a baby he wouldn’t be piloting this craft either. The pilot who was programming in the route finally took a half a step back and met Kal’s gaze. “I’m sorry Lor-- Kal.”

“Thank you Lor, and, good luck.”

Lor stepped back again and came to attention, “Thank you Lord Kal. Perhaps... one day you will be welcome on New Krypton again.”

Kal took Lor’s hand in his own, “Just take care of yourself Lor... and your family. I’ll be fine. Remember, I’ve lost my home before.”

The canopy started closing, “Godspeed Kal.”
Chapter 3

“Wakey, wakey oh sis of mine.”

LJ winced and rolled over. “What, wait, is it, what’s wrong?” Standing above her was her twin brother Clark Jerome Lane, Jr., “What time is it?”

“Everybody’s fine. Well, sort of, Mom’s up and already doing her depressed thing. Grandma’s a little better, but, she’s just sitting there staring out the window. So, you’re gonna get up and take Grandma, I got Mom.”

LJ rolled out of bed and sat still for a moment. Finally she stood and gave CJ a shove, “Go... go... After I check on...” She shook her head, “I’m right behind you.” CJ was at the door when LJ continued with a question, “You call Perry and Uncle Jimmy?”

“Yep. They got breakdown day on their calendars. It’s fine if Mom comes in late.” He paused, “She’s still in love with him Lara...”

LJ just shook her head, “Can’t see why... he freakin’ knocked her up and left.”

CJ blew out a breath, “So he could save his people LJ. He left so that he could save his people from tyranny. Mom said...”

They’d had the same argument many times in their twenty years. They’d had it enough times that LJ could finish CJ’s argument. “...that he didn’t want to go. Yeah, I know... go, go... I’m right behind you. Grandma in her room?”

“Yep.”

LJ sighed and went about getting ready for the day. Jeans, a T-shirt and finally a pair of glasses that she definitely didn’t need.

Both she and her brother wore them. He needed them, she didn’t. They were fraternal twins, born February 3rd, 1997. But, as children they’d often been mistaken for identical twins. Most because LJ had always been the most tomboy-ish of tomboys.

LJ hair was still short, and unlike her brother, who worked out every day and grumbled about it constantly, because of LJ’s super genetics she had a fit and strong runner’s build no matter what she ate. The fact that LJ had powers and CJ did not was the only tension in their relationship. Other than that they were as close as any brother and sister in the world. That was why CJ got away with waking LJ up at oh-dark-thirty and not getting his face rearranged.

LJ went across the hall and knocked on her grandmother’s room door, “Hey Grandma, it’s me.”

“Come in LJ.”

LJ did and closed the door behind her. She leaned against it, “Hey-- so, CJ said that you weren’t doin’ great, but now I can totally tell, ‘cause you never call me LJ.”

Martha Kent nodded from the big chair at the window. “Every year on this day... it was Jonathan... he kept me together.” Martha wiped at her eyes, “I--”

LJ pushed Martha over a bit and smooshed down next to her on the chair, putting her arm around her grandmother. “Do you know how long he tried to teach me how to milk a cow? I was
hopeless. Always told me that he’d only had that much trouble teaching one other person the--
simple-- skill of getting milk from a cow--"

“Me.”

LJ smirked, “Yeah, he joked that maybe I was related to you guys after all. He--” LJ trailed off
and cleared her throat. “He was like a Dad to me, not a Grandad.” LJ glanced towards the door,
“I-- ah-- he was sorta the one who taught me the birds and bees, not Mom.” LJ made a face,
“Though I had to sit through Mom doin’ it too.”

“I know. Jonathan told me that you came to ask about boys. He also thought that...” Martha
glanced over at LJ, “That you didn’t seem very interested in the-- boy-- aspect of the talk.”

LJ frowned, “Ah, Grandma, I was like, nine years old I think.”

“Eight and a half actually. Was he wrong?” LJ shrugged, “I know that you hate this day Lara.
That you think that we’re all-- stupid-- or something, for missing him, wanting him here. But, he
was, he is the one who inspired all those heroes you’re learning from. Superman was one of the
first.”

LJ stood from the chair and went to stand closer to the window, “I have no problem with the myth
of Superman Grandma... it’s the myth of-- Clark Kent that I can’t stand.”

“Lara...”

LJ put a hand up, “No, I... I’m sorry. I’m supposed to be cheering you up. So... what do I have to
do to do that?”

“Have you met anyone?”

“Grandma...”

A small smile came to Martha’s face, “Oh, so you have.”

“Ah, not really-- she’s a voice. Oracle. She helps the vigilantes in Gotham City. She’s smart,
knows who I am already. Well, most of it...” LJ paused, “Actually, now that I think of it, she
seemed to be missing one important detail about me.”

Martha sat forward in her chair, “Do you know who she is?”

“Of course. Barbara Gordon. She was once Batgirl. Four years ago she was shot by the Joker, she
survived, but lost the use of her legs ‘cause of it. Now she’s the information broker for guys like
Red Robin, Black Canary, Batman... and Nightwing, the guy she also dated, which... also means
she’s straight, so...”

“Oh-- honey...”

LJ shook her head, “Nope. I’m fine. She’s a voice. We’ll never see each other, she’ll tell me
where to go, we’ll banter... I’m fine.”

Martha stood and joined LJ at the window, “You were listening huh?”

“What?”

“To your mother’s stories. She, Perry, they all think that you weren’t listening to the stories your
mother told about she and your father. But you were. The stories of soulmates, true love...”
LJ shrugged, “Oracle will teach me something, just like the rest of them have. So, want me to make breakfast?”

Martha put her arm around LJ. “You wake your son, I’ll start the sausages. Your mother is a much better cook than she used to be, but… not that good.”

LJ chuckled.

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“Oracle.”

Barbara turned in her chair, Catwoman, aka Selina Kyle, stood in the nerve center of Barbara’s clocktower. “Selina– what can I do for you?”

“My daughter, I heard there’s a new treatment that could bring her out of her coma.” Barbara frowned, “I see your look. This isn’t about money– I will never be in need of money…”

Barbara nodded, “It’s about hacking. Is it being run through Gotham Memorial?” Selina nodded, “I’ll do anything for her, you know that Selina. She’s like my sister.”

“Thank you Barbara.”

Barbara inclined her head and turned towards her screens. Her hands paused over her keyboard, “I’m sorry–”

Selina approached Barbara and rested a hand on her shoulder. “If there’s one thing I have done right in this life… other than Helena… it was never, ever blaming you for the Joker shooting my daughter and putting her into a coma.” With that, Selina went to the door to the balcony, opened it, and flung herself towards the Gotham City’s skyline. Just as Barbara herself once had done as Batgirl.

Barbara took off her glasses and pinched the bridge of her nose as that horrible night came back to her.

~ 4 Years Ago - 2013 - Gotham City

He came out of nowhere, and Barbara Gordon should have expected it. She’d been Batgirl for five years. Always be on guard, always be ready, the first two lessons ever from Bruce, two of the most painful at the time as well. But how was she to know that the Joker knew her real identity, though she should have known that he was psycho enough to lash out at anyone and everyone who was connected with Batman.

As she lay in her own blood she realized that she’d never actually been shot before. Electrified, bruised, broken and battered to within an inch of her life as Batgirl, sure, but the street thugs she fought weren’t fast enough to get their guns out before she had knocked them unconscious, and the super villains, well, they generally didn’t use guns that used bullets at all.

Of all the people in Gotham it was Selina Kyle who found Barbara, rushed her to Gotham Memorial, saved her life. Of course, Selina hadn’t stopped by Barbara’s apartment to save her life, but to pick up her daughter Helena Kyle. The daughter that had caught a stray bullet that was supposed to have killed Barbara.

Barbara had been babysitting for Helena since the little Kyle was a baby and Barbara was nine years old. Barbara had no doubt that it gave Selina Kyle, the best thief in Gotham, a bit of mirth to know that her daughter was being watched by the adopted daughter of the Commissioner of
the Gotham City Police Department, and sidekick of Batman.

But, even at sixteen when Barbara started training with Batman and Robin, even when she found out from Batman that Selina Kyle was Catwoman she kept babysitting Helena, and then simply hanging out with the young child and then teen. Maybe it was rebellion against Batman who didn’t want her interacting with either of the Kyles. Or maybe Barbara saw something of herself in the young girl, and then the young woman, and wanted to make sure that there was some other voice than her mother’s the thief in Helena’s ear. Or, perhaps it was just that fate decided that they were sisters from two mothers, and that was that.

Whatever the reason, Helena hadn’t wanted to go to the Benefit for the Ivy Foundation and had bugged her mother for two days straight until Selina had given in and consented that as long as she was supervised by Barbara Helena could stay home.

And so in the apartment Selina found her sometimes opponent, blood pooling around her back, and her daughter, blood pooling around her head. And by some miracle, they had both survived.

Barbara Gordon started a new life at the age of 21, no longer Batgirl because the shot from Joker’s gun had paralyzed her from the legs down, and Helena Kyle, she lived too, but fell into a coma and didn’t seem in any hurry to come out of it.

Present Day - 2017

Barbara shook herself out of it and focused back on the screens around her. It was morning, and she had a sudden urge to just get out of the clocktower. Well, technically the urge was to take the batons that she had hidden in her chair to her screens, but, that was expensive. She was sure that going out would probably be a better idea.

"LJ--"

LJ paused at the house’s front door with a glance outside to the steps where her son had sat at the edge and was playing with a stick, “Yep?”

Lois joined her and hugged her, before taking a step back, “Thank you.”

LJ shrugged, “I love you Mom. Whenever you need me, I’m there if I can be. Later.”

Lois watched as her daughter left and sighed, “I wish...” She cut herself off with a shake of her head, “Time for work-- wishing is for horses.”

There was no blue bubble like in the movies, no ripple of the space or distortion of everything. There was no one there, and then there stood a six two or six three foot man with black hair, eyes so dark that they seemed black, and a sneer on his face that transformed into a smirk as he looked around. “Finally.”

Barbara rolled through Crime Alley. She knew she shouldn’t. That all the Escrima and Kempo training in the world would do no good against a gang of bad men. But, she couldn’t help it. As she travelled through she saw the old lady that had been saved by Red Robin two nights before. The scared student who tried to fade into the shadows even in the daytime so he could get through just two more years, graduate, and get out of Gotham City. The middle aged couple that was just
So tired from working too many jobs just to scrape by that they didn’t care if they got home okay from their overnight shifts or not.

Someone was coming. Barbara heard voices behind her and rolled into an alley. It was two people, “Commissioner Gordon, long time no see…”

Barbara silently rolled her eyes. She knew the speaker. Lieutenant Detective Sarah Essen. A hard scrabble woman, the commander of the Major Crime Unit, and the long running fiancé of the Commissioner James Gordon (who also happened to be Barbara’s adopted father and birth uncle).

Everything in Gotham City was complicated like that. The shadows had shadows, even at high noon, and most people had at least two sides.

She tilted her head to one side, something had echoed farther down the alley. She glanced back at the sidewalk where her father and Sarah seemed to be trying to devour each other’s face. She shook her head and with a couple of turns of her wheels she was going towards the trouble.

Three thugs were going at the student she’d seen walking on the street. She had her Escrima stick out and was going at the first thug before she even thought about it.

Unfortunately what she’d thought was three guys was really more like ten. An ambush. In the back of her mind she wondered if it was one setup for her. Still, she’d go down swinging.

She and her attackers went back and forth, but it was a losing battle for the redhead, and she went sprawling, her wheelchair going the other way. She felt kicks to her body and head and then nothing.

Barbara blinked and sat up slowly. She wasn’t dead and as she looked around she realized that the thugs were all unconscious and scattered like bowling pins, Shadow, although at that moment Barbara could understand why those in Metropolis called her Superwoman, was standing amongst them.

Barbara blinked against and was sure that Shadow would disappear as quickly as she’d appeared. But, she didn’t. Instead she picked Barbara’s chair as if it were tissue paper and put it down next to Barbara.

Still without a word she met Barbara’s eyes and then she was gone between one blink and the next. Barbara looked up in the sky for a second, then shook her head and dragged herself back into her chair. She hoped her Dad and Sarah were done sucking face. 

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“Will your son be making a ruckus and tearing up the place?”

“No.”

“So, you got a job to pay the rent with?”

LJ nodded, “I do--”

The super, Joe, a mostly balding middle aged guy with just a bit of a beer belly and the look of someone who knew how to fix almost anything, narrowed his eyes at LJ, “Yeah, what? Too muscular for a hooker. He looked her up and down, “Something, not a doctor, don’t look smart enough for that.” LJ raised an eyebrow at that comment, “PT?”

LJ opened and closed her eyes, a little surprised, “Ah, yeah, actually, I am.” She looked at him
again, seeing an alertness to his eyes that she hadn’t seen before. “You’re good…”

Joe shrugged and held out the key and she took it. “You gonna keep your job?”

“For the rent?” LJ raised an eyebrow.

Joe bantered back, “For the kid.”

“I was plannin’ on it, yep.”

Joe gave a curt nod and held out his empty hand. After a beat LJ shook it, “Welcome to the building– L.J.” He paused, then continued, “And, when you find somewhere better for you and your pipsqueak, don’t worry ‘bout givin’ me too much notice.” He glanced around the room, “I can rent this thing faster than you can move out.”

LJ gave Joe a two fingered salute, “Thanks, and, I’ll keep that in mind. Better pick him up from daycare sooner rather than later.”

Joe left her alone, closing the door as he left. It wasn’t much of an apartment. A small bedroom off to one side, a bathroom that had probably been a closet in a previous life next to it, an even smaller alcove off the other side of the main room, and then the main room that had the kitchen, living room, etc. in it.

But, despite its smallness it had one big plus. It was on the top floor of the building, and right next to the door to the roof.

There was a knock on LJ’s window and she opened it. Catwoman gracefully came through it and looked around. “Cute.”

“Bed doesn’t have bugs, there’s room for Matt, I’ll be able to get to the roof with a few... alterations to the emergency door. What do you want?”

“To let off some steam tonight dear Shadow.” LJ raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms over her chest, “Big Mike Mahoon...”

“Stealth?”

Selina inclined her head, her eyes twinkling under her mask, “Powers would make the job easy.”

LJ blew out a breath, “I can’t, no babysitter for Matt.”

Selina gestured to the inner wall, “Next door, Stephanie, ah... Brown I think. Nerd, doesn’t get out much, or, down the hall her friend, best friend I believe, Holly Robinson. Or... both...”

LJ rolled her eyes and went over to a box. She stuck her hand in and it came back out with a full faced mask. “What the hell... Old Wayne Tower after dark? But, it’s gotta be a fast job, first day of work tomorrow.”

Selina rolled her eyes as she climbed out the window, “You-- you’re very strange Shadow.”

"Hey Lois--"

"Jimmy--"

"I-- ah-- this is what I have so far.” Jimmy thrust a tablet in front of Lois, “Lois, are you sure that
you want me to do the ‘where are we now, twenty one years without a Superman, that sort of thing’. I thought...

Lois handed back the tablet without looking at it, “James, I don’t need to look at it yet. You’re not a copy boy or part time photog anymore Jimmy. It’s good, it’s right, after all...” The smallest of smiles came to Lois’ lips, “You were trained by the best. When it’s finished get it to me, okay?”

Jimmy gave a half hearted smile back and went back to his desk. The desk that had previously been Clark’s. Lois went through the doorway into what had once been Perry’s office and now was hers. She looked around, she’d never have guessed that she would be the one to wind up in Perry’s office. She thought that she’d be pounding the streets for stories as a reporter until she couldn’t do it anymore or she died. But then Clark had gone to New Krypton, and she’d found out she was pregnant, and, a few years before she’d taken over from Perry the Editor duties.

It wasn’t as bad a job as she’d thought it would be. She still wrote a story or editorial here and there, and she’d found that she actually liked shepherding the new reporters. There was Jimmy of course, he was probably her best, but, there was also a young woman just a little older than her son, just out of college all full of vigor and spunk, Chloe Sullivan was a name that would be on everyone’s lips in a few years, Lois was sure of that.

Being Editor also had one other advantage. Although decades ago she had told Jimmy and Perry Clark’s secret, it made the ruse that Clark was still on Earth so much easier to perpetuate if she could just write the stories under the Clark Kent name, and submit them to herself than what they had to do at the beginning involving Perry and Jimmy. Still, Jimmy had been a great Uncle, and with Perry and Jonathan, and sometimes her own father Sam, LJ and CJ had never wanted for male role models.

Barbara sat at her computers and stared through the monitors. She brought up Shadow’s... LJ’s mic. She had realized that she’d seen those eyes somewhere before, and after a quick search with her very sturdy algorithms had figured out where. A photo of Lois Lane and her two children. Lara, LJ, and Clark Jr., CJ. Listening to the mic Barbara was was surprised that it was on and voices were coming from it. She muted her side of the connection and listened, only feeling a little guilty for doing it. LJ was with someone. “They’re damn good negotiators those two are. Highway robbery, though, I did get ‘em to take the price down since there are two of them and only one kiddo.”

The other person with LJ laughed. A laugh that Barbara recognized. “So, kryptonite doesn’t hurt you, but, you can’t... super hypnotize two teenagers or something?”

“So, to the job.”

Barbara turned off the mic and frowned, she hadn’t given Catwoman a job, that meant that she was stealing something just to steal it.

She felt depressed for some reason, she had known that Shadow, LJ had spent time with Catwoman, but, somewhere in her mind she’d thought it was more to learn things, not to help the thief pull jobs. She sent the Batmobile a text with the location of Shadow and Catwoman. Either he’d stop them from whatever they were trying to do, or he wouldn’t if there were something more important for him to do.

Although she didn’t totally approve of Catwoman stealing from anyone she understood it. But, she had thought that with Superman’s blood in her, that LJ would be better than that. Of course, Barbara and Selina Kyle had quite a complicated history too. They’d fought plenty of times as
Batgirl and Catwoman, both winning at one time or another. Catwoman was the epitome of grey in Gotham City. But, she had been much darker than light, that is, until her daughter and Barbara were shot.

~ 4 Years Ago - 2013 - Gotham City

Selina hadn’t come all the way into the room right away. But even just standing in the doorway Barbara could feel the pain radiating from Selina, the hate, the rage. Barbara had felt those feelings coming at her from thugs to super villains every time she put on the pointy ears, the yellow boots and the yellow Bat. She knew those feelings, though she’d never felt them coming from Catwoman, from Selina.

Even out of her costume Selina moved with the grace of a cat. Not so much a house cat, but one of the big cats. She stopped at Barbara’s bedside and without a word threw the covers off of the red head, revealing her legs. She pushed at the knee and then ran her nail along the bottom of Barbara’s foot. Nothing jumped, twitched, or moved, at all. Selina finally met Barbara’s eyes, “It’s true.” Barbara nodded. “Tell me what happened.”

Barbara cleared her throat, once, then again, but she couldn’t get a word past the dryness. She nearly jumped as Selina held a cup and straw up to her mouth. “Drink.”

Barbara took a short drink, and then nodded. “Batman called, he had a lead on the Joker and his crew, Harley Quinn, everyone. It was just the two of us, and we...” Barbara shook her head, “...mostly him, took down the Joker. Turned him over to the GCPD. I went home to make sure Helena hadn’t...”

Selina interrupted Barbara, “You left her alone in your apartment.”

Barbara nodded, “Ironically, yes. And she was fine. She was watching, well...” Barbara cleared her throat again, “That doesn’t matter. She said she’d make me a late dinner, we joked back and forth about my lack of cooking skills, it was, it was normal. She telling me to loosen up ‘big sis’, me telling her to straighten up ‘little sis’. I took my shower and was getting out when the doorbell rang. I...” Barbara took a deep breath in and pinched her eyes closed. “I’m sorry, I’m... Please, just...”

Selina brushed the bangs from Barbara’s eyes, “Honey, I’m not here to kill you.”

Barbara looked up at Selina, silent tears running down her cheeks, “Why not?”

“Please, tell me the end Barbara.”

Barbara cleared her throat, “The Jo... He was surprised to see Helena there, I could see that. She was shot first. I took a step towards her and then there-- there was a moment of pain all up and down my body, and my legs stopped working. I collapsed to the ground. You...” Barbara wiped at her eyes, “You know the rest.”

Selina nodded, “Is there anything you need?”

“Is, is she--”

Selina took in a breath, held it for a beat, then let it out, “She’s in a coma. A deep one from what the docs said. But-- she’ll be back.”

“I want to visit her.”

Selina looked down at Barbara’s legs, “Are you supposed to move?”
“Selina, most of the things I’ve done in my life no one gave me permission to do. My-- he practically severed my spinal cord. This isn’t a case where some miracle will happen and I’ll regain the ability to walk. I’m done. Period.”

Selina pushed a wheelchair over next to the bed. “Get out of bed.”

Barbara frowned, “I need...”

Selina cut Barbara off, “Yes, your life is over. Your life as Batgirl, but... you’re a hero. You don’t get to give up. I won’t let you.”

\[\text{Present Day - 2017}\]

Barbara had been expecting all sorts of reactions from the cat burglar that day except for the one that Selina had given her. All that Selina had wanted in return was a clean slate. No fingerprints in the system, no outstanding warrants or BOLOs. Selina Kyle, Catwoman, went from thief back to law abiding citizen, sort of. She had kept much more to the shadows, under the radar, nothing flashy, nothing that would piss off the cops for sure. Some of the GCPD didn’t even know that she still existed. They thought her a legend made to scare the square badges.

Selina had helped Barbara start training in the arts of Escrima and Kempo in her chair and she slowly transformed herself from Batgirl to Oracle. Barbara had also watched as Catwoman had changed nearly overnight.

After a few months Catwoman had appeared on the balcony of the Clocktower that Barbara as Oracle had set up as her base of operations. She wanted Barbara to guide her too-- give her the problems on the fringe that Batman wouldn’t touch with a twenty foot pole. The stuff that walked the line between good guys and bad guys. She said it was ‘something to do between real jobs’. Barbara had stared at Selina for a long moment, then responded, “So, all of Gotham then?”

They’d both laughed, gallows humor. Selina hadn’t promised that she could keep being ‘good’ as she called it for long, and Barbara hadn’t expected the law abiding Catwoman to last too long either, but, they’d both been wrong. It had been eight years, and the only things that Catwoman had stolen had either been from bad guys and gals, or had been done at Barbara’s direction.

Catwoman wasn’t the only one that Oracle turned out guiding from her perch in the midst of a technological womb in her Clocktower. She helped Nightwing, Dick Grayson, her friend from when he was Robin and she was Batgirl. She helped the newest Robin too, Tim Drake. She even helped Batman on occasion, thought the occasions were few and far between, and it was almost always at his request.

She spent too much time surrounded by her computers in the top floor of the Clocktower, she knew that. But, she couldn’t seem to help herself. It had started with Batgirl, and Selina had been right, even when the use of her legs disappeared, the need to help people was still there, burning in her gut.

“Oracle, earth to Oracle.”
Barbara cleared her throat and keyed her mic, “Nightwing, what do you need?”

“To hear your voice?”

Barbara rolled her eyes, “Hilarious.” she fell silent and waited. She’d gotten very good at waiting in the last eight years.

Nightwing finally broke down and spoke over the open line, “Do you have eyes on Robin?”

Barbara’s eyes went to a second screen that had a map of Gotham on it and showed where everyone was via the GPS chips in their communicators. “He’s near the docks, why?”

Nightwing sounded confused, “Because, I thought I just... Ah, never mind, maybe it was Bats. There are a couple of tied up thugs on the street and I didn’t do it, just wondered.” He paused, “You wouldn’t happen to know where Batman is?”

Barbara chuckled, “What do you think Nightwing. Oracle out.” Barbara pulled up another screen and opened up a connection with a couple of the cameras that she’d had Catwoman place around Gotham. The ones nearest to Nightwing’s GPS position. She frowned. Once second the thugs had been threatening an old woman, the next they were trussed together, unconscious. Barbara slowed the video down as slow as it would go, still, nothing. Barbara knew how fast Superman, Power Girl, the Flash, all the speedsters were, and there wasn’t one of them who was faster than the frame rate of her camera. She should have gotten at least one frame of whoever had done the trussing. She shook her head, “LJ’s even faster than Barry or Wally. Wow.”
“You’re not Grace Choi.” Barbara Gordon wasn’t happy as she wheeled into her Physical Therapist’s office and found LJ Lane standing there. She didn’t particularly like her Physical Therapist. When she could, she did it on her own. But she was only human, and that meant that sometimes she needed professional help. But, she was pretty sure that she didn’t want that professional help to be LJ Lane. “Do you have a DPT?”

LJ nodded as she finished washing her hands and turned. “I do. BS/DPT from an accredited program. Would you like to see the documentation?”

Barbara expected sarcasm in the words, but could find none. “Ah, no, I’ll take your word for it Ms. Lane.”

“LJ, please. Or, Lara if you prefer. After all,” She raised an eyebrow, took off her glasses with a flourish, then put them back on, “I did save your life.” LJ looked down at the chart on the counter. “So, now that we have the secret identities out of the way. You seem to be doing great, better than great actually.” She looked back up at Barbara quizzically. “I’m not sure what I can do for you.”

Barbara transferred herself from her motorized wheelchair to the floor. “Your job.”

LJ held up both hands with a bit of a smile. “It’s your dime, I just like going into each session with a goal in mind. You seem to have surpassed every goal that you and Grace made.”

“Please.”

The woman shrugged and knelt down next to Barbara. “Your pain threshold?”

“High.”

LJ held her hand out to Barbara, who after a moment shook it. “Let’s get started.”

Lois stared down at the story that Jimmy had written. They’d put the first picture that the Daily Planet had ever gotten of Superman with the story. She could still remember the first time she met Superman. He had been swallowing a bomb. It still made her smile to think of it.

Her phone ringing interrupted her reminiscing, which was a good thing. They had another paper to put out. That was the other reason she had taken the Editor job when Perry retired, there was no time to get stuck in the past because every day there was another edition to get out.

“Lane.”

“Lois, it’s Bernard Klein from...”

Lois smiled just a bit, “Bernard, I know where you’re from. What’s up?”

“Something’s... coming, they, we here at S.T.A.R. Labs don’t know exactly what, but, it’s coming, and coming fast and...” Lois could practically see him looking around to make sure that no one was in his vicinity listening. “...I’ve calculated where it’s coming from. No one else has yet. New Krypton. It’s coming from the area where New Krypton is located in the... universe.”

Lois put her hand over the bottom part of the phone, “JIMMY!”
He appeared just as fast as he had when Perry was editor, “Yep, whaddya need?”

“S.T.A.R. Labs, now... you think that Sullivan is ready?”

Jimmy shrugged, “I wasn’t, might as well dip her toes in the deep end right?”

“Good, then, you have a partner. Go, go...” She took her hand away from the phone and spoke to Dr. Klein again, “I’m sending Jimmy and... Chloe Sullivan over to talk to you. So...”

“Mums the word to the uninitiated reporter, I understand Lois.” He paused, “Are you okay?”

Lois also gave a pause before she spoke, “I’m going to pretend that you’re asking about my sciatica, not what I think you’re actually asking about. And yes, I’m fine.... on all counts. It is, after all, just a date. Keep me appraised please Bernard.”

“Of course, of course. Good day to you Lois.”

“Yes, you too Bernard. Good-bye.”

She hung up the phone and stared out her office window for a second. Finally she shook her head. She wouldn’t even let herself think that it could be Clark. Nope. She had work to do.

Barbara lay back on the mat and stared up at the ceiling. “Thank you.”

The water turned off and LJ dried her hands. “Well, it’s my job. But, you’re welcome.”

“You haven’t offered to return me to my chair.”

LJ chuckled, “Somehow I doubt that you’d be anything but pissed off at me if I offered that.” Lara tilted her head to one side and raised an eyebrow, “Am I right?”

Barbara slowly pulled herself up into her chair with only a small groan. “You are right, were right yesterday as well.”

Before she could say any more a small bundle of something came shooting into the room and slammed into Barbara’s wheelchair. Needless to say the chair won, throwing what was a two year old boy to the ground with an oof.

LJ grabbed his arm and hauled him up, “Matthew, you know better than that my man.” She looked sheepishly at Barbara, “I’m sorry Ms. Gordon. This is my son, Matt.”

Matt stared down at his shoes. “Sorry Miss Lady.”

Barbara looked him up and down, “Matthew, your mother’s correct, you should have knocked first.”

He bit the inside of his lip, “I’m sorry...” He shook his head, “Sorry.”

LJ cleared her throat, “Will you be back next week? Or I could schedule you with Grace again. I was only filling in for her today.”

“I--” Barbara shook her head, “No, I’ll be back, and,” she glanced at Matt, “it would be alright if it was with you, minus the... interruption at the end of course.”

LJ nodded, “Of course.”
Barbara rolled out the door, but stopped just past the doorway and listened to Matt, “She’s poopy head Mom...”

LJ practically growled out her son’s voice, “Matthew West Lane, you know much, much better than that too.”


Barbara heard a rustle of clothing and she could almost picture the tall woman picking up her child. “I accept your apology. But, this means sprouts and lots and lots of veggies and not the usual ‘A’ ice cream.”

A slight smile came to Barbara’s face as she heard Matt’s sigh, “Okay.”

Barbara heard LJ chuckle, “But, maybe the next time you get one, if you’re good we can get a banana split or somethin’ my little monster. Now, I need to finish up some stuff, and then we’re out of here.”

Barbara continued to the waiting room, stopping to make another appointment. The receptionist had spoken the same unhelpful words that she’d said every time Barbara left the office. “Now you can go home and get some rest.”

Barbara just nodded and left. She didn’t bother telling the woman that in fact she’d go home to her apartment, have some dinner, and then go up to the Clocktower where all her equipment was. That she’d put on her glasses and wake up her computer systems and she’d become the eyes and ears of the vigilantes of Gotham.

Despite herself she couldn’t just leave the hospital grounds though. Her chair made its way over to Helena’s room almost on its own. She rolled into the room and stopped. She knew that the nurses thought she was insane. She never got nearer than just inside the doorway, she couldn’t bring herself to touch the woman she’d once thought of as the little sister she’d never had but always wanted so badly. The woman that had been under her care when the Joker had gone on his revenge trip. The young woman she’d failed so utterly and totally.

Barbara closed her eyes as her breath caught in her throat.

oOOOOo

LJ’s phone rang and she hit the answer button. Her brother popped up on the screen. “You answered.”

LJ winced, “I do have a job CJ. What’s wrong?”

CJ made a face, “Do you not read anything, or watch anything, or... somethin’ is coming towards the Earth, probably gonna crash, although they don’t think it’s an asteroid. Mom gave the cute new reporter, the blonde the story... well, along with Uncle Jimmy. Wish I had time to ask her out, but, even with an eidetic memory this first year of Med School is kicking my butt.”

LJ rolled her eyes, “Was there a point to you calling? Other than insulting me bro?”

“Yeah, Mom wants you to.... ya know.”

LJ frowned, “I don’t even know if...”
Her brother cut her off, “That’s a total load of crap and you know it. I know where you went when you were pissed at Mom and Grandma and Grandpa... yep... so, I’m calling you on it. Now, either do it, or call Mom back and tell her that you’re not going to. Oh, and you’re not picking up her calls?”

LJ shook her head, “Bye CJ.”

“See ya.”

They both hung up and LJ let her hand drop to her side. She blew out a breath. She didn’t like going into space, it made her feel so, ironically enough, claustrophobic. But, generally her mother didn’t ask much of her and so, she probably should do it.

She glanced at the clock and after a second of hesitation she dialed Dr. Klein’s number. “Hey Bernie... got a sec?” A small smile came to her face, “Yeah, yeah, I know, my grammar’s atrocious. You tried to cure me of it at my yearly physicals, but... alas... yeah. My brother told me, I would need.... yeah... so, when would I be going? Tomorrow?” LJ blew out a breath, “Yeah, let me get someone to look after Matt and such. Tomorrow, yep, in the bright one... Thanks Dr. K.”

She hung up and groaned, “Man, I hate the bright one.”

“Mommy mad?”

LJ swung her son up and he squealed, “Not at you Matt-so... So, what are ya making me for dinner pipsqueak?”

Matt laughed, “No can cook Mommy.” He stuck his hands out like he was flying and LJ gripped him around the waist and swooped and dove him around the room. “Hee touch the roof Mommy, roof...” LJ gave a glance out of the window of their apartment, then she floated up and Matt squealed with delight when he touched the ceiling. She brought him down into her arms and landed back on firm ground. “Ready for dinner?”

“Yes pwease. Cookies?”

LJ put Matt on the ground and ruffled his hair, “Nice try buddy, but, no... cookies’ll come after. Then I have to go out, ‘kay?”


“No Holly?”

Matt shrugged, “Dinner?”

“Go wash your hands and I’ll get it all warmed up. ‘Kay?”

Matt looked down as his stomach rumbled, he laughed, “Yes, yes...” And made his way to the bathroom.

oOOOOo

“You planning on going out by yourself tonight Oracle?”

Barbara jerked fully upright in her chair, at some point she’d dozed off. Intellectually she knew was spending too many hours being Oracle, that she was going to wind up burning out sooner rather than later, but, she couldn’t seem to help herself.
“Are you planning on robbing someone else?”

There was silence from LJ’s end of the comm for a long moment, so long that Barbara was sure that LJ wasn’t going to answer her. That she’d gone too far. “‘Big Mike Mahoon, that’s who we robbed. One of his illegitimate kids and the kid’s mother came into the women’s shelter in Gotham City, you know the one…”

Barbara did, LJ was referring to the shelter that Selina often volunteered at. “I do.”

“Yeah, well, Selina restrained herself from cutting off his… and instead, we robbed him blind.”

“Oh…” It was Barbara’s turn to be silent, “Ah, are you in the City?”

“Yes…”

“The ah…” Barbara closed her eyes for a moment, took in and let out a breath and spoke again, “Someone’s being attacked, I think it’s a villain not thugs. Near Third and Lee.”

“Gotcha. I can hear them”

Barbara listened as LJ arrived on the scene, and in short order took care of Tallyman. It was like that all night. LJ never was flashy with her powers, but the streets were thoroughly clean by the end of the night in a way that Batman and the whole Bat clan had never achieved even in a week of nights.

Finally Barbara gave in, “I have nothing left…”

Barbara jumped as LJ’s voice came not only from the speakers but from right in front of her. “Too bad. I thought I was getting into a rhythm.” She saw that she’d surprised Barbara and blushed just a bit, “Sorry ‘bout that. Thought that we should officially meet, again. And, in person I can see just how pissed you’re at me for my stunt with Catwoman. So, I’m LJ Lane, aka Shadow, aka Superwoman.”

“Wow.”

LJ made a face and walked down from the elevated part of the clocktower to the circle where Barbara sat amongst all her equipment. “Yeah, right… c’mon…” She ruffled her hair into disorder. “The only reason I wear the ‘S’ on my chest is so that my Grandmom doesn’t get this sad look on her face every time I go to see her. I’m not my father.”

“No… you’re…” Barbara shook her head, “Sorry, Barbara Gordon, Oracle.”

LJ tilted her head to one side, “I’ve been meaning to ask you this since your PT appointment. Have they ever considered taking the bullet out?”

Barbara blinked in surprise as she looked up at LJ, “What?”

“Sorry, pretend I didn’t say anything. I should get back to my son.” She blew out a breath, “Tomorrow I have to go out into space and see if the thing that’s hurtling towards Earth is my father… such a joy.”

LJ started to walk out of the computer circle, but Barbara wheeled over to her and caught LJ’s arm with her hand. “Wait. There’s no bullet in me, they told me they took it out.”

LJ squinted at Barbara for a second, then knelt down next to Barbara and put her hand between the chair and Barbara’s back. She ran it down the red head’s back and Barbara felt herself shudder
in a very good way at the touch. Finally LJ’s fingers stopped just before Barbara couldn’t feel anything. “Right there. Looks like a 9mm.”

“That’s... that’s what the Joker used. But... I only remember two shots, I think... One into Helena, one into me.”

“Well,” LJ didn’t move from where she was, and didn’t move her hand either, “If it was three instead of two, well, you do have have an excuse, you were being shot at. You’re what, T7?”

“Ah, T9...”

LJ finally took her hand away and stood, “Wonder how they missed it.”

LJ was nearly to the door that led outside to the balcony when Barbara spoke, “Thank you.”

LJ turned, “Gonna rip your doctor a new one?”

Barbara smiled just a bit, “You don’t know the half of it... Shadow.”

LJ inclined her head, “Goodnight, Oracle...” And then she was gone.

Barbara sat perfectly still for a moment. That was not how she’d thought her evening would end. Not by a long shot. And when LJ had touched her back. She closed her eyes, “Ah... Hell, why can’t you ever just fall for the regular guys Gordon.”
“Hey Dad.”

James Gordon, Commissioner of the GCPD, leaned down and kissed his daughter, then sat as well. A waitress came over and both father and daughter ordered, “So-- what has you down town today?”

“A visit with my surgeon. He lied--”

That caused Gordon to frown, “What?”

“I still have a bullet in me.”

James’ heart skipped a beat as he took ahold of Barbara’s hand. “Are you okay? Is it moving, are...”

“Dad-- Dad-- it’s just sitting there, I promise. I just-- my surgeon got a piece of my mind and he got fired.” Barbara shook her head, “I’m going to get a second opinion.”

James frowned again, “Is it, how did you know honey, did you feel it?”

Barbara hated lying to her father, but she’d gotten used to it, “Yes, yeah... Nothing to worry about. Really Dad. I’m just angry.”

James squeezed his daughter’s hand, “You’re my daughter. I get to worry about you young lady. It’s in the contract.”

Barbara smiled at that. “I’m fine Dad. So-- let’s change the subject. Did you hear about the thing coming towards us?”

Their food came and they both ate a few bites before James answered, “I did. They’re claiming that it’s simply a hunk of rock that may just miss us.”

Barbara rolled her eyes at her father, “Dad-- are you still only reading the printed papers?”

“There is nothing wrong with...”

Barbara shook her head, “Dad, by the time they get printed the papers are old news-- the Daily Planet online say that it’s a ship, or something man made at least, but, they can’t tell more than that yet.”

“Aliens?”

Barbara shook her head, “They don’t know yet.”

James narrowed his eyes at his daughter, “Barbara, I was joking.”

Barbara shrugged, “Weirder things than that have happened in the last twenty years.”

“Mmmm... you mean like how Bullock claims that we have our very own super in Gotham City?”

“Oh? A... super... here? That’s like saying there’s another super in Metropolis. It’d never happen.”

James took a bite, “Bullock says he saw him, around the Old Wayne Building.” He shook his
head, “I told him that he needs to get his eyes checked. But, why are we talking about such depressing subjects. How are you doing? Have you seen... Dick Grayson recently?”

“No, we’ve been done for... awhile.”

“I thought you two were on and off. You’re off?”

Barbara smiled, “On and off, like you and Sarah?”

“Ahh...”

Barbara waved a hand at her father, “It’s okay Dad. I’m glad you’re happy, Aunt Barbara leaving hurt you so much. Seeing you happy, while it may be weird for me, will never be a bad thing Dad. Ever.”

James sat back in his chair and regarded his adopted daughter, “You always do that. Call me Dad, but call your mother Aunt Barbara... why?”

Barbara shook her head, giving a half a shrug, “I don’t know. I don’t remember my birth mother or father, your sister-in-law and brother, you’re... Dad. And Barbara Eileen, she... she was never my mother. Sorry.”

James smiled, “No, no... I’m, I guess I’m honored Barbara.”

It was Barbara’s turn to put her hand on top of James’. “You’ve always been there for me. That’s all that matters Dad.”

“And I always will be honey. No matter what.” His phone rang and he sighed and answered it, “Gordon. A body? With a smile.” He groaned. “Yes, yes, I’ll be right there.” He stood and went to his daughter, “Well, you know what I mean...”

Barbara smiled, “Go, go...”

He leaned down and kissed her forehead, “Sorry to eat and run, but--”

“--duty calls. Good luck Dad.”

Barbara closed her eyes for a moment, the Joker was the only one who killed people like that. People who went out with a grotesque smile on their faces. She looked up at the sky. LJ was probably on her way to check out the incoming ship. Barbara sighed, it was going to be a long day, a very long day.

oOOOOo

LJ hadn’t let Dr. Klein or any of the other people from S.T.A.R. Labs or NASA put any monitors on her body. Mostly because if they had, the monitors would have shown her heart trying to race itself out of her chest. Apparently she was deathly afraid of space. Which, the logical part of her brain told her was oh so stupid.

Still, she’d strapped on the communications device and oxygen mask and tank, and shot into space.

She was about three quarters of the way to the ship according to Dr. Klein. He had started chattering in her ear the second that she’d checked in with them from space. She was pretty sure that he knew that she was petrified. She’d known Dr. Klein since before she was born. She was sure that he’d never expected to be an OBGYN and then a Pediatrician, but he had been, and a
pretty good one. He’d been there when her powers manifested, and every single question she’d ever had, about her powers or anything else, he’d always answered the best he could. So, yeah, she was pretty sure that he knew she was scared. And weirdly enough his prattling on seemed to be helping.

“Ah, Superwoman--” LJ winced at the name. She preferred Shadow as hero monikers went, but at least no one had ever tried calling her Supergirl.

“Yes Dr. Klein.”

“The President wanted to remind you...”

LJ cut Dr. Klein off, “Not to start any intergalatctic wars if this isn’t Superman? Yep, I got that during the briefing, you know, she should take a chill pill-- Pace herself some, this is only her first year of her first term.”

“Ah--” Dr. Klein cleared his throat, “She can hear you.”

LJ smiled into her oxygen mask, “Well, she could try and shoot me for saying what I said, but... I’m right, and bulletproof, so... She’s definitely the cutest President the USA has ever had.”

Dr. Klein groaned, “You should almost be on top of the ship. Do you see it?”

“Yes. It’s... about a hundred football fields away. Ready for the answer?”

Dr. Klein paused, “Are you?”

oOOOOo

Barbara had hacked S.T.A.R. Labs. It probably would have been easier to hack NASA, but, S.T.A.R. Labs and the Super family had always gone together it seemed. She could hear everything that they heard, and see everything that they could see from their satalites. That didn’t make her feel like a stalker, she’d hacked into various government agencies many times before, and she had no doubt that there were some new agencies doing the same thing that she was. It was what was on her other screen that made her feel just a bit like a stalker. She’d tapped into the video feed outside of Matthew Lane’s school. If she were to justify it to herself it was that his mother was up in space, and even though she was Superwoman, things could still happen. Still, she wasn’t quite sure why she’d done it, or, at least, her subconscious wouldn’t be straight with her consciousness and reveal why her fingers had logged into the school’s camera.

The sound crackled on the monitor that was logged into S.T.A.R. Labs, “Alright, I’m coming up on it...” She heard LJ breathe a breath out, “Definitely a ship, and it looks like it has Kryptonian markings on it and... yeah...”

oOOOOo

LJ blew another breath out. The man in the ship had dark hair, the same dark hair that she saw in the mirror every morning. He was reclined in the ship, his hands folded over his chest, his eyes closed. He was trussed up like he’d died, but, she could hear that his heartbeat was steady and regular if slow.

“Yeah, it’s Superman. Even has on the suit. Superwoman... out.”

oOOOOo
The transmission went dead silent and scrambling people noises took its place. Everyone from NASA, S.T.A.R. Labs and Barbara even thought that she heard the President’s voice in the chaos, started talking all at once.

Barbara started to try and figure out how to piggy back her signal on S.T.A.R. Labs’ and try and talk to LJ herself, but something on the screen that showed Matt’s school caught her eye. The flashing lights of a police car. Her gaze went between the two screens. And finally she shook her head and rolled backwards. “LJ, you’re soo going to owe me for this.”

oOOOOo

“Dad... it couldn’t have been a green alien with buggy eyes, it had to be you Dad...” She flew alongside the ship as it raced towards Earth, thinking.

“What the hell am I supposed to do now? Throw you into a sun? Let you keep goin’?” LJ shook her head and closed her eyes, “No. Mom... What would Mom tell me to do.” She opened her eyes and looked at her father in the ship again. After a moment she flew around the ship once, then with a nod she gave it a mighty shove and followed after it at its increased speed.

oOOOOo

“Hi...”

The monitor looked up at Barbara, who didn’t get out of her Hummer. “Yes?”

“Matthew Lane?”

The monitor shook her head, “You’re not his mother. Not the one who signed him up.”

“My name’s Barbara Gordon, my father’s...”

“The Commissioner of Police, I know who James Gordon is, so?”

Matthew squinted up at Barbara, “Hi, Hi...” He frowned, “Mommy not coming.” His eyes got large. Obviously she’d told him where she was going, “Not okay... oh no...”

Barbara held a hand up and met the young boy’s eyes, “No, no... she’s fine kiddo. She’s just running late with her last appointment. She asked me to pick you up.” Barbara met the monitor’s gaze and gestured towards her back seat, “I even have the proper seat for Matt.”

The monitor looked between the little boy and Barbara a few times, before she finally shook her head, “I’m going to get in soo much trouble for this, but... okay. Okay. Do you want me to get him in the back seat?”

Barbara clicked the button on her door that unlocked all the other doors, “Yes, thank you, that would be great.”

oOOOOo

Dr. Klein jumped just a bit as LJ spoke again, “We’re... less than a minute away. I’m going to put it on the lower helipad of S.T.A.R. Labs. Then I... then he’s all yours.”

“Superwoman, don’t you...”

She cut him off. He could hear the clank as ship hit pavement, “He’s all yours. I’m outta here.”

oOOOOo
“Can you hear me... Shadow?”

LJ glanced over towards the Clocktower, “Yep, just a little busy, I’m late to...”

“I have him.”

LJ frowned, “Excuse me?”

“You heard me. So...” Barbara held down the papers on her desk and for good reason as there was a swoosh and LJ still in her ‘Metropolis’ uniform, appeared in the Clocktower. “There you are. He’s asleep on the couch back there. He’s fine. I picked him up, although the monitor at the school was not happy letting me take him. He’s a smart kid...” She trailed off, “And was worried.”

LJ nodded and strode towards the couch. She knelt down next to Matt and he opened his eyes, “Mommy!” He threw his arms around LJ’s neck and peppered her with kisses, “Miss you, love you, miss you...”

LJ held him tight to her, “Yeah, I missed you too buddy. So, you have fun with Barbara?”

“Yes, good food.”

Barbara had rolled over into the living space of the clocktower and blushed a bit, “Ah, just Mac and Cheese. He was hungry, and, ah, I’ve found that with most men, no matter the age, the key to their hearts are their stomachs.”

LJ smiled at that. “Thank you so much. I... it was him.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

LJ glanced at her son and shook her head, “No, I... he’s there, I’m here. So, I should go.”

“Or, you could stay.”

LJ gave Barbara a sideways look. “We haven’t even been out on a date, and you want to Uhaul already?”

“Ahh...” Barbara turned bright red, “Ahh...”

LJ winced, “Sorry, you did know I was gay? I mean, I have been-- I was just joking, and... ah, yeah, never mind.”

“No, Yes.” Barbara cleared her throat twice and shook her head, “Yes, I knew, and no, it wouldn’t be-- tell me that it’s easy to find babysitters?”

LJ was silent for a moment, staring at Barbara, then she glanced down at Matt and back up at Barbara, “You have a point.”

“I own the whole building, well, Bruce owns the whole building. There’s a whole floor right below this one empty. I thought I’d use it as my residence, but--” Barbara glanced down the hall towards the bedroom that she used, “I haven’t yet. Please, use it. There’s even stairs and an elevator that goes just between the two floors.”

“I--”

“Don’t say no-- you can come and go as Shadow, Superwoman as much as you need. Matt’ll have someone to look after him during your... nightly excursions...”
LJ raised an eyebrow, “And?”

Barbara frowned, “What?” Understanding dawned on her face after a second, “Oh-- I won’t have to go out to get my PT huh? So, will you two do it?”

LJ knelt in front of Matt again, “How ‘bout it bud? Wanna live here?” He nodded very enthusiastically, “Okay then. I’ll tell Joe. Guess it’s good we didn’t unpack too much huh?”

“Yay... more Mac ‘n Cheese pwease?”

Barbara smiled, “Ah-- I see why you want to stay buddy.”

“Swrrry.”

“Nah-- let’s get your Mom some too ‘kay? She’s had a long day I think.”

Matt grabbed his Mom’s hand and pulled her towards the kitchen area. “Is yummy.”

Barbara didn’t move at first, just watched the mother and son interact. She knew that LJ was probably the most powerful person on Earth and yet Barbara watched as Matt challenged LJ to an arm wrestling match over the Mac ’n Cheese and then watched as the most powerful woman on the planet ‘lost’.

Barbara was pulled from her reverie, “Ah, Babs... I think your computers are going off, and... I was going to pick up our stuff if--”

She trailed off, “Yes, yes, I haven’t changed my mind.” She rolled back to her command center and opened one of the desk drawers. She turned and tossed something at LJ who caught it with ease. It was two keys.

“Inner and Outer doors. The clock tower’s door isn’t kept locked and there are no camera’s that can see it either.”

“Barbara...”

Barbara was silent for a moment, studying LJ, “You don’t take help as well as you pretend to, you know that? When you control what ‘help’ you’re given sure, but...”

LJ put her hand up, “I get it, I get it. So, Mac ‘n Cheese when I get back huh?”

A form dropped from the ceiling into the Joker’s cell in Arkham Asylum with such little noise that the Joker didn’t even know that he was there until he spoke, “You wanna blow this joint?”

The Joker whirled around, “Ah, a mysterious visitor. Perhaps you’re the one who is stealing my schtick? Using my serum? Making everyone.... smile? Were you going to take me out whilst I was unaware?” He tilted his head to one side, “Did you know you bear a striking resemblance to that annoying boy scout? Hair’s a little curlier, you have a bit of a receding hairline.... Mmmffpphhh...”

The man growled under his breath, cutting the Joker off, “Shut up, do you ever shut up? So, out or in?”

“Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.”
The dark haired man shook his head, “Yeah, whatever. Follow me.”

“Okay, you’re done for the night little Herr…”

Matt stuck out his bottom lip, “Mommy not done.”

LJ swept Matt into her arms, he laughed as she spun him in a circle, “It is for tonight Matt-so. You can see tomorrow if the Captain and Maria can live happily ever after.”

Matt sighed and put his head on his mother’s shoulder. “Okay.”

LJ smiled, “Good,” she bumped open Matt’s bedroom door with her hip, “Try and get some sleep, alright.”

Matt snuggled under his covers, having done all his pre-bed preparations before he started watching the movie, “Early tomorrow?”

LJ brushed a lock of hair from Matt’s eyes, “The sun’ll barely be up. That early enough for you?”

Matt nodded enthusiastically, “Yes, yes pwease.” He yawned, “Love you Mommy.”

LJ leaned down and kissed his forehead, “Love you too Matt-so.”

She left the room, closing the door three fourths of the way and walked up the stairs to Oracle’s part of the Clocktower. She walked to Barbara’s command center “Matt’s down for the night?”

LJ nodded as she leaned over Barbara’s back, “Yep.”

Barbara looked over and found their faces nose to nose, “Still, I’ll keep an ear out for him.”

LJ took a step back, “We really could go back. Even Joe can’t get his apartment rented that fast. I don’t…”

Barbara shook her head, “No. This works on multiple levels. And I’ll keep telling you that until you believe it LJ.”

“So, tell me where to go.”

Barbara tapped her glasses and LJ frowned for a second at the apparent non-sequiter. Then understanding dawned and she took off her own glasses and slicked back her hair. Barbara shook her head as if to clear it. LJ raised an eyebrow, “What?”

“With the glasses, you look like, you I guess. But, without them.” She shook her head again, “You are your father’s daughter.”

All the laughter went out of LJ’s face, “I’ll be somewhere out there. Contact me if you decide what to do with me.”

Barbara didn’t even know which exit she took. The red head frowned and turned on the shirt comm. unit, though she muted her side. “Now I have to figure out why that was the wrong thing to say.” She sighed, “Superheroes.”

Dr. Klein groaned, “Superheroes...”
Clark was still weak, he hadn’t absorbed enough yellow sun rays to be stronger than an average human yet, and that was the only reason that he was still at S.T.A.R. Labs. Bernard could see it in his eyes. The world knew that Superman was back, but, Clark couldn’t have cared less about that, he wanted to go to his fiancé. But, Dr. Klein had to make totally sure that when he released Clark from his custody that he wouldn’t be unleashing some new disease on the world or something. But, Bernard knew that the second that Clark got strong enough, no amount of talking and explaining would keep him at S.T.A.R.

“Dr. Klein?”

Bernard looked up and over at his friend, who was standing inside a glass cylinder in his red yellow and blue super suit. “Ah, yes, Superman. We’re nearly finished. I promise. Just one more test and then you’ll be free to....”

Clark raised an eyebrow, “Get reacquainted with Earth?”

“Yes, yes. And, may I suggest going out the back way, there are quite a few... reporters... at the front doors.”

Clark met Bernard’s gaze, “All of them.”

“No, but quite a few. And, we’re done.”

The cylinder opened and Clark took a step out, his cape swishing behind him. He’d missed his cape on New Krypton. “Thank you Dr. Klein.”

He went to leave, but Bernard wasn’t done, “Superman...” He paused, not knowing how to say what he needed to say, “It has been decades. As a... friend... it’s been decades. After that much time has passed... there is one constant on Earth at least, everything changes.”

Clark nodded, “Thank you... thank you Bernard.” And he was gone.

Bernard shook his head as his papers flew around the room, “Welcome home.”

Gotham City was loud, even at night. Oh, the thieves, muggers and super villains thought they were being quiet, but to LJ’s ears, even when she wasn’t trying to use her super hearing it was a hell of a racket.

She heard Barbara’s voice floating up from her chest and despite her earlier madness at the redhead she smiled. “Shadow, it’s Oracle.”

LJ rolled her eyes as she scanned the buildings, streets and alleyways, “What’s up Oracle?”

“There’s been a Two-Face sighting at the Second Theatre.”

LJ turned in a circle before she spotted the theatre in the distance, she started towards it, “Am I going to run into the flying rodent.”

“Shadow...”

LJ jumped from building to building, not quite flying, but definitely not having to use any sort of dorky batarang. “You know, doing it my way’s faster. I coulda already been there, he would have been in custody all pretty and trussed up.”
There was a pause on Barbara’s side of the comms. “And since Superman is back on Earth, then
your father would know where you were, because Batman would tell him. Trust me, I’ve been
doing this in this city for a long time. My way is the best way.”

LJ stifled a chuckle, “Right. I’m here. Ah, I can hear something playing right now.” She walked
up to the two thugs who were seemingly guarding the door and with a quick combination they
were down.

It was down a hall and up a staircase and she quietly entered the theatre proper. There didn’t seem
to be screaming, or wails of pain, or anything that was usually connected with a super villain. She
 glanced up on stage. A woman in a pointy hat and, well, green was singing about trusting instincts
and leaping. LJ mumbled, “My kinda musical.” She scanned her balcony and then the others and
did a double take. Standing not ten feet from her was what seemed to be a transfixed Two-Face.

LJ slowly made her way over to the man until she stood next to him. “You rootin’ for Oz or the
Wicked Witch?”

Two-Face looked over and started to jerk away. LJ stopped him with just short of an iron grip of
his wrist. “Who?”

“Just me Harv.” LJ didn’t let go of Two-Face as she looked back up at the performance, “Not
polite to leave in the middle of a song. Plus... sounds like the best part is coming up. Ooohhh....
she can fly....” A half a smirk came to LJ’s lips. “Flying’s fun...” She and Two-Face stood there in
their weird tableaux as the green woman sang her heart out and got quite the ovation.

As the musical continued LJ pulled a mostly unresisting Two-Face from the theatre. Outside she
tied him up and put a hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

Two-Face looked up with surprise on half of his face, but LJ was already gone.

She’d moved into a townhouse. And he floated there, staring at it. The lights were on, so she was
home. He could have looked inside with his X-ray vision. Seen exactly where she was, what she
was doing, but he couldn’t bring himself to.

His parents had moved too. Sold the farm, moved to Metropolis. His father had died. The man that
he’d done his very best to emulate was gone forever and he’d never gotten to go to his funeral, or
say goodbye. He blew out a breath and in the blink of an eye he was on the front porch of the
townhouse, his glasses on, knocking on the door.

The door opened and he reared back just a bit. It was like he was looking in a mirror. The glasses,
the hair, the height, weight. He cleared his throat, “Ah, hello....”

The young man smiled, “CJ. Um, Clark Jerome Lane, Jr. You want to come in? Mom’s in the
kitchen and Grandma’s probably about got her walker into position and is... hey now... that hurt.”

Martha Kent whacked CJ on the butt as she passed him by and engulfed her son in a hug. “Clark,
Clark, thank God... I thought we’d never see you again.”

Clark looked around, “Walker?”

CJ closed the door with a chuckle, “I was just messin’ with the old lady... So, you’re alive. Guess
that’s good.”

“Ah, Lois is here?”
CJ nodded, “Yes, I’ll...” He gave Martha a tap on the shoulder, “Grandman, can you stall Pops here for a bit while I talk to Mom.”

Martha smiled and guided Clark to the sofa, “She’s... she’s happy, and she’s angry, and she’s sad, and... she’s...”

Clark smiled, “She’s Lois. Look, I know that it’s been twenty years, and that I have no right to expect, anything. I left her with two kids, super kids, to raise by herself. I just, I wanted to make sure that she’s okay, and then I can leave...”

“One.”

Clark frowned, “Excuse me?”

Martha patted Clark on the leg, “LJ, Lara Joanne, she has all your powers at least, but CJ is just your average super smart will be a doctor sooner rather than later, young man.”

“Oh, that doesn’t make any sense.”

Martha shook her head, “Honestly.” She glanced towards the kitchen, “I think that may be why he decided at the ripe old age of five to be a doctor, so that he could figure out why he and his sister are twins and yet not both super.”

“Lara... Lois named her Lara, after, my mother? I mean...”

Martha shushed Clark, “I know what you meant. And yes. But, she goes by LJ.”

CJ came from the kitchen and met his father’s eyes, “If you want to go in there... she’s ready to see you I mean.”

Clark stood, “Yes, I... are you staying for dinner as well?”

CJ nodded, “Yeah. We, ah, tried to get LJ to stay too, but...” CJ shrugged. “I mean, you’re, I want to get to know you, if that’s... if that’s okay.”

Clark paused next to his son and put a hand on CJ’s shoulder. “There is nothing that I want to do more than catch up with everything about you and your sister.”

CJ raised an eyebrow, “Nothing?”

Clark colored a bit, “Ah, nearly nothing. Kitchen?”

“Kitchen.”

Clark pushed through the door and let it swing closed behind him. “Hey.”

Lois’ back was to him as she stood at the stove. She didn’t move for a moment, and then he watched as her shoulders shuddered just a bit. He walked to her and slowly turned her, she was crying. “No, please, don’t cry Lois. I’m never going anywhere, ever again. Ever.”

She didn’t say a word, just put her arms around him and laid her head against his chest. They stood there like that for quite awhile, until Clark sniffed, “Ah... I think that the sauce is burning.”

Lois looked up into Clark’s eyes and smiled, “They’re used to it by now. Will you stay, or, do you have...”
“...if you want me to.”

Lois put her hand to Clark’s cheek and kissed him slowly and thoroughly before answering, “Yes. Forever and ever.”

O000O0

LJ had to laugh. It was almost morning, and the scene she was looking at could only happen on the roofs of Gotham. Nightwing, who, if she was keeping up on her secret identities had been the first Robin was facing off against, Catwoman. Neither was moving.

LJ dropped down near them with a chuckle, “Stalemates suck huh?”

Both costumed figures looked at LJ, who held her hands up, “Now, I haven’t actually had to hit anyone tonight, which, actually I think it’s a record. Is it a record? Gotta be a record.”

Barbara sighed, “I think you can handle this one yourself Shadow, I’m going offline.”

LJ looked back at Catwoman and Nightwing. “So. I have an idea.” She took a couple of steps towards them. “I’ll take that.” She snatched the bauble from Catwoman’s hands, and then with her other hand caught Nightwing’ arm. “And you get to go Ms. Cat.”

Through her mask Catwoman stared at LJ, “Who are you?”

LJ shook her head, “The annoying red head calls me Shadow. Go...”

Catwoman didn’t have to be told twice, and within a couple of eyeblinks she was gone. Nightwing shook off LJ’s hand and took a step back. “What the hell?”

LJ looked as if she were going to take off, but Nightwing’s voice stopped her, “Thank you.”

LJ turned, “She’s in the gray, right. Negotiating the grays of society can be hard.” She glanced around, “I may not quite get Gotham totally, but, I know that much.”

Nightwing just stood there, sort of stunned. And then LJ plucked something from mid-air. “Nope, you big bully, you don’t get to do that on my watch.”

Nightwing stared at LJ, who had of all things, a Blue Jay caught in her fingers. “That’s... that’s a bird, uh, Shadow.”

LJ pointed with her free hand at a small nest across the roof. “Chickadee nest, probably with eggs in it. Blue Jays are the bullies of the bird kingdom. I don’t like bullies.” LJ held the bird to her chest, “C’mon, let’s take you to somewhere where there are lots and lots of English Sparrow eggs, one bully can eat another interloper’s eggs.”

When LJ started towards the edge of the roof Nightwing spoke again, “Wait, who the hell are you? How the hell do you expect to get down off this roof?”

LJ cut Nightwing off, “I’m.... a friend...” Then she made a face, “Ack... that was so lame.” And dove off the roof head first. Nightwing rushed to the edge of the roof, but ‘Shadow’ was nowhere to be found.
Chapter 6

Clark stared up at the ceiling, he could feel Lois breathing next to him, and smiled. He was home. Earth, Metropolis, next to Lois. It had been easy, almost like he had never left. He carefully rolled out of bed trying not to disturb Lois. He went to the bedroom window and looked out. It was raining. Pouring was probably a more accurate description. He smiled. A smile that got bigger when Lois joined him at the window, wrapping her arms around his waist. “You’re smiling at rain?”

“New Krypton had no rain. No snow, no bracing cold days during the winter, or sweltering heat waves during the summer. I--” He turned a little towards Lois, “I never stopped loving you Lois.”

Lois laid her hands against Clark and looked up, “I didn’t stop loving you either Clark. I haven’t even...” Lois shook her head, “I haven’t even dated in these twenty years, first it was the children, and then...” She smiled, “In quite the role reversal LJ’s been bugging me for a few years now to put myself out there... but...”

Clark was silent for a beat, “Zara and I, we never consummated our marriage Lois. My sons, Jor and Pol-- they were Ching and Zara’s sons.”

Lois sighed, “Pol and Jor is it. They may not have been yours, but... they grew up with a father.”

Clark pulled away, “CJ seemed, okay, but Lara, she isn’t?”

Lois paced away from the window, thinking. “I think it’s because of the powers. Me, Martha, Jonathan, we all tried to help her when they appeared, but...” Lois sat down on the bed and looked down at her hands. “When she was fourteen she broke into S.T.A.R. Labs and into the safe where they keep the Kryptonite. Dr. Klein found her the next day. Surrounded by a bunch of sharp instruments, all of which were either dulled or bent.”

Clark gasped. “She... she tried to kill herself?”

Lois nodded, “It was at that point that we all found out that she is immune to Kryptonite.”

Clark put a hand to his head, “I... do you know where she is?”

Lois was silent for a long time, just sitting on the bed. Finally she raised her head and met Clark’s eyes again, “There’s more. Two years ago she she gave birth to a son, Matthew West Lane.”

Clark had nothing to say to that. Instead he joined Lois sitting on the edge of the bed. “I’ve missed so much. A grandson, and...”

“Jimmy married my sister and then they divorced. They have one son, Duncan. Jimmy thinks he’s gay. Oh, and LJ, Lara is in fact gay. That’s why Jimmy’s not sure, because Duncan has always had the biggest case of hero worship of LJ.”

“Is she...” Clark paused, “Does she use her powers for good?”

Lois nodded, “She’s the one who got you down here. Ah, but, she doesn’t like to be... Superwoman. I believe that right now she’s in Gotham City fighting as a vigilante called... Shadow.”

Clark frowned, “You talk as though I shouldn’t go there. I shouldn’t talk to her, try and... explain.”
“I... I don’t think that any explanation will suffice Clark. All her life she’s been told not just how much she looks like you, but, how much like you she is. Her even temperament, her moral compass that means that even if she’s not doing what’s needed by the law, she’s doing what’s right. And your powers. The three people who raised her...” Lois shook her head, “We probably laid it on too thick, I know. But... we all did the best we could. Now, now it’s up to her. She’s not in jail, her secret identity is solid, and when you see her with her son.” Lois smiled just a little, “It reminds me of you with children.”

Clark cleared his throat, “I... I guess I should see about getting a new...”

“Just call Perry.”

Clark frowned again, “Clark Kent can’t have been...”

“Foreign correspondent.” Lois smiled just a bit, “I’ve gotten quite good at writing like you. I... both Perry and Jimmy know. But, they’re the only ones other than family and Dr. Klein. I-- I had to, to survive.”

Clark gathered Lois in his arms and closed his eyes. “You’re amazing Lois, for the rest of my life...”

“...or my life...”

“I will make up for the past twenty years we’ve lost. To you, CJ, and Lara. I promise.”

oOOOOo

“Wally West? The Flash’s nephew? He’s his father?”

LJ looked surprised for a beat, then nodded as she ate a bite of cereal. “Yes.” She waited a beat, the continued, “I can practically hear the gears turning from there. That he’s going to be unstoppable, that I shouldn’t have done it. But... I was in a bad place.” LJ shook her head, “Hell, I’ve been in a bad place for my whole life. The second that I held Matt in my arms was the first time I ever felt anywhere near whole. I’m his world, and he’s mine, and, powers, no powers, I’ll be there for him...”

Barbara finished LJ’s sentence for her, “...unlike your father was for you.”

“You said it, not me. Look, I’m not excusing anything I’ve ever done, but, I’ve always tried to be better, I’ve always...”

Barbara cut LJ off again, “Tell me what happened?”

“What happened?”

Barbara shot LJ a look over her coffee, “You think that you’re totally unreadable, that you can bluff your way out of anything. But, here’s the thing. I grew up with two of the most inscrutable men out there, Batman and my father James Gordon. So, you’re an open book to me Lara. What happened?”

LJ still tried to charm her way out of it, “Open book? Then what size bra do I wear?” Barbara didn’t respond, just sat across from LJ, drinking her coffee in silence until LJ gave in, “Fine, fine... I was... thirteen I think. Maybe twelve going on thirteen...”

~ 7 Years Ago - 2010 - Metropolis
“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry....”

Lois Lane skidded into her living room and took in the scene. On the ground lay her father-in-law Jonathan Kent, apparently knocked cold with what looked like an egg forming on his forehead. On the other side of the room, looking more horrified than Lois had ever seen her, stood LJ. She kept repeating I’m sorry, over and over.

Lois slowly approached her daughter. “Lara... hey, it’s okay, do you know how many times I’ve been knocked out. I should probably be drooling in a psychiatric facility somewhere. Lara...”

Lois touched LJ’s arm, and LJ flinched backwards, the blue eyes going wide.

“It’s okay. He’ll be fine, and we’ll laugh...”

“No... no.....” And just like that she was gone. Lois stumbled back a few steps from the rush of air that LJ left in her wake.

A few moments later there was a cough and Lois turned to face Jonathan. He winced and felt his forehead. “Did someone,” he groaned, “that hurt a bit.” He looked around, “Where’s LJ?”

“Oh Jonathan...” Lois sat down next to Jonathan on the floor as Martha hurried into the room with an ice pack, “She-- she left.”

Jonathan stood with a half a cough, worried more about his granddaughter than himself, “She’s only 13 Lois, where would...”

Lois shook her head, “I don’t know.” She put her index finger against his chest, “What the hell happened Jonathan?”

“I just... I...” Jonathan shook his head, “I don’t know. She doesn’t listen, and she just... she’s out of control and she doesn’t seem to think that she ever has to become an adult.”

Lois looked out the front window. “Great. The one part of me she gets is the out of control as a teenager part.” Lois blew out a breath, “She’ll figure it out. I did.”

Jonathan sighed, “You didn’t have the ability to destroy buildings with one wrong look at her age Lois.” Both Martha and Lois looked worried as they realized just how right Jonathan was.

Present Day - 2017

“What happened?”

LJ shrugged, “I don’t know. What did you do as a teenager?”

“Ah....” Barbara cleared her throat, “I became Batgirl.”

LJ chuckled at that. “Right. I graduated high school at sixteen. And for the last four years I’ve been bouncing around here and there. Got my PT license, had Matt.” She glanced around the apartment, “We won’t be here long. Just... I don’t stay in one place too long, ’cause then people...”

Barbara narrowed her eyes at the dark haired woman, “Become your friends? You find yourself caring about them?”

LJ stood, “I’m going to go to work.” She paused, “It’s much easier to leave before that happens. Much easier for everyone.” LJ was then gone in the swish of a second.
Barbara sighed and closed her eyes, pinching the bridge of her nose, “What if it's already too late?”

The dark haired man groaned. This... Joker was more of a pain than he was led to believe. And demanding. So damn demanding. But, it would all be worth it, because, he was going to take care of this... Superwoman, Shadow, LJ, Lara, whatever she was going by in any given week before his boss arrived. It would be glorious to watch. The man’s mouth twitched just a bit as he watched Joker shoot one of his new henchmen in the knee, maybe the Joker wasn’t so bad after all.

“So, you’re... Superman...” Clark glanced over. A man in mostly black, and a cowl with pointed ears stood next to him. Clark hadn’t even heard him approach. “I’m Batman.”

Clark raised an eyebrow, “Do you practice that?”

“Excuse me?”

Clark smiled and shook his head, “Batman huh? Use your visage to... scare the bad guys into submission.”

Batman nodded, “I try to, yes. You’re watching your daughter.”

“Yes. You know her real identity?”

Batman glanced down. LJ leaned against a stone wall outside the daycare, her legs crossed in front of her, waiting for her son. “This is my city. I know everything that goes on here.” He glanced over at Clark, “I even know who you are.”

That got Clark’s attention and he turned so fast that his cape whooshed just a bit, “Are you...”

Batman put his hands up in front of him, “I don’t say that to threaten.”

Clark went back to watching his daughter, “No, you say it just to make sure that I know that you think you’re smarter than I am Bruce...”

Batman tilted his head to one side, “Perhaps you’re not quite as daft as I thought you were.”

Clark turned his head to respond, but Batman was already gone. Clark shook his head. “I think I liked it better when I was the only hero around.”

Clark watched and listened as Matt came running out of the front door and jumped into LJ’s arms without a second hesitation and she whirled him around.

“Momyyyyyyyy... drew pictures, ate crackers, Tommy cried, um....”

LJ laughed, “There’s more? Wow... And I thought that I had an exciting life.”

Matt’s face got serious, “Still home?”

LJ’s good humor vanished at Matt’s question, but she did answer it, “Yes, yeah, we’re still here.” She paused, “Do you like Barbara?”
“Mama too?”

“No, no, no,... no...”

Matt laughed at that. “Funny Mommy....”

“Oh, you think that’s funny....” She held him with one hand while her other hand darted here and there and everywhere tickling him.

She stopped when he said, “Uncle Mommy, Uncle...”

LJ put Matt down but kept hold of his hand, “Alrighty. So, ready to go home? You want to go see Grandma tonight, or Great Grandma?”

Matt shook his head, “Bab, Barb... Babra.”


Matt made a face, “Mama easier...”

LJ winced, “Yeah... ah...” She got a glint in her eyes, “How about this. Barbara has red hair right. Can you say Red?”

“Red.”

LJ smirked just a bit, “Definitely go with Red buddy..”

Clark tilted his head to one side. He had been keeping an ear out for what was going on in Metropolis. There was a fire, a big one. And just like that, he was gone from Gotham City. Batman hadn’t really left the roof, just taken a step back and ducked out of the way, and as Clark left he stepped out from the shadows with a frown under his cowl. He glanced down at LJ and Matt, then up at the sky and back to LJ.

Barbara cut LJ off, “You flew.”

LJ was perfectly silent.

Barbara Gordon took off her glasses and threw them onto the keyboard in front of her. She pinched the bridge of her nose before finally responding, “When you’re in Gotham, you don’t show your powers, flying, especially, if you don’t want your father to find you, confront you faster than... well, a speeding bullet, that’s just how it has to be. You agreed with me on that last night” Lara mumbled something and Barbara leaned forward, “What?”

LJ blew out a breath, “I’m not a child, and I saved the man didn’t I. Isn’t that the point of being a superhero? Save the freakin’ day?”

“You have no control Lara.” Barbara sighed, “Not to mention, the fact that you have no weaknesses either. If you don’t...”

“...have control every second of every day one day I could rule the world by accident. At least, that’s what Bats thinks, and my brother and my grandmother, and my mother, and since they’re all
chummy again, probably my father too. Not to mention somehow Bats’ convinced the rest of you nosy superheroes too. Is it my fault that I was born immune to Kryptonite? Is that MY FAULT too?”

Barbara grabbed LJ’s hand, "Come with me."

LJ resisted for a moment, long enough to let Barbara know that she didn’t have to go anywhere she didn’t want to. But after a moment she followed. They went to the edge of the balcony in front of the clock’s face. "You plannin’ on jumpin’ Babs?"

Barbara ignored the jab. "What do you see?"

LJ glanced over at Barbara, then out at the slowly brightening Gotham City. "Uh, that crazy vendor by the Wayne Tech building selling broken watches, a couple’a birds mating in the park--"

Barbara cut her off, “Bigger--”

LJ frowned, “The trees are bl--”

“Bigger. You’re looking at the parts, the atom, look at the whole, the object.”

“Like you do?” LJ shot back, “You live in the details, you’re scared of everything other than the details.” LJ crossed her arms over her chest, “You want me to say that I see the sunset, that I see how we’re all alike and how I can never be better than anyone else, how I should be just like the crowd, how I shouldn’t fly, or lift moons back into orbit, or..... or be faster than a speeding bullet. I should just be, ordinary. And not be a threat. But, it’s all you who don’t get it. I can never make mistakes. When I make mistakes.... I kill people, okay? You think that I don’t get that, that I don’t understand when I screw up, people die.” LJ shook her head and jumped onto the ledge, “Whatever. I’ll be back,” she shot into the air, and as she rose her words floated down to Barbara, “--or not. I doubt if any of you really care.”

Barbara stared up at the sky for a second, then at Gotham City. “Somehow, you planned all this Bruce. Why?"

Batman dropped down from his perch on one of the gargoyles. “I simply need time.”

Barbara rolled her eyes, “Yes, right, time. Time to figure out what her weakness is and put it in your bag of tricks, or maybe you let out the Joker to see if she could handle him.” Barbara could see enough of her former mentor’s eyes through the mask that she had to hide a smile at the bit of surprise that was in the older man’s look. “What, I graduated college at 18, and I basically run alone what it takes the military ten or twelve highly trained men and women to run. I know that you have something to defeat all of them, from your Kryptonite for Superman to a nasty little virus for my system. You’re going to have to come up with a new one, the one you have won’t work anymore.”

Batman stared at Barbara, “You two are... alike in many ways. I simply need her here in Gotham. What she does is none of my concern. As for the Joker, I didn’t let him out, I wouldn’t do that... I’d never do that to you, or...Catwoman.”

Barbara rolled her eyes as he swung off. She called after him. “Nice seeing you too Batman.” She didn’t move from her place and watched as the sun slowly came up. “What do you see Barbara. I see a past, I see the problems we have now, and I see a future where Gotham’s as bright, clean and safe as Metropolis.”

She turned in her chair and went back down a floor. Lara Joanne Lane, daughter of Clark Kent and Lois Lane was annoying as hell, couldn’t really be controlled, but she was right too. As
Oracle, she was surrounded by her many screens and computers. Barbara lived in the details because of her data points just as much as LJ did with her super hearing, her x-ray vision.

But Barbara hadn’t always been stuck there. She’d spent many nights as Batgirl, leaving the details to Batman, or Nightwing, and simply following orders. But, then the Joker had shot her. And Barbara had transformed herself from Batman’s foot soldier to Oracle, the one who made the plans and obsessed over the details. The details had been all she’d had left.

She pushed her wheels and rolled to her keyboard. She’d spent a long time after the shooting honing her skills so that she could do three fourths of what she’d been able to do with two working legs.

She nearly jumped when LJ’s voice sounded in her earpiece, “Oracle, this is--” LJ still didn’t love her call sign and Barbara could hear it in the super heroine’s voice, “Shadow. It’s not quite light. Got anythin’ for me?”

Barbara pulled up the text output of the police band for the past few minutes. “Gotham One had its vault alarm tripped two seconds ago.”

Barbara could hear the grappling hook fire and a whoosh of air, “See you two in a sec.”

Barbara shook her head as the line went silent, and Barbara muted the pick up in the Clocktower. “Red--”

Barbara took off her glasses and pinched the bridge of her nose. The two year old little devil, who was just as bad if not worse than his mother sometimes, was up.

“Be right there bud-- your mom’ll be home soon too.”

A little head full of tangled, mussed black hair stuck through the doorway. “Red, I wet bed...”

Barbara winced, then turned and rolled towards the doorway and followed Matt down the hallway where he had been asleep on a pull out bed. “Nothing to be sorry about Matthew.”

“Even a lot of mess?”

Barbara nodded, “Even if it’s a mess.”

LJ finished tying up the two bad guys and plopped them down in front of the bank. She had found that putting the criminals near the crime scene made it easier for the not so smart part of the Gotham City Police Department to figure out what to do with them.

Her head tilted to one side as she heard something in the distance. She was pushing it, the sun was fast approaching the horizon and the shadows weren’t so shadow-y anymore. But, LJ couldn’t help it, apparently no matter how much she tried to push it away, helping people was in her blood.

A moment later she carefully stepped up onto the ledge next to a young man that was there. They were on the edge of the Zimmer building. She didn’t speak, just stood silently and waited. Finally the young man spoke, “You’re not going to... yank me back, or, whatever?”

“Do you want me to?”

“No.” He paused, “Yes... damn.”
LJ crossed her arms over her chest. “So, you gonna make me guess what has you up here?”

“Everything.” He blew out a breath, “I can’t find a job. I’m not stupid or useless, but no one will give me a chance to prove that. And my Grand-dad is dying and won’t even fight. Not to mention my girlfriend wants to be a family and I don’t want to. I’m not saying never, but for the love of god... NOT YET....” An explosive sigh came from the man. “Pathetic huh.”

LJ shrugged, “Life sucks. Do you believe in God?”

The man shrugged back. “I guess.”

“He-- or she-- wouldn’t have put you here if you were just going to take up space. You have a reason that you’re on Earth, even it ‘s just to make your girlfriend happy one day and have a gaggle of kids. Not everyone is here to be... Superman.”

The man turned his head to look at LJ in her Shadow get up. “Have you ever-- I mean--”

“Wanted to kill myself? It’s never really been one of my options. But, yes..., yes I did, awhile ago. After all. Life sucks more than it’s good. But, I’m also immensely glad that it didn’t work.”

“You won’t stop me?”

LJ nodded, “I won’t. If I stopped you, you might just try again. You have to stop yourself.”

They stood there for quite awhile. At one point Barbara spoke up over LJ’s comm, though LJ didn’t let the man onto that fact. “The police are nearly there.”

Still, LJ didn’t move until the man put his hand out and took the step off of the ledge. “Okay.”

LJ jumped down from the ledge also, “That’s good. Will you let the police help you?”

“I don’t--”

Barbara spoke to LJ again, “Detective Montoya is one of the responding officers.”

“Detective Renee Montoya, she’s a Major Crimes Detective with too much time on her hands, pulls too many doubles. But I bet that she’ll understand what you’ve been through. She and her partner will be here soon. She’s a bit prickly, but she’ll help you get help so that you don’t wind up here again. Alright?”

The man finally nodded and then his head turned as there was a scream from down the street and when he turned back, the masked woman was gone.

oOOOOo

“I’m sorry.”

LJ waved Barbara off, “You come from a regular family. In mine fights were the norm, not the exception. Uh, verbal I mean.”

Barbara folded her hands in her lap, “Still. I know that... I wouldn’t...”

“...tattle?”

Barbara narrowed her eyes at LJ, “That would be one way of putting it, not the way I would have, but... I wouldn’t tell your father about you being here in Gotham unless you wanted me to.”
LJ sighed, “Yeah, well, he probably already knows, he and my Mom, well after he told her about him, they never were good at keeping secrets from one another. Anyway, tomorrow...” she glanced out the clock, “well, later tonight. I’m not going out. I mean, I should go out, but..”

Barbara was still for a moment, and then looked up at Lara. “Really?”

“Sorry.”

Barbara shook her head as she rolled into the living area of the Clocktower. “No, that’s not how I meant it. I’m just surprised.”

LJ glanced down the hall that led to Matt’s room. “Fridays, at home, when I was a child. It was family night. No matter what stories my Mom was working on, all five of us, Mom, CJ, me, Grandma and Grandpa, would spend the entire night together. Sometimes Uncle Jimmy, or Perry, or Aunt Lucy and Duncan would come too. We played cards or other games, or watched movies, or just all... doing something together. For awhile, I tried to do the same with Matt, but...” She sighed, “I’ve failed at that too...”

Barbara took the mask from LJ’s hands. “So, take Friday nights off.”

LJ tried to take the mask back, “No, I mean, it’s the worst day of the week. I know that.”

Barbara rolled into the kitchen and Lara followed, “So, pick another day. Why does it have to be Friday? Pick... Tuesday. It has the fewest crimes according to my data.”

LJ quirked an eyebrow, “You have data on that.”

Barbara blushed just a bit, “I-- I have data on nearly everything.”

LJ crossed her arms over her chest, “Tuesday huh. Alright, on one condition. You take the night off also. From being Oracle.”

“Lara-- I ca--”

LJ took back her mask and ran her fingers over it, “Gotham City survived before it had Oracle watching over it. Even before it had Batgirl. Plus, I’m pretty sure it’d be sorta weird for us if you were clacking away while me and Matt were having fun.”

“I...”

“So you will then.”

Barbara’s eyes narrowed at Lara again, “You did that on purpose didn’t you.”

“Well, you know very well that it’s Matt and I, not...” Barbara cleared her throat, “You should probably get Matthew up, and I need to get ready for school.”

LJ waved a finger, “Not until your physical therapy is done.” Barbara looked from the computers to the backwards clock and sighed. LJ smiled, “You get ready for that, we’ll make it an abbreviated session, and I’ll roust my son.”

Barbara watched LJ go towards the stairway down to the apartment and put a hand on her chest. “Damnit Gordon.”
LJ was in the middle of an appointment when her phone seemed to levitate off the desk it seemed to ring so hard. She frowned, she could have sworn that she’d turned off the ringer and the vibrate function. That could only mean that one person was trying to get ahold of her.

She glanced at her patient, “Do those just like that, and if you can do it for two weeks, then you can add two pounds. Okay?”

The patient nodded, “Yep. Got it. Thanks LJ.”

LJ nodded as the patient left, then she picked up the phone and dialed Barbara’s number. “You rang?”

“The Joker has your son.”

LJ’s face went white. “Where... what...”

A command came over the phone line, “Take a breath Lara. I’m at his school, his day care. They called me...” She trailed off, “I hacked their system and put my number in as a secondary contact. They tried you, but your phone was off, so I...”

A slightly hysterical laugh bubbled from LJ’s throat, “I don’t care if you... there, or should I try and find him?”

There was a pause, “Here. Come here.”

LJ closed her eyes and when she opened them all the warmth and humor and good times had gone out from them. “I’ll kill him.”

oOOOOo

“Three blind mice, three blind mice, See how they run, see how they run, They all ran after the farmer’s wife, Who cut off their tails with a carving knife, Did you ever see such a thing in your life, As three blind mice?”

“Silent. BE SILENT!.”

The man with the white face and too big of a smile, laughed. The dark haired man put his hand around the Joker’s throat, “Can you follow my orders for... just... just don’t kill them until I give you the word.” He glanced back at the group of two and three year olds who were cowering in a huddle. Being watched over by two of the Joker’s thugs. “Terrify them all you want, but no killing.”

The dark haired man let go of the Joker’s throat and took a step back. “Okay?”

The Joker didn’t answer the question, “But, there will be chaos, you promised chaos.”

The man smirked, “Oh... there will be chaos. Chaos like you humans have never seen.” And then he was gone.

The Joker whistled, the spoke as he flounced over to the children, “For want of a nail the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the battle was lost. For want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a
LJ was stopped by Barbara before she got to the day care’s teachers and administrators. “LJ, a second. I told them we were girlfriends... The-- the officers--”

LJ nodded, cutting Barbara off, “That’s fine-- whatever-- I need to see the room where he was taken from.”

Barbara nodded back, “I’ll drop my father’s name.”

She started to roll away, but Lara caught her before she could, “Thank you.”

Barbara shook her head, “Not yet. Thank me when he’s in your arms okay?”

LJ nodded. She turned, putting her back to the teachers, administrators, cops, everyone.

She wasn’t a crier, never had been. Not pre-powers when she had scraped the hell out of her knees and elbows, or when her girlfriends broke up with her, or when it hit her every year on her birthday that her father hadn’t given a crap about any of them. She swallowed back the tears that threatened to fall and cleared her throat a couple of times. She heard her name called, turned and joined Barbara.

The police walked away as Barbara spoke, “We have five minutes.”

“I won’t need that. Okay. I’m not the Detective that the rodent is, but, I have some skills he doesn’t.” She lowered her glasses to the end of her nose and made a slow turn, looking at every inch of the room. With a sigh she pushed the glasses back up her nose and slowly breathed in through her nose. She blinked in surprise. “Peach blossoms-- maybe... I’ve smelled it before, when Two-Face had a face to face... to face with Ivy. Maybe, maybe the Joker and she are working together, or... or... something. Barbara, can you try and find me Pamela?”

Barbara gripped LJ’s hand, “No. But, I will find her--”

The Joker tilted his head to one side and the dark haired little boy on the ground mimicked it. The Joker lunged towards the boy and he recoiled in fear. That just made the Joker laugh and laugh and laugh.

Matt was scared. More scared than he’d ever ever been. For some reason the Joker had separated him from the rest of his friends. They all sat across the room looking just as scared as he was, but at least they were together.

The Joker walked away and a woman’s voice spoke from behind him. “Young man I have a very important question for you.”

Matt swallowed and turned his head just a bit to look at the woman. She wore all bright green that seemed to stick to her, her hair was red like Barbara’s and her skin was a little green tinged too, though not as green as her clothes. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m...”

The woman glanced up towards the Joker and then back to the young boy. “I’m not on his side... for one thing, he doesn’t have a side. He’s crazy. I need dirt, can you get me dirt.”

The boy frowned and patted the floor gently and quietly, then showed his hand to the woman,
“Dirt.”

The woman shook her head, “That is dust young man. I need real dirt. Dir from outside.” She paused, “Or... even better... a bit of a plant, a bit of leaf.”

The woman fell silent as Matt squinted and seemed to go inside himself. Thinking. After a moment he nodded and met the woman’s eyes, “Save everyone?”

That made the woman pause, “I will.... I will make sure that the bad man doesn’t hurt you. She paused, “any of you, but saving-- people, that, that is not really my thing.”

“Not hurt?”

The woman nodded, “Yes. He won’t hurt you.” She got a glint in her eyes, “And they won’t hurt any of my babies either.”

Matt nodded one last time, and then so loud that even the woman nearly jumped out of her skin he yelled, “Poop, poop, poop.... peeeeee..... pooppeeeee...”

The Joker sighed and waved a hand at one of his thugs, “Take him outside.”

“But boss, couldn’t he just....”

“Now...”

It wasn’t too long before they came back, Matt wriggling like his life depended on it, and the thug looking quite put out. He practically threw Matt onto the ground, and growled something that wasn’t meant for children’s ears at the young boy.

Matt crawled over to the woman and put his head on her thigh. “Okay...” He shook his sleeve just a bit, and not only a leaf, but part of a root system tumbled onto the ground. The woman smiled. “Good boy.”

“I’m Matt.”

The woman opened and closed her eyes, the name that most of the world had given her would only scare the child. After what probably had been too long of a pause she answered him, “Pamela, Pamela Isley. Now...” She glanced up at the Joker. “All I need is time to recharge.”

oOOOOo

“Got it Shadow. Corner of Scott and Meyer. It’s a three story building, although my guess is that they’re in the basement. Shadow...” Barbara paused, “Be careful, he’s only human, but he’s... so dangerous.”

oOOOOo

LJ was nearly to the building when her father swooped down and landed next to her. “Need a ha--”

“No. I didn’t need you growing up and I don’t need you now. My Son is in there and this isn’t Metropolis. Stay out of my way.”

“Super...”

“Shadow. I’m Shadow.” She spoke to the air, “I’m going in Oracle. And... tell Batman.” LJ paused, “Tell him thank you for letting me do this myself.”
Clark looked around when out of thin air he heard a computerized voice speak, “I will. Kick his ass Shadow.”

LJ’s lip curled, “Damn straight I will.” She stepped through the door as if it wasn’t there, and then sped through the door to the basement next. She stumbled to a halt in the middle of the room. The Joker had a child, not her son, but one of his little friends, held up, a knife to the boy’s throat. “Put him down. NOW....”

She felt the whoosh of her father and managed to not show the wince that she felt on her face. A second later he was in a ball on the ground, groaning and in quite a bit of pain. The Joker tilted his head to one side, “My father left me three acres of land, Sing ivy, sing ivy; My father left me three acres of land, Sing holly, go whistle and ivy!” The Joker paused. LJ hadn’t budged, hadn’t even moved a muscle. “You don’t wish to save your father? He’s dying of Kryptonite poisoning as we speak.”

LJ still didn’t move, “If he dies, he dies. The world didn’t end when he left. It can go on if he dies.”

The Joker tipped an imaginary hat, “I ploughed it with a ram’s horn, Sing ivy, sing ivy; And sowed it all over with one peppercorn, Sing holly, go whistle and ivy! I harrowed it with a bramble bush, Sing ivy, sing ivy; And reaped it with my little penknife, Sing holly, go whistle and ivy!”

From across the room came a yell, “Stop it. Just be silent!”

LJ glanced over her shoulder quickly. There was Poison Ivy, and Matt was standing just behind her legs. The Joker wasn’t done yet though, “I got the mice to carry it to the barn, Sing ivy, sing ivy; And threshed it with a goose’s quill, Sing holly, go whistle and ivy! I got the puss to carry it to the mill, Sing ivy, sing ivy; The miller he swore he would have her paw, And the cat she swore she would scratch his face, Sing holly, go whistle and ivy.”

Poison Ivy spoke again, “You’re just a killer, a horrible, disgusting plant killer Joker.”

Her tirade distracted the Joker for the second that LJ needed and with two quick run’s the Kryptonite was far away from the place and she had the Joker by the throat. He laughed as they super sped their way to the roof and she hung him over the side, “You’ve destroyed so many lives. I should let you drop. You deserve to die.”

Clark wasn’t quite totally recovered from his exposure to the Kryptonite, but he had made it to the roof, and pleaded with his daughter. “Stop it. Damnit... Shadow, you can’t kill him. It’s not our way.”

The Joker just laughed and laughed as his face started getting a lot more color, a lot more blue. Soon LJ wouldn’t have to drop him, she’d have strangled him.

A voice came out of nowhere, Clark could also hear it, but it was meant for LJ. “Shadow. It’s your decision. I, for one, will not shed a tear if that monster dies. He took...” Barbara paused, “I thought-- he took everything from me. But, before, before you do something you can never take back, remember revenge may dull the pain, but the less we feel the less we are.”

There was another long moment of silence. Then LJ dropped the Joker and with her other hand punched him into unconsciousness.

Clark came over to LJ and gave her a pat on the back, “You did ri--”
LJ gave Clark a push away, “You bawling at me had nothing to do with me not killing that piece of shit. Nothing.” She poked him in the gut, “Leave Gotham City and never come back. Ever.”

Clark stood there, a little stunned for a moment, then he inclined his head and with a whoosh was gone. LJ blew a breath out and closed her eyes. She felt rather than heard Batman land on the roof next to her. She turned, “You got him?”

“Yes.”

LJ went to the edge of the building, but was stopped by the Batman’s voice, “Do you consider this your town?”

LJ rolled her eyes, “I don’t give a damn if it’s my town, your town, Oracle’s town, as long as...” She glanced towards where her father had flown off, “…he’s not in it.”

oOOOOo

Pol-El glanced down at the communication device in his hand. The message would take a bit to get to its end destination, but, he was on schedule, so it wasn’t a problem. He didn’t have to wait for an answer. He patted the tree that it was next to. Everything was set for Gotham City, next he had to prepare for Metropolis.

oOOOOo

LJ had circled back and ‘picked up’ Matt from the corner of Scott and Meyer after the police had called her. She had watched and frowned as Poison Ivy had been put into a police car raving the whole way about how some other man, not the Joker, was going to kill all her babies. LJ presumed that she meant some sort of plants, but for the life of her LJ didn’t have the strength to care at that point. Her son was in her arms, that was all that mattered.

LJ and Barbara had decided that Matt needed a change of location, so Alfred had Matt at the manor. LJ just hoped that the butler didn’t take her son into the Batcave or anything like that. She didn’t want Matt to get any ideas quite yet. LJ was going out to patrol in a few minutes, but the Gala wasn’t starting for a half an hour, so she and Barbara had had a silent dinner together and now they were in the command center watching the unnervingly quiet monitors.

It was Barbara who broke the silence, turning to LJ, “LJ, Lara, just, tell me why in the world you don’t... why don’t you want to be Superwoman? Why don’t you want to get to know your father?”

“You’re not my mother. She’s the only one who gets to grill me.”

Barbara bit off her laugh halfway through it, “Not your mother... Yes, trust me LJ, I am very, very... very aware of that fact. Very aware.”

LJ shook her head, “Yeah, sure, right.” She took in a breath and blurted out, “I’m afraid of the dark.”
To her credit, and it took every ounce of will she had, Barbara didn’t laugh. “Lara, you’re the most powerful being on Earth, and you’ve gone out every night you’ve been here to patrol. It gets dark in Gotham, really really dark.” She mumbled mostly to herself, “I know.”

LJ didn’t look up from the study of her hands, “Yeah, why the hell do ya think I didn’t let you put one of ’em heart resp thing’a’majobies on me? Or let the NASA guys put anything on me. Space is damn dark you know.”

Barbara’s face stayed perfectly still. “It doesn’t make sense.”

A bitter chuckle came from LJ, “It’s a phobia Babs, probably some because of some psychobabble thing about my father....” She finally looked up and met Barbara’s gaze, “It doesn’t have to make sense.” She shook her head and pushed herself to her feet, “And you’re laughing too. Maybe not in a ‘ha, ha’ way, but in your way....”

“No,-- no.” She rolled towards LJ and grabbed her by the arm, “I’m just trying to understand.” LJ didn’t look convinced, but she didn’t move from Barbara’s grasp. “Really, we could....”

LJ cut her off, “No, it’s fine. I’m fine. I’m dealing. Let’s pretend I never said anything, alright?”

Barbara and LJ’s gazes clashed in a battle of wills. Neither wanting to give an inch. Barbara wanting to solve the problem that she had just been presented with, and LJ wanting to just let it go and move on. Finally Barbara nodded and took her hand off of LJ’s arm. “I’m sorry that I--”

“Butted in on my personal problems? I don’t get to have personal problems. Every one of those nosy super heroes thinks that it’s his or her job to... I don’t know, guide me, or tell me what to do, but really--” LJ shook her head, “Really they’re all just scared like hell of me. But, they don’t know, that... that...”

Barbara rolled away from her computers and into the Clocktower’s kitchen as she finished LJ’s thought. “That you’re afraid of yourself. For the record, you do put up a good front to hide it.”

LJ stared at Barbara so hard that she wondered if there were holes forming on her forehead from heat vision. “How...”

Barbara shook her head, “I don’t...” She paused and then brought her head up, “No, I do know. You’re here, saving money, saving property, saving a singular person here and there, but you, you should be in Metropolis saving the whole damn world Lara.” She put her hand on LJ’s again, “You’re scared of more than just the dark.”

LJ nodded, “Well, I should go stake out the Gala.”

Barbara shook her head, “You don’t have to. Go get Matthew, spend the night with him. You just went through a very traumatic experience, you can take the night off.”

LJ shook her head, “I’m fine.” She paused, “I’ll be fine. This’ll just be Catwoman right. It’ll be nice.”

Barbara was silent for a moment, then nodded, “I’ll be here.”

“OoOooOo

“You ever been to one of these things Oracle?”

A short laugh came over the comms, “Between who my father is and who my mentor was, what
do you think Shadow?”

“Point taken.”

“Something’s going on.”

LJ went with the non-sequitur back to their jobs. “I see nothing. Is there a lead lined room in there? I get fuzziness with lead, like lookin’ through seriously frosted glass.”

LJ heard rapid fire keystrokes, “Yes, third floor, three oh eight. The guards have someone cornered and are about to--” Barbara didn’t get to finish her sentence as she heard at least a dozen rapid fire gunshots, the bumps of bodies, and then silence. “Shadow?”

Barbara quickly brought up the security feeds for the museum and found Shadow and a very familiar face.

LJ and Catwoman stood facing each other. Catwoman broke the silence. “I would have survived.”

LJ shook her head, “Not this time. Someone knew you were coming.”

Catwoman tilted her head to one side, “The bullets bounced off of you.”

LJ chuckled, “A trick of the light.”

Catwoman shook her head, “When I trained you... you seemed very human.” LJ stayed silent. “You know you don’t seem to be trying hard to convince me you’re not his daughter.”

LJ shrugged.

“Why won’t you arrest me? It’s not because I taught you stealth. You made it very clear that once our time was done and we went our separate ways that you owed me nothing. Now, twice, you’ve let me go.”

“I’m not a cop. And, last I heard you weren’t one of the really bad guys, right?”

Catwoman shook her head, “Then why don’t you truss me up and leave me for the police?”

“We’re both doing things against the law. We both assault people for a living. But... I’ve never seen you steal from someone who needs it.”

Catwoman inclined her head, “I’ll be leaving then.”

LJ smiled just a little, “I have no doubt I’ll see you again. Oh, a question before you go.”

“How-- Law and Order of you. Your question?”

“Have you seen a man. He broke the Joker out of Arkham? A little birdie told me that you happened to be in the neighborhood of Meyer and Scott around the time that they... moved into their new digs.”

Catwoman raised an eyebrow, “A birdie?” LJ shrugged as Catwoman shook her head, “I saw him, I never saw his face. He was tall, and wide and strong.”

“Thank you.”

Catwoman waved her fingers and went out the window. LJ sighed as she closed it after the thief. “Damn. I’d hoped she’d seen something.”
Barbara sighed as well, “Well, he’ll reveal himself at some point. So, how long do you think it’ll be before Catwoman finds the tracker you planted on her? She keeps... losing the ones I give her. The ones Batman gives her.”

LJ chuckled, “Couple of days.” LJ looked up at the security cam and gave it a smirk. “Told you this was what I needed.”

Barbara just rolled her eyes in the Clocktower. “The rest of the city seems quiet. That worries me.”

LJ quirked an eyebrow, and then was gone from the room, though Barbara could still hear her over the comms, “Everything worries you Oracle.”

“Less when I’m talking to you. Have you seen Nightwing or Robin tonight?”

LJ glanced to one side, then the other. “Robin is on the East Side and Nightwing, uh... well, he, uh...”

“Spit it out Shadow.”

“I think he’s on a date.”

“Oh.”

LJ swung onto a roof and perched on the edge of it, “You okay with that?”

“What?” Barbara cleared her throat, “What, of course. Oh, we were together when I was Batgirl and he was Robin, actually, now that I think back to it, it was sort of weirdly incestuous.” A chuckle, “No, he always had a thing for Donna Troy, Wonder Woman’s... ah, I’m going to go with sister here...” Barbara paused, “Are you worried about me Shadow?”

LJ laughed, “Me, worried about you, as if. So....”

The sky lit up in oranges, reds, yellows, blues and whites. Barbara wasn’t sure if LJ had stopped speaking, or if she was traveling so fast that the sound wasn’t registering. Barbara switched to her feeds of, well, all the cameras she had in Gotham. It saved her life as she saw a giant piece of building or something flying towards the Clocktower and with all the strength she had in her upper body heaved herself out of the way of the concrete as it impacted her command center with a gigantic crash.

oOOOOo

Helena Kyle was choking, or drowning, or some combination of the two. She clawed at her throat, finally finding the problem. A breathing tube. With one yank it was out of her throat, leaving a trail of fire, but allowing her to breathe unhindered.
Chapter 8

Somewhere in all the mess of the Clocktower an alarm was going off, an alarm that had its own specific sound. Helena had woken up, or died. Of course, Barbara couldn’t tell which because she was half buried under a pile of rubble.

That the explosion that ripped three quarters of the city apart had happened at night wound up being a mostly good thing, because, those who called themselves the protectors of the city were all out and about as the shockwaves and buildings flew hither and yon. Batman, who was known in some parts as a dark terror, became one of Gotham City’s saviors. He saved hundreds of people, so many that he stopped counting. Nightwing managed to get out of the way of a flying piece of building and saved what seemed like high rise after high rise of people. Robin, Zatanna Zatara used her magic to do the same, even Poison Ivy, Catwoman, Two-Face worked alongside the GCPD, the GCFD and ordinary citizens as hundreds, then thousands of people were saved.

No one saved more people than LJ though. After LJ had taken Matt to Alfred at the mansion, which hadn’t been touched by the blast, she’d held buildings up as the GCFD got the people out. Dug people out from where the subways had collapsed. She even literally caught a few people who didn’t know what to do and had thought jumping out the window of their apartment building was their only way out. Her father was there too, but, she chose to pretend that he didn’t exist. And he saved many people that night too.

It was the tiniest of groans that got LJ’s attention. She hadn’t heard from Oracle since the explosion, but she hadn’t been worried, the city was a mess, LJ had assumed that Barbara’s communication system was down. But that groan. Even though it had only been a little while while she knew Barbara’s voice, her sound, and with that groan LJ sped as fast as she could to the Clocktower, or, to be more specific, what was left of it. “Barbara, Babs, RED?”

“Here...” It was barely above a whisper, but, LJ heard it and in a second she was to Barbara’s side, practically throwing the wall and equipment that was on top of Barbara. “Th-thank you...”

She tried to sit up, but LJ put a hand to her chest. “Don’t move.”

“S’okay,” a half addled laugh came from Barbara’s lips, “it landed on my... on my legs.”

LJ shook her head, “And your back, where you have a bullet really very close to your... spine. You, you have to get checked out Babs, please, for me.”

Barbara shook her head and looked around, “I can’t... not from up here...”

LJ looked around, spotting a flat piece of wood. “If I get you down to the apartment. Call... your father. They’ll take you in, get you looked at.”

Barbara nodded just a little bit, not wanting to move her head. “LJ... I can feel everything. I can. I’m fine.”

LJ put a hand on Barbara’s cheek for a moment, then pulled it away as if burned. “We’ll see... and after I get you downstairs...”

“Go, go, I’ve been through worse than this.”

oOOOOo
Selina stood in what had been her daughter’s room and shook her head. “Shadow, if you can hear me, I have a message for Oracle. My little... Huntress... is gone.”

LJ made a quick stop at the manor, it hadn’t been touched by the bomb. Then she stopped by the hospital and ducked into Barbara’s room. “Hey... message from Selina, she said that her... Huntress... is gone?”


LJ thought for a moment, “Or, maybe she woke up during all the chaos?”

It was apparent by the look on Barbara’s face that she hadn’t thought of that. “So she’s... somewhere out there, in all, that?”

LJ started to take Barbara’s hand, and then pulled it back towards her own body. “So, are you okay?”

“I’m being discharged in mere moments. Will you... take me back? I have to start...”

“....rebooting.”

Barbara nodded, “Something like that, yes.”

LJ put two fingers to her forehead and saluted, “I’ll be right outside. Swoop you up when you get to the parking lot.”

“Thank you...”

LJ shrugged, “You’re pretty light.”

Barbara caught LJ’s hand in her own, “No, I mean for saving me. I-- I don’t scare easily, but I-- I almost died tonight.”

LJ looked down at their intertwined hands, then back up at Barbara, “It’s all part of the job. I-- While you’re making your way downstairs, I think.... I think that I need to switch to my red blue and yellow number huh?”

“I don’t think that those you save care what you wear doing it, but... yes, with all the flying you’re doing, yes.”

LJ walked to the window, “Back in a jiff.” And was gone.

“No. Just, no. Okay?” They were back in what was left of the Clocktower, LJ making a few paths for Barbara’s wheelchair in the rubble.

“But, you said you needed to get a bird’s eye view, and that your satellites are down, or the link up is, or whatever.”

“Lara... you can go up yourself. You’ve been flying since you were a kid.”

LJ rolled her eyes, “Yeah, and report back, and that won’t really work ‘cause then I’ll give you
the wrong information, and you’ll get this pinched look on your face and...” LJ paused, “Please.”

“No.”

LJ took a step back and held up her hands, “Fine, whatever. I get it. You think that it’ll hurt. It’s like love, it’s easier to never let it in than to try and get hurt.”

LJ took another step away from Barbara and spun into the ‘Metropolis Uniform’. It was the same colors as her father’s, though the style was different. It was a dark blue top that was so tight that it accentuated her chest and the stylized S that sat there. She had a yellow belt almost like her fathers, just a much more muted yellow, but the spandex pants that hugged all her curves were a dark, dark red, not blue like Superman’s, and she had passed on the ‘underwear over the leggings’ look. The boots were also dark red, though they were more combat and less thigh highs with heels. And of course, there was the dark red cape flowing behind her. A thought flashed through Barbara’s head. The suit, it brought out LJ’s blue eyes, the blue eyes that were so much like her father’s and yet also seemed different as Barbara looked at them.

LJ smoothed down her hair and looked up, “What?”

“Yes.”

LJ frowned, “What?”

“Yes. Fine. I’ll go up with you, how do... how do we... Oh--” Barbara blinked as suddenly she was weightless, one of LJ’s arms under her back the other under her legs, though she couldn’t feel that one. “If I’m too...”

“Sshhh... I can probably lift the moon.” They flew through the jagged hole in the clock tower and up and up and up and then they stopped. “You can open your eyes now.”

Barbara blinked and did open them, “I didn’t realize.” She shivered, “It’s cold.” Without a word LJ wrapped the cape around the red head. “And we’re up too high.”

LJ shook her head, “No, we’re not, but, we’ll go down lower for a look after.”

“After?”

LJ leaned in and touched her lips just barely to Barbara’s. The younger woman had no idea how Barbara would respond, or if she would at all. After all the times that Barbara yammered on about control... and then all thought left the black haired woman as Barbara returned the kiss and more.

It was Barbara who finally pulled away, “We can’t, I’m... we need to.”

“Save the world? I believe the world has already gone to hell and I missed saving it by a second or two.”

Barbara cleared her throat as she stared into the bluest eyes she’d ever seen. “Yeah, s-save the world.” LJ nodded and started to float back down. Barbara kept her eyes open as they did. “It’s effortless isn’t it. Flying, or the strength, or any of it.”

LJ nodded, “People call it a power, but, it’s not really. Is breathing a power for normal humans, or, or hearing, or seeing, or walki-- I-- It just is what it is.”

Barbara lifted LJ’s chin so that the dark haired Superwoman had to look into her eyes, “And you’d give it all up?”
LJ swallowed and nodded, “If I got to keep Matt, keep you, if you got to walk. Probably for my mother, maybe even for my father. I’d give these so called ‘powers’ up in a second. Yes.”

“I love you.”

All downward motion stopped and they just hung in the air. LJ blinked a few times, “I, I love you too. I didn’t know if...”

Barbara put her fingers over LJ’s lips, “Shh... your son, your family, even my life, but not my legs. I don’t... I won’t pretend that I don’t dream of one day being able to walk down the stairs, walk down Gotham’s streets and alleyways, maybe a day in the future a certain aisle, but they’re just legs.”

“Oh my God.”

Barbara frowned and looked down, “Oh---” She put a hand to her own mouth, “That’s... that’s worse than I thought it would be.”

LJ tilted her head to one side and then closed her eyes. “I have to...”

Barbara smiled, “No more Shadow. You know that you need to be Superwoman.”

LJ nodded, then swallowed, “I don’t... I’ve never done it for any length of time before. Not really. He’s... he’s a god Babs, what if...”

Barbara kissed LJ, “You will be great, and, I’ll be right there with you.”

“But...”

Barbara looked sheepish, “Yes, I, sort of found your suit in the closet and wove a spare comm unit I had into it. Sometimes I get bored.”

LJ traced the line of Barbara’s jaw, “If you’re there with me. I think I can do anything.”

Barbara groaned, “That was really corny.”

LJ winced, “I know. We should get down there before I sprain something being so corny and ruin my rep as quite a cool lady. There is... a lot to repair. It’s going to be a long... long cleanup.”
Barbara climbed into her spare wheelchair and pushed herself to what was left of her computers and started going through the carnage. She slipped on an earpiece and cleared her throat, “Superwoman.” The sun was just coming up and together they’d decided that they needed to keep at it for a few more hours at least. Try and get as much of the city into working order as possible.

“I’m here. You up yet?”

“No, but I will be.”

“The Zimmer buildings’ about to go, and the dam, I don’t...”

Barbara cut off LJ’s rambling, “Deal with the Zimmer first, catch it or reinforce it, or, whatever. By then I’ll be up and we can fix the dam.” She pushed a totally dead piece of equipment to one side and swapped a couple of monitors since one had a crack down the middle of it. She kept doing that, swapping this and that, RAM, sound and video cards and everything else until the monitor in front of her brightened with her ‘Oracle OS’ as LJ called it. “Superwoman. I’m up. Are you at the dam?”

“I am. Do I patch the holes or release some of the water?”

Barbara searched, then whacked the side of the tower and typed more. “Okay. Do you have something to patch it with? Go with patching for now.”

Barbara heard a whoosh and LJ’s voice, “Quick dry cement’ll have to do for now. Other crises?”

“Immediately, the Old Wayne Tower has people stuck above the working elevators, Kane bridge has been, well... the middle’s standing while the rest isn’t, oh, and I picked up your father on RADAR. Ah, and could you...”

LJ cut Barbara off, “I already checked Gotham City Hospital, they can’t find her, but, she’s not dead. They think she woke up, the breathing tube looked as if it had been ripped out of her throat.”

Barbara let out a breath, “You know that I...”

“I’ll keep an eye out for her. She’s like your sister. I get it.”

Barbara’s lips twitched just a bit, “No, you don’t, but, thank you for faking it.”

“My pleasure my love. So... Dam’s done, what’s next?”

Barbara flicked back and forth between reports and screens, “Do you feel like getting shocked by a helluva lot of voltage? Gotham Electric can’t wait. They can’t seem to turn off a broken...”

LJ cut Barbara off, “On it.” She cleared her throat, “Ah, people.”

Barbara smiled to herself, “Just channel the stories your mother told you about your father, but, be you. You can do this.”

“Be Super-him, but be me, right, easy peasy...” Barbara heard LJ land and clear her throat, “Sir, you have an electrical problem?”
The man sounded gobsmacked. “You’ve got breasts.” Barbara laughed despite the situation as the Gotham Electric worker stumbled over his words. “Uh, sorry, yes, yes, you’ll fix it?”

Lara cracked a grin, “Might make my hair stand on end.” Barbara chuckled at that too. “But, I’ll try.”

The man led LJ to the far end of the jumble of working and ruined electrical equipment. “Just, if you grip that and pull it down it’ll cut off the current.” The man paused, “Are you sure...”

LJ smiled, “If I’m wrong we’ll find out. Please, step back, put your seats in the upright position and--” she paused, “--turn off all your electrical devices.”

The man stared at LJ as if she had three heads, but took a few steps back. LJ flexed her hands a bit, then with one grabbed the switch. A tendril of electricity tickled her and a smile came to her face as she turned off the circuit. “There ya go.”

She flew into the air as the Gotham Electric worker shouted, “Thank you.”

LJ gave the man a half a salute, then tapped on her chest, “Can ya still hear me?”

“Five by five.”

LJ chuckled, “I have a request. I know you’re working at less than peak capacity, but can you keep me outta the way of my father?”

Barbara paused, “How do you feel about the rest? Nightwing, Batman, Robin, the GCPD?”

“They’re fine. Thank you. Ah... damn, looting can’t start. I won’t let that start.”

LJ flew down and landed with almost no noise, “I dare you.”

A kid slowly turned, coming face to face with the ‘S’ on Lara’s chest, “But, it’s--”

“Put it back, now.”

The kid looked down at the TV in his hands, up at LJ, and back to the TV. “Ah man, my Mom’s gonna kill me.”

LJ watched the eight or ten year old boy slowly put the TV down. “Actually, I have an idea. It’ll even get you brownie points with your Mom. You have any friends around here?”

The boy puffed up his chest, “Course man, uh... ma’am.” LJ narrowed her eyes, “Uh... Supergu--woman?”

“You’re smarter than you look.” LJ rolled her eyes, “Get your friends.”

LJ smiled as she heard Barbara mumble, “What are you up to Superwoman?”

She was tired. Lara Joanne Lane, a woman born on Earth with some of the genes of a Kryptonian, who couldn’t even be hurt by kryptonite. One of the most powerful people on Earth just wanted to find a bed, preferably one near her son and Barbara and fall into it. The Barbara thing surprised her a little with how fast it had come on and how intense the feelings were for the red head. And for that matter the fact that apparently Barbara returned the feelings.
She’d gone from one crisis to another for the past thirty six hours, falling down buildings, hurt people. She’d even transported a few body bags to the morgue, not something she ever wanted to do again. Right next to her, or down the street, or across the street Nightwing, Robin, Batman, Superman even Catwoman alongside the GCPD and GCFD, had kept at the process of putting Gotham City back together. The explosion had touched almost every part of the city.

LJ knelt in the crater, Batman on one side of her, Nightwing on the other. “I don’t smell any explosives, and I scanned the entire crater, there’s not even a speck of debris from a bomb either.”

“What if it was biological?”

Barbara had keyed all three of their comms, but only LJ’s was on, only LJ could hear her comment. Because of how it was made, LJ’s was always on. Barbara had been waiting for the entire time they’d been working together for LJ to object to the intrusion, or the fact that technically Barbara could always hear what was going on around LJ, but the words had not yet come out of LJ’s mouth. That probably should have been early proof of LJ’s feelings for Barbara.

So, when LJ nodded to thin air and started scanning the ground again, the mentor and ward’s gazes met over LJ’s head in confusion.

“Will you let us in on the secret.”

LJ didn’t stop searching, “Oracle’s idea. Perhaps what exploded was actually a person.”

“Oof,” That was Nightwing, “Did we even have someone who could do that in the world, or in Arkham?”

LJ stifled a yawn, “You two are the Detectives. Detect. I have to shore up-- god knows how many more buildings.” She shot up into the air.

She was nearly to the Luthor Building when Barbara spoke, “First you need to sleep.”

LJ rubbed at her eyes, “I can’t. It’ll look even worse tomorrow and, you’ve been in my ear these past hours too, so, unless you’ve been talkin’ in your sleep, you need some shut eye as well.”

There was silence, “We both take ninety minutes, then get back to work.”

LJ smirked to herself, “Together?”

A hurf came from Barbara, “Superwoman...”

Barbara jumped as LJ appeared next to her, “I guess no one saw you.”

LJ shrugged, “Mostly when I go that fast they don’t know which way to even start looking. Ninety minutes?”

Barbara started down the hall as the redhead explained, “The average time it takes someone to cycle through the stages of sleep.”

“Thank you by the way, did he... go home, to Metropolis?”

Barbara nodded, “He did. Lara...”

LJ put a hand up, “I just... maybe I even love him, I don’t know. He’s my father, but I just can’t. He’s never been there, all the times I needed him, he wasn’t there, does it really matter why? He just wasn’t there. I just, I couldn’t, I can’t.”
Barbara put an arm around LJ’s waist and they stopped. “I think that it was actually Bruce who convinced him to go home. So, you’ll have to thank The Batman.”

They continued to Barbara’s room, “Ooh, that one’s gonna hurt.”

LJ started to leave, but her hand was caught by Barbara, “Uh, uh, you’re sleeping here.”

“Babs...”

Barbara gently pulled Lara into the room, “It’s the only way I can be sure you’ll actually sleep of course.”

LJ smirked, “Of course?”

Barbara rolled to the bathroom. LJ shook her head and climbed into the bed. She managed to stay awake until Barbara climbed into bed next to her. Barbara found herself surrounded by LJ’s arms. “Lara, you don’t...”

“Shhh.... sleep.” LJ waited until Barbara’s heartbeat settled and her breathing evened before she closed her eyes and mumbled, “I’ll make everything right.”

oOOOOo

Barbara jerked up as something landed on the bed. Or at least she tried. She found herself in a steel grip. Her eyes focused on the six year old. “Matthew? I... we...”

She felt LJ’s grip lessen just a bit, “Matt-so. You know better.”

Matt looked down, “Sorry. People here.”

Barbara gently moved one of LJ’s arms, “Join the party, since--” She glanced out the window, “I think we slept for more than ninety minutes.”

Matt crawled up, snuggled between the two women and sighed, “Call you Mom too?”

LJ’s eyes bugged out, “Matt.”

Barbara smiled, “You’re a smart kid aren’t you buddy. It’s entirely up to you Matthew.”

LJ transferred her look to Barbara, “Babs.”

Matt tilted his head to one side, then the other, “Not yet, okay?”

Barbara kissed Matt’s forehead, “Perfect. So, you said people. Is Alfred here? He brought you?”

Matt nodded, “And Mister Bruce--” Matt frowned, “Not Mister....”

“Master Bruce?” Matt nodded, “He’s here?” Matt nodded again, “I’m going to...” Barbara untangled herself from the two Lanes and transferred herself to her chair and disappeared from her bedroom.

Matt frowned again, “Is Mister Bruce bad?”

LJ shook her head, “No, no, of course not. It’s complicated.”

Matt made a face, “Is stupid.”
LJ ruffled her son’s hair, “Kiddo, we adults can be very, very, very smart, and very stupid. Sometimes at exactly the same time.”

Matt rolled his eyes, “Pancakes?”

“Sure bud.”

Bruce, what are you doing here?”

Bruce looked up at the hole in the ceiling, “It was quite a blast, that’s a concrete pylon from the dockyards.” He put a hand on it, then after a moment he looked up at Barbara again, “I’m sorry.”

Barbara looked around at the mostly destroyed Clocktower. “It’s just things.” Bruce shook his head, and Barbara rolled closer, “They’re just legs.” She paused, “Bruce, I’m not sure--”

“The Joker, he’s still in Arkham. I also think that he was the one who... set off whoever or whatever took out half of Gotham City. Before he got caught...”

“I don’t think he was, but...” Barbara studied Bruce. He was in a dress shirt, pants and a blazer, no tie. She tried to figure out what in the world was going through his head. “It’s good that’s he’s locked up again.” Barbara frowned, “And Helena. Has anyone seen her yet?”

He shook his head, as his focus moved from Barbara to something behind her. Without turning Barbara held out a hand, “C’mon Matthew, let’s go see what Alfred’s making for breakfast.”

Matt gave his Mom and Bruce a look and shook his head before he took Barbara’s hand, “Pancakes maybe?”

“I don’t know. I bet it’ll be better than pancakes.”

Once Barbara and Matt left silence stretched between Bruce and LJ. Unsurprisingly it was LJ who broke it. “I couldn’t do what needed to be done while hiding my powers. And, once I used my powers my lineage becomes pretty obvious. Wearing the damn-- wearing the bright and shiny ‘S’ makes things simpler.”

Bruce crossed his arms over his chest, “This is my City.”

LJ held her hands up, “Wherever Barbara is, I will be there.”

“She’s not going to get out of that chair anymore than I’ll ever be able to fly. You can be a savior to this world, but, she is who she is. Richard has already seen that and decided being friends is better. She may play it off like they were just a teen fling, but, her heart was broken by Dick, and I won’t let that happen again.”

LJ didn’t shy away from Bruce’s gaze, “Are you my prep for Former Commissioner Gordon? Because I love her. It’s out of nowhere, and weird, and fast, and... maybe I should have waited, woo-ed, whatever, supposedly like my father did for my mother. But sometimes, sometimes the first time you meet someone it’s love, and, everything after that just is time away from each other. And, people can go away at any time, death, abandonment. So. I love her. Period. Nothing you can say or Gordon can say, or even Barbara can say will change that.”

They both fell silent again, “Did I pass the test?”

“Gotham City is not a place for a... a bright hero.”
“Oh, my costume looks bright to you? I think you need your eyes checked old man. Or--” LJ tilted her head, “Maybe that is what Gotham needs, a brighter hero too, but--” LJ’s head snapped to one side, “Something’s starting-- I have to go.”

Barbara appeared from the kitchen, “It’s in Metropolis, your father’s fighting someone and... and... getting--”

LJ spun into her red yellow and blue uniform and met Barbara’s eyes for a moment, then was gone. Bruce had to get out of the way as he was between Barbara and her cobbled together command center. “What are you doing?”

“You may not appreciate my eye in the sky, but...” She glanced over her shoulder at her one time mentor, “For whatever reason, Lara does. So, I’m doing what I do.” She slipped in an ear piece as her hands manipulated the keyboard. A picture came up on the monitor and Barbara blanched, “He-- he.”

Matt spoke up from Barbara’s shoulder, nearly making the former Batgirl jump. “Mommy bad guy like you, like Grampa.”

“Did you get that Superwoman?” She paused, “Yes,” and glanced at Matt. “Matthew, go to the kitchen with Alfred.”

Matt made a face, hurfed and spoke loud enough that his Mom would be able to hear it over the comms, “Poopy head.”

A smile dropped onto Barbara’s lips for just a half a second. “You get that too?” The smile disappeared, “Alright, the SCU just tried Kryptonite. Idiots, it hurt Superman, didn’t touch the unknown attacker. This’ll be pure strength, unless Batman has found something that can hurt you that we could use to hurt him.” Barbara’s eyes went to Bruce who shook his head, “He says no-- you can do this love.”

Barbara listened for a moment and closed her eyes, “Even so, I’ll be here.” Barbara muted her end and sighed.

She looked up when Bruce put a hand on her shoulder, “There’s still lots to do here so I have to go, but Alfred’s going to stay. I-- she’ll be okay.”

Barbara had no response, just watched as Bruce left the Clocktower. Her eyes went back to her monitor and after a few moments she was into the Metropolis camera network and watching the now three way fight.

oOOOOo

“Thank God for Star Trek logic in real life.”

While Superman and the Super opponent were so pretty similar looking, the bad guy did have a thin, anemic looking black beard and green eyes instead of blue, not to mention that Superman was bleeding a whole helluva lot more. LJ aimed to change that.

First she caught her father before he took out the top few floors of the Daily Planet. The past twenty one years faded into the background as LJ asked one question of her father. “Who?”

Clark barely had enough breath to breathe, but answered with a few words. “Pol-El, my--adopted son from New Krypton.”

LJ nodded and they both flew at Pol. No words were used as they worked to drive him away from
the city. Out towards the ocean. But Pol was having none of it.

So, with a flurry of punches that to onlookers looked like streaks for primary colors, they drove him deeper and deeper into the earth. They went so deep that they popped out onto a subway platform, scattering people. Each punch that one of the three connected with, caused the tunnels and the earth above them to shake like an earthquake.

Pol had just laid Clark out and the man wasn’t moving at all, so he was taken by surprise when LJ powered him back up through the hole they had made, skewering him with heat vision. It barely slowed him down, but a line of blood appeared. She’d finally caused just a little bit of damage.

It also caused the first words to come out of his mouth, “Damn you woman, I am Superman-- I--- I AM, your world will be mine dyke halfling.” He punched at her and missed. “I am the most powerful Superman ever, and I will get to wear the ‘S’ forever, my true father and leader says so.” His second punch did connect with LJ and boy did it hurt. She hadn’t felt pain in years, and, if she was honest with herself, it was actually a bit exhilarating.

LJ shook off the punch and took a swipe at him, but it was as if she were punching in clay. He was fast, faster than she’d ever seen. “So, you know my secrets, I’ve never been good with ‘em anyway.”

He punched her again and this time she went flying through three different buildings and slumped into unconsciousness.

Pol’s laugh was cut off as something hit him in the gut. They went up and up and up and up until the air was thin. Pol struggled to get out of Clark’s arms, but with everything he had left Clark Jerome Kent, Kal-El, Superman, he held on to Pol. He was tiring, he could feel it, but Metropolis was his home, the people, especially people like Perry and Lois and Jimmy, they depended on him and he’d let them down by leaving. He wasn’t going to let them down again. He had to defeat Pol or die trying.

LJ groaned and blinked, “Ah, crap...” She winced as Barbara’s voice rang in her ears, “Shhh, ya don’t have to scream, I’m awake, I...” She groaned again, “Where, tell me where...” She coughed, “where is he, are they?”

“The River.” There was what seemed like a never ending pause, “By the Nuclear plant.”

LJ stood, “Double crap with a side of sh....” The rest was lost to the wind as she took off.

Matt sniffled back tears as he appeared next to Barbara, she’d probably been louder than she’d needed to when she saw LJ get bashed through the buildings. She cleared her throat. “Hey Matthew.”

“Hi. Red, I stay?” Barbara ignored the grammar and patted her lap. Matt frowned, “You don’t like.”

Barbara gave Matt a wink, “Well, I’ll make an exception for you.” He climbed up and she tried to distract him from what was going on on her screen, “So, did you know that I didn’t like you?”

“You didn’t?”

“Yep. If you haven’t noticed I like things in a certain order. You are pure chaos kiddo.”
Matt’s frown deepened, “But-but, fun.”

Barbara smiled, “Do you know what a loner is?” Matt nodded, sort of, “It’s a person who likes to be alone, to have a lot of space to herself. Well, I thought that I would always, always, always and forever be one. I’ve never been like your Mom, she’s a people person, likes being around people, well, at least when she’s herself, when she’s Lara she likes being around people. I had to learn that.”

“You like me?”

Barbara put her arms around him and hugged, “Yep, now I like you. You’re one of my favorite two year olds ever. I definitely like you Matthew, more than I ever thought possible.”

oOOOOo

“Oh, I apologize, I’ll--”

Selina cut Bruce off, “No, come in, we--” The blonde woman cleared her throat, “I was taking a break from...” Bruce nodded his understanding, “... and watching the coverage of the-- carnage in Metropolis.”

Bruce came all the way into Selina’s apartment, closing the door behind him. “It’s going badly.” Selina nodded, “May I watch with you?”

Selina was silent and still for a moment before she nodded. Bruce sat down on Selina’s couch and took a hold of Selina’s hand. Selina glanced at the intertwined hands for a moment, then looked back at the TV screen. “They think that Superman may be dead. And-- and if even he can’t survive on this world anymore, what does that say for my Helena’s chances?”

A shadow passed over Bruce’s face, but he said nothing.

oOOOOo

When Pol hit LJ again it hurt like nothing had ever hurt before. They’d been fighting for what seemed like days and days, though she knew it was probably only minutes. She flew backwards again, through a couple of walls and came to rest in the bullpen of the Daily Planet. She stood and had to catch herself on a desk. “Ow...” Something was wrong with one of her arms.

She started to take off again, but was stopped by a hand in hers. She looked down, then up into her mother’s eyes. “I need to....”

“Let go. He’s not human. You can let go.”

LJ frowned at Lois, then took off back towards the bad guy. She heard a voice coming from the comm in her shirt, “She’s right. You’re not in Gotham anymore Superwoman. You have to hit him with everything you’ve got.”

LJ mumbled, mostly to herself, though she knew Barbara could hear her too, “Control the power, let the power go... you people need to freakin’ make up your minds already.....”

And then she was plowing into this Pol fellow and she let herself go as she’d never in her life.

After she’d knocked out her grandfather she’d gotten perfect control of herself, of her powers. Never using any of them to anywhere near their full potential. And when she’d returned to the real world, oh, she still pretended to play it fast and loose, knock a bad guy out when she was just supposed to knock them down, it’s not like some of the them didn’t deserve a bit of time in
unconscious land. And every time that someone would tell her that she needed more control, that she was out of control she bristled.

It felt amazing to hit with all her strength and she and the man who was supposedly her adopted half brother were rocking all of Metropolis and the surrounding areas with their punches. But it wasn’t enough. He kept hitting her far away. And the final time that she stumbled to a stop, coming back from nearly the edge of New Troy, she literally felt her heart skip a beat. Her father lay on top of some rubble, his heart beating so weakly, Pol over him, laughing.

The sound, it was like it ignited a furnace in LJ’s guts. It wasn’t anger, it was pure rage. Every bit of anger that she’d ever stuffed down, at her Mom, at her Dad for leaving, her powers, her friends, even the petty annoyances that she sometimes fleetingly felt in regards to her son. It all combined and she screamed, shaking windows, buildings and causing every single person in Metropolis to look to the sky.

She was on Pol in a moment, a punch to his face sent blood flying, to his solar plexus, which by the split second of surprise LJ saw on his face, Pol didn’t know he had. But she, she knew the human body and she had spent her time as Shadow taking out humans very carefully by using their kidneys, noses, solar plexuses and family jewels. She put those skills to use, with a bit more oomph behind them.

All of Metropolis, hell, the world was transfixed as they watched the two super powered beings bash at each other. They could see Superwoman trying to steer the fight away from the city again, while Pol was trying to take it back to the heart of Metropolis.

Pol caught LJ by the throat and slammed her head into the side of the LuthorCorp Building, sending pieces of building everywhere. He did it again, and again, and again, and then with a heave he threw her away. She landed with a bump next to her father, and she stared up at the too blue sky.

“Air, air--”

With a grunt LJ rolled to her knees, and knelt next to her father, “Dad...”

He yanked at Lara’s cape, “Air-- only--” He coughed blood, “Love you.”

And then she was ripped from him and thrown through the doors of the Daily Planet. “He never wanted me, never wanted any of New Krypton, pretended to love me. He thought I was never gonna amount, but I amounted. More than anyone. ANYONE.” He stood over the bloody LJ as she frowned up at him, “What, you won’t ask any last questions, you don’t have any last requests? You don’t want to know-- why-- I did it?”

LJ said nothing as Pol picked her up by the neck with one hand and ripped the ‘S’ off her chest with the other.

“I was-- disinherited-- DISINHERITED-- like trash by my own father, given to Kal like I was a royal trinket, and your father, he could have cared less. Oh--” She slammed her against the Daily Planet’s wall, shaking the building, but leaving it standing. “your.... father, he said he was protecting me, that he loved me.” He cleared his throat and laughed as LJ’s face turned red, her lips blue. “So, I found someone who would tell me the truth.”

As her lips started tingling a random neuron fired and her father’s rambles made perfect sense.

Apparently Pol was still talking, “I will raise your son-- right. In the Kryptonian way.” He laughed and glanced around. And so didn’t see something snap in her eyes.
She went scary silent and was on Pol with furious combinations of kicks, punches, grabs, and then she felt her arm get ripped from her body. She screamed with the pain that came with the removal.

With all the strength she had left, she gave him a left hook. As he stumbled back she ripped off her cape and sped around to his back, wrapping her cape around his throat with one hand. He clawed at it, thrashed around, trying to free himself.

Finally Pol fell to the ground as his eyes rolled up and into his head. Lara landed on her knees next to him, holding her arm where Pol’s final attack had sheared it from her shoulder. She stood up with a groan and stumbled over to the bloody appendage. “Call S.T.A.R.-- Doctor Klein. Arm please.”

Lois was the first to her side, picked up the arm, and nestled it against LJ’s chest. “Are you going to be--”

“No time-- already healing.” With that she took off, far slower than usual, heading towards S.T.A.R. Labs.

Jimmy caught up with Lois, “Did-- did she win?”

Lois looked at Pol, then around. It seemed like almost every building in Metropolis had been impacted, literally. Whether its windows had been blow out or half of it was sitting on the ground. “I-- don’t know. But, we now share a similarity with Gotham City.”

“Half of our cities are in ruin. Yeah, not really one of the things that cities want to share.”

LJ stumbled into Doctor Klein’s lab, causing quite the ruckus. Bernard Klein looked up from his computer and gasped, “Superwoman.”

She thrust the arm at him, “Sew back on-- now-- before...”

“But...”

LJ collapsed to the ground, blackness starting to invade her vision, “Trust me.”

Lois stared down at her husband on the ground for a long moment before a gurney bumped into her hip. Her jaw worked, but nothing came out. Finally as the gurney started rolling away with Superman on it, she spoke, “Keep him safe.”

Maggie Sawyer managed to catch Lois before she hit the ground, “If you want me to, I’ll be there with him every second.”

Lois nodded, “Please.”

Maggie made sure Lois was able to stand on her own, let go and followed after the gurney.

Matt stared at the woman he’d been dropped off with. “I’m confused.”

The woman raised an eyebrow, “Your mother didn’t tell you about me? My name is Selina Kyle, and I’m a friend of Barbara’s. I promise.” Matt shrugged, “You shouldn’t be scared.”
He shrugged, “Mom’ll make all better,” he paused, “my Moms.”

Selina’s eyebrows raised, “Moms?”

“Red said okay.”

Selina sighed with a shake of her head, “Babs, of course.”

Matt frowned, “She’s nice.”

“Oh, I know, she used to babysit my daughter. Before...”

Matt was silent for a moment, then spoke, “Helna?”

“Do you know what happened to Barbara?”


“My daughter Helena was there too and got shot too, but not in the spine like Barbara.”

“Where’s Helna?”

Selina shook her head, “I don’t... I don’t know. When the big bomb went off she got lost, and we’re looking for her, but we haven’t found her yet.”

“We pray?”

Selina blinked and looked at Matt in surprise. “Your Mom prays?”

Matt shook his head, “No, great grandma. We now?”

“I-- uh-- haven’t in a long time.”

Matt nodded, took a hold of Selina’s hand and closed his eyes. “Dear God, sorry stole cookie. Sorry knocked Pop Tarts.”

“Pop tarts?”

Matt opened his eyes, “Red has. Mommy no eat.”

“Oh.”

Matt closed his eyes again and resumed, “Please watch Mommy, Red Mommy, Great Granma, Granma and Granpa, and Duncan, and Ms. Kyle and Mister Bruce and Al, and Helna too. Because her Mom sad.”

Selina stared at Matt as she mumbled, “Amen.”

oOOOOo

“Where-- what? Where?”

Lois’ voice cut through LJ’s confusion, “Doctor Klein’s lab, a part of it anyway.” Lois brushed her hand through LJ’s short hair, “You quite freaked him out hon. He’s still out in the main room trying to clean up the blood.”

LJ closed her eyes, “Da-Dad’s dead?”
Lois nodded slowly, “I know.”

“Grandma?”

Lois shook her head, “She’s fine, I called her, she’s coming.” LJ tried to get up, but Lois held her down. “Not yet. Let Doctor Klein check you out first, okay?”

LJ shook her head, “The Nuclear plant.”

“I just lost my husband, sit still young lady until Bernard tells you that your arm won’t fall off.”

LJ looked down at her arm. She flexed the fingers, “It-- it actually worked.”

A slightly strangled laugh came from Doctor Klein. “Good thing you didn’t tell me that before I sewed like a demented seamstress. I thought I was going to wind up leaving you with the worst scar ever.” He cleared his throat and shook his head, “I could feel it healing under my fingers. Does all of it work?”

LJ lifted it and let it drop to the bed, “Seems like it. Thank you Doctor K.”

Doctor Klein blushed a bit and changed the subject, “What happened to your ‘S’?”

LJ looked down. Indeed although the blue that had been underneath was still there most of the ‘S’ was gone. “I don’t... I think maybe Pol ripped it off. It gets fuzzy there at the end of the fight.” She sat up in the bed, “I have to go, really... the plant it’s getting worse.”

Lois gave LJ a long look, then nodded and held a hand out. LJ took it and let herself be helped from the bed. LJ then found herself engulfed in her mother’s arms. She could hear the workers at the Nuclear plant freaking out, and yet, she didn’t want to let go of Lois. She whispered, “I’m sorry--” and then with all her will she sped out of her mother’s arms and towards the power plant.

Lois put a hand to her heart. “Be careful Lara--” She turned towards Doctor Klein and frowned, “You have a strange look on your face.”

“I-- just... since your first appointment with me I’ve known you would be a mother, or that you were a mother. Even seen you with LJ on multiple occasions for her check ups, but, I guess that--it never really sank in.”

Lois glanced towards the door as Doctor Klein put an arm around her, “Thank you Bernard, for saving her arm.”

Doctor Klein shook his head, “No. I mean, I’m glad I did, but, she’s just like her father. Two arms or one, she would have kept saving lives no matter what.”

oOOOOo

“Speak into the microphone kiddo, but not too loud, and remember...”

A sigh made its way from the transmitter sewn into LJ’s suit to Lara’s ears, then Matt’s voice, “Superwoman. Love you.”

There was a pause and Barbara’s voice, “We’re fine here-- so-- save your home.”

Lara tried to clear the lump from her throat, “I... I already did, last week. Now I gotta save Metropolis.” She cleared her throat again, “’kay, enough mushy stuff. Know anything about Nuclear power plants?”
Chapter 10

Metropolis had been easier to clean up. Not that it was back together. There was still rebuilding and fixing to do, but, the city that never slept had also gotten used to, very used to cleaning up the mess when some super villain came around trying to destroy the city where no superhero had operated.

The Nuclear plant had been touch and go though. But it hadn’t melted down, and after gritting her teeth through all the thanks and everything she flew back to Gotham in the blink of an eye.

The Clocktower looked better every day, and it was more filled with people than she’d seen it in a long time. On the couch slept a wiped out looking Catwoman, on the floor Robin, his mask thrown halfway across the room, and in the easy chair Nightwing was gently snoring, the only one who apparently was able to sleep in his mask. She didn’t want to think what that meant for his mental state. She was sure that Dick had gotten that skill from Batman who LJ was pretty sure could also sleep in his mask.

LJ had floated quietly down the hall, her feet a few inches above the ground and looked first into the room that Matt had taken possession of, it was empty. She next tried Barbara’s room. They were both fast asleep on Barbara’s bed. LJ carefully slipped in behind Barbara and wrapped her arms around the two most important people in her life. Even with all the thoughts whirring through her head, she fell asleep nearly instantly.

Just as any other day, morning had come, and the vigilantes in the living room had scattered. That just left Matt, Barbara and LJ. “We’ll be fine Lara. Sarah, my father and Renee have the police in order. Batman, Nightwing, Robin, and even Selina are keeping the order in the streets. Go, be there with your Mom, she just lost her husband, again. Be there for your grandmother, who lost her only son.”

LJ brushed an errant bang out of Barbara’s eyes. “Will, you... Is it alright if Matt stays here with you?”

Barbara frowned, “Of course, but--”

“It’s safer here, and--” LJ stood up, “so what I’ll do is go to Metropolis, bury my father and then...” She met Barbara’s striking green eyes with her own blue ones, “Then I’ll come home and we’ll find Helena and clean up Gotham as much as we can.”

Barbara shook her head, “Batman won’t like that, a Superwoman in his city. You’ll throw off all his brooding.”

LJ knelt next to Barbara’s wheelchair and gave the redhead a kiss that took her breath away. “Well, he’ll just have to deal, huh?”

LJ stood, but Barbara caught her hand, “I love you.”

LJ smiled, “It’s totally weird, unexpected, and so many other astounded adjectives, but I love you too Barbara.”

Barbara shook her head, “Don’t die. I don’t know what I’d tell Matt.”

“I’ll try my best. Oh, will you give Batman a call for me, see if he’ll... keep.. my father in his
cave?”

“Of course.”

LJ blew out a breath, “Thank you. Now... I’m gonna say goodbye to him, then-- go get the body, okay?”

Barbara gave the hand she was holding a squeeze, “I’ll be here if you need me.”

“Since I set foot in Gotham City you always have been even when I wasn’t working with you.”

A last smile passed between the two women and LJ turned and walked down the hallway towards her son’s room. He was waiting for her at the door and she ruffled his hair as she went by and sat on his bed. “You heard.” Matt nodded as he jumped up next to his Mom, “Just to be clear, I don’t think that your grand-dad is dead.”

Matt nodded again, then asked, “I not go with you?”

“The reason I told Babs. Because it’s safer here.”

Matt made a face, “No not.”

Lara put an arm around Matt and pulled him closer, “Yes it is bud.”

“I help. With good ears.”

LJ glanced down at him, “You could hear us all the way from here?” Matt nodded, “Something, which, you’re not supposed to do by the way. And not yet, and--”

Matt blew out a breath, “Blah, blah, blah... love you Mommy.”

LJ hugged Matt to her for a long moment, “I love you too buddy, more than anyone in the world.”

“Even Red Mommy?”

“You’re a nosy gus aren’t you Matt-so. Do you... understand what’s going on with me and Babs?”

Matt nodded, “Like her, like her, right?”

LJ nodded, “You need to listen to what she tells you to do. Okay? Follow her rules.”

“Mommy...”

“Matt-so.”

He poked Lara in the shoulder, “You don’t.”

LJ chuckled for just a second, “Good point. Maybe I should listen to her more, huh?”

He nodded, but then fell silent, staring at his hands. “Gonna die Mommy?”

LJ took his hands in hers and he looked up, “Nah, that part is done already. You’re stuck with me buddy.”

“But Mommy, if did?”
“What would happen to you?” Matt nodded, “Nothing is going to happen to me little bud, but, well, when I get back to Metropolis I’m gonna put Barbara in my will.”

Matt nodded enthusiastically, “Mac ‘n Cheese.”

LJ smiled again, “Oh, you’re glad of that ‘cause of the good food she makes?” Matt nodded again, “And I know that Selina and Dick’ll be there too. I bet even Mister Bruce would check up on you. Not to mention your grandma and great grandma would be there too. There would be lots of people who were there for you buddy.”

Matt sighed, “Alfred?”

“Totally.” Lara stood, “I need to go, but, I’ll be back.”

Matt jumped into LJ’s arms. “Love you Mommy.”

“Me too bud.” She put him down and spun into her ‘Metropolis’ super suit. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t.”

“Mommyyyyy....”

LJ smiled as she flew away.

oOOOOo

“Has Superman been confirmed dead?”

The Doctor didn’t want to be standing in front of all the reporters. He was graying at the temples and every question he took seemed to gray him more. “Yes, he was DOA.” He cleared his throat, “Ah, dead on arrival.”

The same reporter shouted another question over the din, “Did you try to revive him?”

That made the Doctor defensive, “Our EMTs with the assistance of a Metropolis citizen did their best to revive him at the scene. We simply confirmed his status in the ER after we too tried to revive him via all the means we had.”

A different voice from closer in the crowd spoke, “Who will you be releasing his body to?”

The entire gather of people in front of Metropolis Memorial went dead quiet as they waited for the answer. “You know I can’t answer that,” the Doctor paused, “And honestly, I don’t know.”

The clamor was back. The Doctor held up a hand and shook his head, “That’s all I have.” He turned and walked back through Metropolis Memorial’s front doors. He blinked as he realized that some people had appeared since he went outside.

The dark skinned man in a green suit with a Green Lantern on it stepped forward first. Behind him stood two men with dark wavy hair, one wearing another Green Lantern costume, and the other in a black and blue uniform with what sort of looked like a bird’s wings in flight across his chest. Next to the first Green Lantern also stood a blonde woman with a MPD badge clipped to her belt, “I’m John Stewart, that’s Green Lantern and Nightwing of the JLA, and you probably know Inspector Maggie Sawyer, MPD. We’re here to make sure Superman’s body is not disturbed.”

The Doctor cleared his throat, “We generally do an autopsy, but-- nothing has worked, not even Kryptonite.”
John shook his head, “I’m sorry. I don’t know anything about his physiology. We’re simply here to watch over him until arrangements are made.”

“By-- Superwoman?”

John nodded, “The morgue?”

“I’ll-- ah, I’ll bring you down there--” He paused, “Do you... How do you think Superwoman is doing?”

It was Maggie who answered, an edge to her voice, “How would you be doing Doc?”

LJ landed inside her parents’ townhouse. All eyes went to her. It was Martha who got to Lara first, despite her being nearly 85. Martha hugged LJ as hard as she could.

Lois waited for a moment, “I hate to... the hospital needs to know what to do with Clark’s body.”

LJ stepped back from her grandparents and took a deep breath, “It never stops.”

Lois nodded, “It doesn’t. The JLA sent two Lanterns to protect him--” Lois trailed off, barely holding herself up with the wall. Lara stepped over to Lois and put an arm around her mother’s waist. “-- his body. Nightwing is there also, as well as Maggie Sawyer.”

“I guess...” LJ cleared her throat, “I guess it’s time then.”

“Who do you think is the mother?”

John was the first to answer, “It doesn’t matter Green Lantern.”

Nightwing looked over at the shrouded Superman, “Rumor is that Superwoman is immune to Kryptonite. That might mean that it’s a powerful female metahuman. It would be interesting to know which one of us it was.”

Maggie cleared her throat and the three men looked up. John winced and took the lead. “I apologize Superwoman, we should not have been speaking of your father that way.”

“My mother was not a Metahuman. Not Wonder Woman, not any of them.” She paused, “Does it really matter who my mother is when I save someone? Do they ask for my genealogy before I pluck them from danger?” LJ glanced at the three super heroes and police officer. “Did it matter what planet Superman came from when he saved someone?”

The Green Lantern with a green mask over his eyes spoke up, “You know, you haven’t said that you’re his daughter.”

A laugh came from, of all people, Inspector Sawyer. She coughed, “I’m sorry. The Mayor wanted to have a memorial service in Centennial Park. A big to do and many, many citizens of Metropolis have volunteered their crypts to hold his body.”

LJ finally met Maggie’s eyes. She was pretty sure that from how Maggie was treating her the MPD Inspector knew that Superwoman and LJ Lane were one and the same. LJ had gotten into her share of trouble in Metropolis as a kid, and as an MPD Officer Maggie had more than once returned LJ home to Lois. “No. He won’t be buried in Metropolis. He’ll be in a secure location.
But--” LJ paused, “A memorial service is a good idea, but, not just for my father, also for all those lost during the fight.”

Maggie nodded, “You-- you’re so much like him. I mean, I knew him before he... left, and...” She trailed off as she handed a clipboard to LJ who stared at it for a moment, then shook her head, took the pen in her left hand and scrawled Superwoman on the signature line.

“Will that work?”

Maggie glanced down at the scrawl, “Oh, the ME’s going to love it.” Maggie nodded, “But, you’re free to take him. You’ll--”

“Take him now. Yes.” She carefully cradled her father’s body. “Thank you.”

They watched as Superwoman disappeared from the morgue. John shook his head. “I hope she has someone there for her.”

Maggie watched as she got smaller and smaller as she travelled farther away. “I’m sure there are people in her corner. Now, I need to get started getting this memorial service’s security.. thank you for your help gentlemen.”

oOOOOo

Barbara sat in her chair and stared up and up at the Batcave’s roof. She closed her eyes. They hurt, what she could feel of her back hurt. Everything hurt since the Clocktower had half collapsed on her. She jumped as a hand landed on her shoulder. She looked up and into the eyes of the Bat cowl. a grimace came to her face, “Just like old times, sort of.”

“Dick is on his way home and Shadow...” Bruce paused, “Superwoman should be here with Superman’s body any moment. I--”

“No.” She seemed to sit up straighter in her chair, “No, you won’t do anything to him. Nothing, do not touch him.”

“It’s okay Barbara.”

Barbara frowned, “No, it’s not Lara.”

LJ placed Clark into a coffin that sat to one side of the batcave, “You have sensors in there? Infrared, bio, microphones...”

Barbara cut LJ off, “Bruce, he’s Superman, if anyone were to get their hands on the data...”

LJ knelt in front of Barbara and grasped her hands, “Maybe I don’t love my father as much as I should, but, fighting with him... it’s screwed up, but maybe I do love him.” LJ winced, “Loved. There’s so much we don’t know about him, about me, stuff that maybe could even help Matt in the future, or the rest of the world.” LJ trailed off and stared down at her and Barbara’s intertwined hands

Barbara spoke up finally, “We do not know for sure if he’s dead.” She squeezed LJ’s hand, “I understand,” then she looked past LJ to Bruce, “And Bruce is going to let me link in and watch the readings as well.”

Barbara could see Bruce’s eyes narrow under the cowl, then he nodded, “Of course.”

“Good. Then I’m going to take LJ home for tonight and pick up Matt from Selina.”
LJ chuckled tiredly, “Catwoman, the babysitter-- and it doesn’t even seem weird to me.” LJ shook her head, “God, my life is insane.” She turned to Bruce and held out her hand, “Thank you Bruce.”

Bruce shook it, “He... losing a parent, there is nothing in this world comparable to that.” He paused, then without another word went down one of the Batcave’s tunnels, leaving the two women alone in the cave.

LJ gave her father a kiss on the forehead and placed the top on the coffin, “Let’s go get my son.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Heh, this thing was so long (haven't done one this long in a long time) that it 'broke' Google docs on Firefox on Linux. I had to start a second document for it 'cause the cursor was like three lines down from where it was supposed to be while I was typing and it got very distracting....

Three Days Later

A short laugh came from the command center. Matt didn’t even raise his head from looking at his cereal, but LJ did look over and after a moment joined Barbara at her one remaining computer. “Something going on?”

“Ah, apparently you have an Army here in Gotham. Superwoman’s Army.”

LJ winced, “Ah, yes. That feels like it happened in a different century. The bomb. I stopped a few kids from looting. Instead I wondered out loud if they’d be better off after all this if they helped instead of causing more chaos.”

“You threatened?”

LJ shrugged, “A bit. They’re doing good things?”

“They are--” Barbara moved to one side and LJ read a bit, “It seems you inspire people even faster than your father.”

LJ sighed and stepped back, “Anything about Helena yet?”

Barbara shook her head, “I’m not giving up.”

“I know and I should go. I have to speak at the Memorial Service... Sawyer’s freakishly good at planning. She organized the whole thing in three days. A Saturday so that more people could come. I don’t...”

Barbara cut LJ off with a kiss, “Just speak...”

LJ sighed, “From my heart?”

Barbara covered LJ’s lips with two fingers, “I was going to say, speak the words that your father would speak.”

“Oh-- sorry-- I...”

“Shhh, but--” Barbara glanced back at LJ, “Would you also do a quick sweep for Helena? Bruce and Selina have been looking for her, they still haven’t even found a small clue to where she could be.”

“Of course. Although, showing up the world’s greatest detective could be dangerous.”
“Lara--”

LJ put her fingers over Barbara’s lips, “Good thing I’m invulnerable to, well, everything... I’ll look before I go-- then... after too.”

“Thank you.”

LJ didn’t answer but kissed Barbara again and then was gone. Barbara’s bangs fluttered in the breeze.

oOOOOo

LJ stared out at the people gathered to honor her father. Nearly the entire JLA, active and reserve, stood along the edge of the crowd of thousands upon thousands upon thousands of Metropolitans. Also, amongst the crowd LJ spotted every Special Crimes Unit member, including their commander, Inspector Sawyer. Also, she spotted a good portion of the MPD, some in plain clothes, others in uniform. As well as Police Officers from all over the US, maybe even the world.

Next to her on the dais stood the Mayor, DA, Police Commissioner, Fire Chief, and way too many other people. She tried to shut them all out as she stepped to the podium. As she did she heard a voice, it came from her uniform, and once again she was the only one on the planet who would ever hear it. “Don’t puke.”

LJ took a breath, “My father loved every person on this planet just as much as those who were technically his ‘own people’. But, those in Metropolis, you held a dear place in his heart, trust me, I’ve been hearing about the things he did for this city all my life. When he arrived years ago you could have reacted with fear, with anger, with envy. Instead you embraced him like he was as much a daughter of Metropolis as Maggie Sawyer or son of Metropolis like Bibbo Bibbowski.”

LJ paused, “Honestly, I’ve never really understood my father’s--”

A voice called out from the crowd, “--obsession.”

LJ pinned the speaker with a look, “I never understood his love for this city until-- until I really saw the real city.” LJ laid her hands on the podium, “Not the one on postcards, the one that people travel thousands of miles to see, but the one I- we fought for. The one we knocked down quite a bit of. It’s happened before and it’ll probably happen again. And every time the citizens of Metropolis put it back together. The five year old that turns her Red Flyer into a way to bring people water. The store owners who survived who give away, or give discounts to get their competitors back up and running. Or the homeless men and women who band together and help scour their former haunts for those who lived above them and who even though they’re under the rubble may still be alive. And, the heroes, not just the ones in bright suits with powers, but those who wear the fire burned, dirt stained uniforms of the police department, the fire department, the National Guard.” LJ trailed off and cleared her throat a couple of times, “Sorry.”

She stood perfectly still and even the crowd stayed silent, waiting for LJ to either continue speaking or fly off.

Finally LJ took a deep breath, “Superman is bigger than me, or any of you.” She touched the top of her chest and the repaired Super ‘S’, “Superman is bigger than Superman. Every person can be good, you simply need to do one good deed, one unselfish act at a time. Maybe if all of us Metropolis citizens just try to do one good thing at a time, we’ll together manage to be what Superman was.”

As LJ took a step back from the podium and the crowd was silent for a beat and then exploded with cheers.
After LJ stepped aside the memorial service went on, other spoke, but LJ heard none of it. She didn’t hear anything until Barbara spoke through her suit. “Come home.”


Tommy sniffed and swiped at his nose. “Think she means it Gus? One deed thing? That we’re good now?”

Tommy, Gus, and about five other teen boys and a couple of girls all sat hunched around a small TV. Gus cleared his throat and shook his head.

Tommy continued, “I mean, I’m not-- her-- a goody two shoes so…”

One of the girls, Gina, gave a snort, “I think none of us are worth much Tommy--”

A female voice came from behind them. “I think Mr. Kord would disagree. He still runs this place right? From what I can see you’ve helped him open his business days earlier than if he’d had to clean and repair it himself.”

All nine kids whirled and the newcomer held up her hands. She was dressed in purple and brown leather, a small mask around her eyes. “I’m... I’m Huntress, and, I bet with my help we could get even more done. How does that sound?”

The kids all stared at the second ‘superhero’ they’d met in the past week. It was finally Gus who stood, “Can you like... lift a lot?”

The woman smirked, “More than you kid.”

Gus watched as the woman walked away, there was something so similar about the walk, or, nearly similar. He thought back and back and then it hit him. He glanced towards the woman, making sure that she was deep in conversation with his friends, then he glanced both ways and pulled out a telephone and punched in a number.


LJ smoothed Matt’s hair and pulled up the covers. She gave him a kiss on the forehead and with a sigh left his room. They’d had a busy day after LJ had gotten home from the memorial service. She’d finished fixing the outside of the clock tower and somehow managed to pry Barbara away from trying to repair her computers. All three of them had gone to Gotham City Zoo. Somehow it had totally escaped the destruction that the rest of the city had felt, all the animals were a little jumpy, but alive too. All that animal excitement meant that for the first time in a while Matt was so tired he fell asleep the second his head hit the pillow.

Barbara caught up to LJ as they got to the command center. “You have a sec?”

LJ nodded and gestured towards the clock tower balcony. “C’mon, I need to be outside... I just…”

They moved in silence until they were outside. It was LJ who broke the silence. “He had a will. I mean, Superman... also... had a Will,” LJ sighed, “Is that even legal. Two different Wills.”

“Oh. Wow…”

LJ continued, “They’re reading it tomorrow morning. They think it’s going to-- I have no idea what it’s going to tell them. Shoot me on sight?”

“Did he--” Barbara trailed off for a moment, not sure how to phrase the question.
LJ completed Barbara’s thought, “Did he update it since he got back. I have no earthly idea. I also...” LJ shook her head, “I don’t think this is over. There was something that Pol said, something about his leader. I think... supposedly those on New Krypton let Kal go and then said they’d leave Earth alone.”

“But, you think it was just a ruse and what, Pol was just a scout?”

LJ looked out towards the horizon with a long sigh, “No, not a scout. I think he was the tenderizer.”

oOOOOo

“Jimmy.”

Jimmy swallowed and poked his head in Lois’ office. He got a sheaf of paper thrown at him. It fluttered to the floor before it hit him. “This is utter garbage. Give me something good Jim. Something from the heart.”

Jimmy marshalled his emotions and stepped all the way into the office, “You should write it Lois. Everyone knows that. You knew.... Superman... the best.”

Lois shook her head, “I can’t Jim.”

“Why?”

Lois ruffled papers on her desk, “Because if-- if I write it-- then I’m admitting he’s dead. And if I do that, then I completely fall apart. Try again Jimmy, please.”

Jimmy walked from the office, shaking his head, “But Supes is dead.”

oOOOOo

Barbara glanced between the blond young man sitting on the apartment’s couch and LJ. He’d appeared at the door and LJ had thrown her arms around him with abandon that she’d never seen her give anyone else. Duncan Olsen. James Olsen and Lucy Lane’s child.

Matt came running from his room and threw himself at Duncan too. Duncan gave an ‘oof’ as he wrapped his arms around the young man. “Hey bud. How do you like Gotham City?”

“Fun.”

Duncan glanced over Matt at LJ with a raised eyebrow, “Fun?”

“Yes, yes.. my room, show my room...”

Duncan let himself be pulled up by Matt and dragged towards his room. LJ watched them go and turned to Barbara, “Sorry for the...”

“Stop. Does he know?”

LJ nodded, “He does, yes.” Then she frowned, “I...”

Barbara grabbed LJ’s arm, “I don’t do this often, and so... maybe, maybe I’m going all in too soon. I’ve only had... if you count Dick, five guys that I went on more than one date with, and...”

LJ knelt down in front of Barbara and took ahold of her hands. “This is my first time too...”
Barbara shook her head, “Now, I know that’s untrue.”

LJ let go of Barbara’s hands and sat back on her heels. She stared down at the ground, “You say you’ve been in five relationships. I’ve had sex, a whole lotta sex. But, relationships. I’ve never even been in one.”

“Hey...” It was Barbara’s turn to take possession of LJ’s hands, “Then, I can teach how not to do all the wrong things that I’ve done in my relationships, and you can teach me all the...”

“Mommy--” Matt came shooting into the room and jumped into her arms. “Uncle Dunc said can parah-- parah--”

LJ raised her eyebrows at Duncan as he followed Matt into the room. “Parachuting huh? Duncan said that you guys were gonna go?”

“I--”

LJ shot Duncan a look and he trailed off, “Let’s put aside the fact that Matt-so is two years old... Did you forget to ask me?”

Matt’s face fell, “Okay...”

“Hey...” LJ’s focus went from Duncan back to her son, “I think, when you’re old enough, we’ll talk about it again. Sound good?”

And just like that Matt’s smile was back, “Kay. Gonna go play.” He looked at the three adults, “Red play too?”

Barbara glanced between Duncan and LJ and nodded, “Yep. Right behind you Matt.”

LJ leaned against one of the door jambs and stared at Duncan, waiting. He finally gave in to her stare and spoke first, “Fine, fine. Look the world nearly ended, here and in Metropolis, and so, I... I told my parents. My father... he was fine. My mom...”

“Lucy?”

Duncan nodded, “Yeah, my mom and step-dad on the other hand.” He blew a breath out, “They kicked me out. I mean, yeah, I’m 18, but...”

LJ crossed her arms over her chest, “‘Kay, so, what’s your plan?”

Duncan’s eyes twinkled, “Couch?”

LJ looked towards the hallway that led to Matt’s room, “Yeah, yeah, fine. Just...”

Duncan held his hands up, “You’ll barely know I’m here. Thank you LJ, just...”

LJ put an arm around Duncan’s shoulders. “Hey, those of us from broken homes, we gotta stick together right? You’re like the little brother I always wanted...”

Duncan raised an eyebrow, “Uh, wouldn’t that be CJ?”

LJ smiled just a bit, “Nah, he’s the little brother I never wanted...” LJ’s head canted to one side and she took a step back, “Hey, will you tell Babs that I had to go?”

“Do I get to call her Babs?”
“I dare you...”

“She knows?”

LJ nodded seriously, “She does. I gotta go, a fire...”

Superwoman landed by a group of kids who were painting and what looked like repairing broken storefronts. She was covered in soot and dirt, but none of the kids noticed, and she had gotten used to it after the past few days of practically living in it, “Superwoman, we’re doing good, I promise I--”

LJ put a hand on the boy’s shoulder, “I’m not here to-- you are doing well guys. But, I’m actually here to see one of you guys, you... let’s go with ‘called’ me?”

“I--” The boy stumbled over his words, “My--my Dad died too, two years ago. I- I’m sorry your Dad died.”

LJ patted the boy’s shoulder, “Thanks kid. We’ll both make it through, right?”

The boy nodded quickly, “I guess, yeah. Um, I think it was Gus who called you. He’s in the front sweeping up the glass, and he’s gonna put on a new plate glass window, he won’t let us do that sorta stuff. Duh, not like I never walked around broken glass bottles or whatever.” The boy shook his head and continued carefully picking up pieces of wood and sticks, “Whatever. You can go in.”

“Thanks.” She was almost to the front of the store when she heard a swear in Portuguese. She sped up just a bit and managed to catch the plate glass window before it hit the young man or it shattered on the ground.

Gus winced and tried to loosen his arm a bit, “Thanks, that would have been...”

LJ raised an eyebrow, “Sucky?”

A half grimace, half smile came to his face, “Yeah. Ah, but, this isn’t the reason I contacted you Superwoman. She’s around the corner.”

LJ nodded, giving him a pat on his good shoulder, went around the corner of the building and came to a halt. There she stood and watched as a brunette hung off of the fire escape with one hand as she cleaned what appeared to be blood from the building’s wall.

“So, need a hand?”

The woman’s hand slipped and she plummeted towards the ground. But LJ didn’t move. She just watched as the woman twisted in midair and landed on her feet, then sprung at LJ.

Unfortunately for her LJ was very-- solid-- when things impacted her, and the brunette bounced off, although she still managed to land on her feet, her eyes transforming into cat irises. She practically growled at LJ, “Who are you?”

LJ frowned, “Better question is, do you know who you are?”

The woman opened her mouth and then closed it. Her eyes reverted to their human look as well. “I-- no...”
From around the corner came a voice, “Look, Mr. Kord doesn’t have anything left-- please, don’t shoot Gus...”

LJ put finger to her lips, met the brunette’s eyes and pointed at the ‘S’ on her chest, then pointed around the corner. The brunette paused for a moment, looking as if she were going to argue with LJ over who was going to confront the man with the gun. But, finally her curiosity won out and she didn’t, she just followed LJ around the corner.

LJ spoke, “You wanna pick on someone more your size?”

The young unkempt looking man whirled and a shell exploded against the ‘S’ symbol on LJ’s chest. It felt oddly comforting. All she’d been doing for the past half a week or so had been rebuilding and rescuing, and having to deal with all the touchy feely human crap in both Metropolis and Gotham City. To have someone try and kill her with bullets was definitely comforting. “You must be new in town.”

The young man emptied his clip at LJ. She caught some of them with a blur of arms, while others she let harmlessly bounce off her chest and fall to the ground. “Wha-- they said this’d be easy, that Batman was busy, Superman was dead.”

LJ stalked towards the man, “I should feel insulted.”

The man threw his gun at LJ and started sprinting away. LJ tapped her foot and then was simply in front of the man. She shook her head, her arms crossed over her chest, “It’s ironic. I’m faster than he was, Kryptonite is a pretty gem to me, I may even be book smarter than he was,” She shook her head again, “And yet, here, Metropolis, probably the world, every single person, they don’t want me, they want him. Even I, who barely knew him, want him to be here instead of me.”

The young man swallowed, his eyes looking everywhere except at LJ, “S-s-so don’t do it?”

LJ raised an eyebrow, “That’s a new one from y’all. You’re still going to jail though.”

Barbara spoke over LJ’s comm, “Police are on their way and...”

LJ cut Barbara off, “Yes, call her. We’ll be back when I get this all... tied up.” In the blink of an eye LJ tied up the would be robber and turned to Gus. “You guys okay?”

Gus and all the other kids nodded.

“Mind if I take...”

Gus spoke up, “She called herself Huntress.”

LJ nodded, “Huntress with me?”

Gus shrugged, “It’s her memory right? My grandpops always had that sorta look on his face at the end, he had Alzheimers. You’ll take care of her?”

LJ clapped Gus on the shoulder, “I’ll find somebody who can make her better”

Huntress stood behind LJ with a frown, “You know who I am?”

LJ turned, “I do... will you come with me?”

Huntress stood perfectly still for a long moment, then nodded, “Yes--”

“Then-- hold on.” LJ put a hand on Huntress’ shoulder and in the time it took Huntress to blink
they were both in the Clocktower in front of Barbara and Selina.

It almost seemed like Selina had acquired some of LJ’s speed by how fast she made it to her daughter. She wrapped her arms around Helena Kyle and nearly crushed her in a bear hug. “Helena, Helena, thank you, thank you, thank you…”

Helena glanced over Selina’s shoulder at Barbara and LJ with a frown, “I--”

Selina took a step back, “Helena, are you okay?”

“That’s my name?”

Selina frowned at her daughter, “Helena Martha Kyle. you don’t know who you are?”

Helena looked around the clocktower, “No-- I-- ah, woke up choking in the hospital. The only memory that I had was sort of a name. Huntress.”

It was Barbara who made a noise that bordered on a laugh and everyone turned to look at her, “I-- the day we were shot it was the last thing I said to you. the last conversation we had. You were thinking of following in your mother’s and father’s footsteps. They’re... vigilantes here in Gotham. You were going to put on a costume, use your powers to help people, you said something about Catgirl or a name like that, and I...” Barbara paused and cleared her throat. LJ put an arm on her shoulders, “Sorry. It’s like it happened yesterday-- everything after the shot is gone, but everything before the shot is etched into my memory. I told you, ‘you’re not girl anything, you’re more like a huntress.’ You laughed. I went to take a shower, and you went out onto the balcony to think. And the rest…” Barbara trailed off again, “I-- I can’t...” She rolled across the room and into the elevator.

“I’ll--”

LJ cut Selina off, “Let me?”

Selina paused and then nodded, “Okay.”

LJ took the stairs down to the apartment and Selina and Helena looked at each other warily.

It was Helena who spoke first, “You’re my mother.”

“Yes.”

Helena looked down at her hands, flexed them and looked back up at her mother, “Are you-- different too?”

Selina put her arm around her daughter and led her to the couch, “I am, we’re something called Metahumans. But, you’ve always been more powerful than me. I have agility, balance, but no strength, and... no enhanced vision either. My eyes have never done what yours have done since the day you were born.”

“And my father?”

“A human, but, a very skilled one.”

Helena fell silent for a long moment before she spoke again, “Will... do you think I will get my memory back?”

“I do.”
“Why?”

Selina hugged Helena to her, “Because I’m your mother and even if I have to force feed every single day of your life back to you, you’ll get your memory back.”

Helena put a hand to her chest and Selina frowned, “What, what is it? What’s wrong?”

Helena shook her head and looked at Selina, “You’re my mother. I-- I can feel it in here.”

Selina smiled, “It’s a start.”

oOOOOo

“Are you going to say something, or just stand there watching me fold laundry for another five minutes?”

“God I love you so much...”

Barbara frowned and glanced over her shoulder. After studying LJ for a moment as she changed out of her Superwoman uniform, Barbara turned, threw the unfolded laundry back onto the top of the dryer and rolled away.

LJ watched her back, “Babs-- I-- did I...” She followed Barbara into the kitchen, “I’m sorry.”

Barbara abruptly turned again, “Why... why do you love me. I know why I love you. You’re funny and beautiful and caring and...” She colored a little, “...and, I’ll admit it, it’s also, I mean, you’re Superwoman. But... I’m just a washed up vigilante who orders people around...”

“Stop.” LJ sat down on the couch and took one of the redhead’s hands in her own, “Fine, yeah, I can bench press the planet Pluto.”

“Planetoid. They demoted it... quite a while ago actually.”

LJ raised an eyebrow and Barbara fell silent, “But you-- you have more strength than I’ll ever have. After everything, every day you get up, you face the world and you never make excuses.”

She brushed back a lock of hair from Barbara’s forehead, “And you push yourself harder than anyone I’ve ever known.” LJ smiled and took Barbara’s glasses off, “Oh, and don’t sell yourself short, you’re devastatingly beautiful, with or without these. And, if that weren’t enough, you’re a freakin’ genius.” She paused, “and-- I have no doubt that there are a million more things I’ll find out about you that I love even more.”

Barbara still didn’t seem convinced, “Like how at least once or twice a month I wake up screaming from the nightmares.”

“So does Matt, just ask him, I’m very good at nightmares.” In the blink of an eye they were both on the couch, Barbara firmly ensconced in LJ’s arms. “See...”

Barbara tilted her head up and looked at LJ, “I’m being serious.”

“So am I. Next.”

Barbara sighed and leaned back against LJ, “I said it before Lara, and I’ll repeat it, this... my legs, it’s not something you can ever fix.”

“Well... I think you’re wrong. I think that one day the world will come up with a cure for quadriplegia and paraplegia. But... I’ve never been a leg woman anyway, it’s all about the...”
Barbara cut LJ off, capturing the dark haired woman’s lips with her own and kissing her. Finally, when they pulled back just a bit to get a breath in, Barbara spoke, “I do love you too, I just... this will take awhile for me to get used to. To believe in as strongly as you do.”

LJ smirked, “It’ll be fun convincing you though. Now, Helena’s upstairs with her Mom, Duncan and Matt are who know’s where. I think that I’m going to start convincing you just how much I love you right now.”

“Oh, really?”

LJ’s ‘yep’, as well as a gust of air, was the only thing left in the apartment’s living room as both LJ and Barbara disappeared from the couch.
Barbara blinked and looked around. She sat in her wheelchair. She was older, she could tell that, but she wasn’t sure how old or how she could tell that she was older. She was surrounded by children, some with red hair, others with black hair, not to mention some with all shades in between. They all seemed to be looking up at her too.

A voice Barbara recognized spoke from behind the kids. “Dinner time for all those who can’t drive—” There was laughter and the kids practically stampeded through the newcomer.

Barbara smiled, “As beautiful as ever.”

LJ frowned as she scooped Barbara out of the wheelchair and plopped both of them down on the couch. Well, LJ was on the couch, Barbara was mostly sprawled across LJ’s body. “You feelin’ okay love?”

“I just never...”

“Hey-- hey-- you’re crying.”

Barbara cleared her throat, “I’m sorry. I’m-- so happy.”

LJ chuckled, “Right, one of those girl things that I never understood ‘cause I was overcompensating and smooshing down my femininity because that was the way that I thought that’d I’d get his approval.”

Barbara looked upside down at LJ, “Smooshed?”


“You’re... you’re still here?”

LJ frowned, “Where else would I be? It’s Christmas, and as much as I am not a proponent of all that.... Christian stuff... all the kids and grandkids love it, so...”

Barbara looked up at LJ again, “Grandkids?...”

LJ’s frown got deeper, “Are you okay?... Matt’s kids, and JJ’s and Marty’s and...”

Barbara lifted her hand and covered LJ’s lips with her fingers, “I know, I know, I just...”

A little girl with bright red hair that hung in pigtails, only five or six years old, came into the room and stood in front of them on the couch, “Granna, Nanna, you’re supposed to both come and eat and everything. We’re waiting and Uncle Matt said...” The girl frowned in concentration, “...supposed to stop... necking... but your necks are fine and...”

LJ laughed, “We’ll be right in Little Bee, and tell your Uncle Matt that when he and Felicia stop necking so will we...”

Barbara watched the little girl scamper back towards the room, “Bee, is in B-- Little Barbara.”

Yep...” LJ helped Barbara sit up and looked her up and down, “Barbara, I’m serious what’s... Barbara cut LJ off with a kiss that was just as amazing as ever and left her just as breathless.
“Nothing. Everything... everything’s perfect. Now, put me back in the chair already so that we don’t have a mutiny on our hands.”

LJ smiled and gently placed Barbara back in the wheelchair, “See, that’s more like it. Ordering me around. When you did that those first times and I found that it was fine, that I didn’t get the little twitch of rebellion that I did when my Dad or Mom or Grandmother or Grandfather told me to do something. That’s when I knew I loved you.”

Barbara pulled LJ down and kissed her again. “I love you too.”

oOOOOo

“That’s a disturbing way to wake up...” Helena sat up in bed, staring back at her mother.

Selina blinked and smiled sheepishly, “Sorry. You’ve been in a coma for four years. I feel like if I take my eyes off you, you’ll disappear.”

Helena had no response for that so she changed the subject, “Is... was I-- am I close with Barbara, the red head?”

“Do you remember her?”

Helena pushed herself back up against the headboard. “I think-- I feel like I had a crush on her at some point?”

Selina smiled and chuckled, “Yes... you did. The biggest one for awhile.” She paused, “But then you hit puberty and it waned a bit... by High School I think it was mostly gone-- just a little one left... But, no matter what you’ve always been fast friends. Like sisters.”

“I--” She trailed off, “My father?”

Selina stood and moved a bit away from the bed to the window. “I called him. He wasn’t sure if you wanted him to come. Do you remember him?”

“No, but, last night... I read about him, and you. Do you, are you two?” Helena trailed off.

Selina was silent for a moment, “It’s very complicated.”

Helena climbed from the bed, “I also read some of the Gotham Gazette. From recently I mean. All of Gotham City seems complicated.”

Selina nodded and turned back to face her daughter, “It is. Do you want to see parts of it other than Crime Alley?”

“That’s where I was?” Selina nodded, “Do I get to get changed first-- Ma?”

Selina smiled a little, “Yes--” As she went by Helena she just couldn’t help herself, she pulled Helena into another crushing hug. “I am so damn glad you’re awake Helena-- so very glad.”

oOOOOo

Barbara sat straight up in bed. She was in a strange room. She glanced around at the slightly blurred room. She was in the master bedroom of the apartment and lying next to her was LJ Lane. The woman she’d been dreaming about, the woman she loved.

“Shhh.... you’re thinking too loudly Babs...”
The woman who slept too lightly, “And you were in my dreams.”

One of LJ’s eyes opened and looked at Barbara, “Oh... really?”

Barbara lay back down and put her head on LJ’s shoulder, “Not that kind of dream--”

LJ made a noise, “Well, then I definitely did something wrong last night.”

Barbara rolled her eyes, “Funny...”

LJ kissed Barbara, “Wasn’t joking... buuuttt... what did you dream of?”

“Us... happy.”

“That’s ah--” LJ paused, “Good right?”

Barbara gave LJ a push in the abs, “Yes, smart aleck, very good. So... what’s your plan for the rest of the day?”

“Save the world a couple of times, maybe get soup for lunch...” LJ paused, “Pop in on Grandma too I think.”

Barbara groaned, “Oh, you’re going to have to meet my Dad, aren’t you.”

LJ chuckled, “You make it sound like a root canal. How bad could it be. He’s the Commish right? Doesn’t know about your...”

“Change in which sex I’m sleeping with? No.”

“Ah, I was going to say... night job.”

“Oh... yes. That. No he didn’t know I was Batgirl and doesn’t know I’m Oracle either.”

LJ was silent for a moment, “Do you want to meet Martha Kent?”

Barbara looked over at LJ, “Just like that?”

LJ shrugged, “She’s not big on pomp and circumstance. But.” She hugged Barbara closer to her, “It’s totally up to you. Just tell me when you’re ready. To meet my Mom too.”

There was a knock on their door, “Mommy?”

LJ shook her head, “First though...”

“Matt... go, go.”

LJ landed in the batcave and Bruce looked up from his computer with its multitude of monitors. He was in his Batsuit with the cowl pulled back off his head and resting on his neck.

“Superwoman.”

“Never gonna call me LJ huh?”

Bruce raised an eyebrow, “One never knows who may be listening.”

LJ looked around, “In here? That would never happen.”
“You have a high opinion of me. Why?”

LJ met Bruce’s eyes and didn’t flinch, “I looked up to my grandfather, and you remind me of him. You’re rough around the edges and you piss people off and in the end, no matter how much you protest and pretend to be this cold and calculating detective, you’ve taken in three boys who had nowhere else, no one else and helped raise Oracle too, and that means that you care.”

“Four.”

LJ frowned, “Dick, Tim, and Damian?”

“Jason... Jason Todd.” Bruce shook his head and put on his cowl. “So, you’re here to see your father.”

LJ bantered back, “Have you seen your daughter yet?

Batman joined LJ at her father’s coffin, “Today. Lunch. So...”

“Have you figured out how I’m different from my father?”

Batman went to a screen next to the coffin and brought up a few different charts and graphs, “One of the things I’m taking readings on is the decline in the sun’s energy in your father’s body. I think that the reason that you’re more powerful than he was is that he was a child when he got here, you’ve been getting the sun’s energy since you were in your mother’s womb. As for your immunity to Kryptonite, my educated guess is that you were never exposed to it like he was on Krypton, and so...”

LJ nodded, “Perhaps... and my bloodwork.”

“Do I want to know how you got me such a large sample. Dr. Klein noted a few times that he could only ever get small ones from your father.”

LJ pursed her lips and looked down at her father, still clad in his Superman costume. “Yes, well, I think that I have a higher pain threshold than the old man did.”

Batman shook his head, “I definitely don’t want to know. And, you were right. There’s something in your blood, it’s not Human or Kryptonian. Or a mix of both. I’m not sure exactly where it came from, but, it could also be the reason why you’re more powerful and immune to Kryptonite.”

LJ raised an eyebrow, “Have you figured out a way to stop me?”

“Are you planning to need stopping?”

LJ sighed, “It always pays to be prepared right?”

Batman was silent for a long moment, then finally shook his head, “No LJ, I haven’t. You... you’re the definition of unstoppable.”

LJ blew out a breath, “Damn...”

Batman cut LJ off, “No, I take that back. Nothing physical can stop you except yourself. I know that it didn’t work when you were a teenager, but now, I think you may be able to kill yourself. And... then there’s your family. So, yes, you are stoppable, but... that assumes that you still care about your son, Oracle, your mother, grandmother...”

“Huh...” LJ looked up towards the ceiling, “Gotta go. Thank you Batman.”
Batman watched LJ go and then turned on the communicator in his cowl. “Did you get all that?”

Oracle responded, “I did.”

“Any ideas regarding Superman?”

Batman could hear the breath that Oracle let go, “Not a one, but.... I’ll keep thinking on it. Thank you Batman.”

“Batman out.” He snapped off the communicator and looked down at Superman. “Never knew you, but, I hope that we can find a way to get you back to the land of the living.

oOOOOo

“Oh- Oh-- lo siento, my apologies.”

Duncan rubbed at his shoulder where the young hispanic man had knocked into him. He’d just dropped Matt back at LJ’s and was out looking to see how the job opportunities were in the less destroyed parts of Gotham City. “S’okay.” Duncan held out a hand and the young man took it and was pulled up. “Probably my fault, wasn’t really concentrating on where I was going.”

The young man shook his head quickly, “No, no, it was definitely my fault. I-- this city is-- es increíble--.”

Duncan glanced up and around at the buildings and such, “Ah-- okay. You’ve never been to Metropolis though, huh?”

“No, I have not.” He stuck out his hand and Duncan shook it, “I’m Miguel Barragan. You’re saying Metropolis is--”

Duncan nodded with a smile, “More, much more incredible. Of course, I did grow up there so I’m a little biased. Ah, I’m Duncan, Duncan Olsen.”

Miguel smiled, “Like Bond, James Bond?”

Duncan winced, “Sorry. I... you hungry?”


Duncan cut Miguel on, putting an arm around his shoulders, “Amigo, yo crecí en Metropolis, sé Español.”

Miguel’s face seemed to light up and he started speaking so fast that Duncan’s eyes nearly rolled up into his head, “Stop, stop... I don’t know Spanish that fast...”

Miguel’s face fell for a moment, then the smile back, “Lo sien....”

Duncan put his hand over Miguel’s mouth, then jerked it back as he realized what he’d done. “I... you can stop apologizing though, okay? So. Lunch...”

“Lunch.”

oOOOOo

“Your mother didn’t come?”

Helena looked Bruce Wayne up and down as she took a bite of whatever he’d ordered and shook
her head. She swallowed, “No. You two...”

“Aren’t together.”

Helena narrowed her eyes, “But you want to be. I can see it in your eyes.”

“It’s...”

Helena rolled her eyes, “…complicated. Yes. That’s what Mom said too.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for this to be uncomfortable.”

Helena tilted her head, “Has it ever not been uncomfortable between us?”

Bruce to his credit didn’t look away or down from his daughter’s gaze. “No. Before, you had written me out of your life and I didn’t fight it.” He paused, “I should have.”

Helena folded her hands in front of her, “I’m going to keep doing what I was doing—” She glanced one way then the other, “Being Huntress...”

Bruce frowned at Helena for a long moment. Silent. Finally he nodded, “Then tonight we patrol together...”

“But--”

Bruce put a hand up, “Deal with Bruce Wayne however you want to. Talk to me, don’t talk to me, but... This is my city. If you’re good enough you have my blessing, if not...”

Helena raised an eyebrow, “You think that you can take me if I decide to patrol without your blessing?”

Bruce had no answer for that.
Chapter 13

A Week Later

LJ was saving some people from a fire when Barbara came over the suit’s comm unit. LJ hadn’t heard from her all night, and there was just a bit of a hitch in her flight path when Barbara spoke up, “I have an idea.”

LJ looked up at the sky, as if she could see Oracle from Metropolis. “Hit me.” There was a pause on the other end of the connection, “Oracle?”

There was a short laugh, “You’re the only one who doesn’t…”

“Freak the hell out when you just start talking to me out of the blue after listening in to whatever I’m doing? I hear voices all the time Oracle, in too many languages to count, from all over the world, all the time. I’m more powerful than my father was, remember. And trust me your voice is nicer than most, even when you’re scolding me, not to mention it’s the only one I’m madly in love with.” LJ paused when Barbara didn’t respond, “So, your idea?”

“Take your father into the sun.”

LJ frowned, “But, if he’s not…”

There was a pause on Barbara’s side of the connection before she spoke, “I didn’t say it was a good idea.”

LJ took off at super speed towards the crypt, “What the hell, you only live once right? Still better than my best ideas. Better shut my connection down. Don’t know what the sun will do to the tech.” LJ paused, “And, if I don’t make it back…”

“You will.”

“Take care of Matt for me, okay. Please. I think he likes you even more than I do…”

Barbara did turn off most of the communications gear that connected her to LJ, and pulled up a video news feed at the same time. “Again, it appears that this Superwoman, the apparent daughter or female relative of Superman was seen with Superman’s body and has... well, flown off with it into space. We don’t know precisely where. She is also the one who gave quite the beautiful speech about her father and Metropolis at Superman’s Memorial Service, though, it did seem to ramble a bit.”

Barbara opened up her space monitoring program, and looked down as there was a pull on her arm. “You want to watch where your Mom’s going?” Matt nodded, “Then, up... so... do you like space?”

He nodded again, “Like the moon. We, Mommy and me, we go sometime.”

Barbara chuckled just a bit, “Yes, well, I guess that would be a unique mother, son outing. See, I found your Mom.”

Matt frowned as he studied the screen, “Why sun?”
“Well, your grand-dad, and your Mom, and maybe even you, you’re all powered by the sun you know. Each of your cells,” he frowned and Barbara realized he didn’t know what they were, “each of the little parts that makes up your body sucks in the rays of the sun and stores them like your toys store the electricity when you charge them.”

“Oh.”

Barbara watched as the dot disappeared into the sun, “Uh, yes. So, your Mom’s going to try and supercharge your grandfather’s cells.”

Matt’s face contorted a bit, “What if boom like Paulie’s phone?”

“They won’t.” Barbara hugged Matt closer to her chest, “They won’t.” Her jaw moved and she whispered, “They won’t.”

LJ had thought that getting hit by Pol had hurt a lot, she’d been wrong. It was as if her atoms were all trying to secede from her body at the same time. But she kept going. She didn’t know how far she’d need to go, she was really winging it. Finally she just couldn’t take it anymore. She gave her father a push towards the center of the sun. And then everything went black.

It was like her brain was on fire it was so bright. She tried to turn, but even though it sort of felt like her body was turning, it was all the same. Bright, white and yellow, light. “Hello? Hello?”

A woman clad all in gold armor appeared before her. “You’re dying.” She tilted her head to one side, “What did you expect, you went into the sun.”

“Is... is my Dad alright?”

The woman crossed her arms over her breastplate, “You care now?”

LJ met the woman’s eyes and found a challenge there. “What, who are you?”

“Artemis.”

LJ raised an eyebrow, “She has red-der hair and it’s quite long.”

The woman took a deep breath, “That’s my namesake on Earth. You have a decision to make. Do you wish to live?”

LJ winced, “Is this gonna be like a ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ sorta thing? I never liked that movie.”

“It only requires a yes or no answer.”

“Yes. I just... I just found love with Babs, and I want to see my son grow up and... yes.”

Artemis gave a regal nod, “Then, I need something from you Lara Joanne Lane. A piece of you.”

LJ frowned, “A piece of... like, blood and gore?”

Artemis raised an eyebrow, “Something like that. Yes.” From what seemed like thin air she produced a blade, “This is made out of...”

LJ put a hand up, “Don’t care. And, I have no doubt that this’ll come back and bite me in the ass
at some point, but, hand it over so I can stab myself already.”

Artemis did and with a quick slice LJ took a bit of her skin off of her left arm and handed the blade back to the supposed goddess. “Now what?”

Artemis put her hand just to the left center of LJ's chest, right over her heart and gave her a big push.

ooOOOo

In the Clocktower both Barbara and Matt winced as the communication device that had been interwoven in the Super suit got fried. Matt looked up at Barbara, “Is Mommy...?”

“No, no... hey, she’s in the middle of the sun.”

Matt shook his head, “No, look Mama...” Matt turned an interesting shade of pink, “Sorry...”

Barbara hugged Matt closer to herself, “Hon, you can call me whatever you want. Red, Barbara, Babs, or Mama... all up to you. Okay?”

He nodded and moved to one side as Barbara put the display that Matt had been pointing at on the main screen and winced. Something was coming towards Earth and coming towards Earth very, very fast. Barbara whispered to herself, “She’s not flying,” for a moment forgetting that Matt was right there.

Matt got what Barbara was saying though, “Mommy crashing?”

Barbara nodded and patted one of Matt’s legs. “I need room hon.”

Matt scrambled off of Barbara’s lap, “Sorry Mama... Mommy be okay?”

“Yes. I am calculating where she will come down.”

“Oh.”

He didn’t really understand what Barbara had just said, but he fell silent as Barbara hit the comm button. “Batman, do you read me?” Nothing came back. “Nightwing?” Still nothing. “Red Robin. Robin. Zatanna...” No one seemed to have their comms on. Barbara sighed and her hand paused above the button. “Catwoman, I need a favor.”

“It will cost you little bat-ette.”

“Whatever you want, for as long as you want. Just... Superwoman, Shadow, she’s about to give Gotham another shake. She’s... you’ll find her in the park. Will you retrieve her?” Catwoman didn’t reply, and Barbara cleared her throat, “Please.”

There was a pause on the other end of the connection, “Will she be alive Oracle?”

Barbara glanced at Matt, then closed her eyes. “I don’t know Se-- Catwoman. Please....”

“Good thing the crazy girl saved my daughter or you’d owe me something big red. I’ll bring her back to the Clocktower. Catwoman out.”

Matt sniffled back a tear and Barbara lifted him back up to her lap. “Let’s go wait her at the elevator.”

ooOOOo
Superman awoke floating somewhere between the Earth and the Moon and definitely didn’t remember how he’d gotten there. He righted himself and started towards Earth. The last thing he remembered was Pol’s fist, then, nothing. That caused him to make haste back to Metropolis.

When he got close he gasped. A lot of the destruction that he had helped create had been repaired, but there was so much of Metropolis and New Troy that was still in ruins. He looked around, no LJ anywhere.

He scanned the city, looking for Lois, or CJ. CJ was at the hospital, Lois at home. With a quick move he was inside their townhouse. She jerked to a sitting position, and then rushed into his arms. “Clark, she did it. She didn’t tell me she was going to do it, but... you’re back.” Lois looked around, “Where is she?”

“Lara?” Lois nodded and Clark looked around as if he’d find her in the living room, “I don’t know I... I woke up in space, I thought...”

Lois frowned, “What, that she’d just left you out there. She’d never do that Clark. She may have mixed feelings about you, but... she knows how I feel, how CJ feels. No... that means...”

Lois let go of Clark and turned up the volume on the television. “And, again, we have just gotten confirmation that the unidentified flying object was in fact Superwoman coming back into the atmosphere at terminal velocity, of course, she may well have survived since she’s made up of tougher stock than your average astronaut, but so far we do not have confirmation on that fact. We’ll keep you updated. Now onto our local Metropolis weather....”

Lois muted it, closed her eyes and put a hand to her head. “Who to, who to call...” She snapped her fingers as she opened her eyes, “Duncan’s in Gotham.” She got her Cell and scrolled until she got to her best reporter’s son. She dialed him and waited. “Duncan, is she there?”

To Clark the silence seemed to be endless until finally Lois let out the breath she’d been holding. “Yes. We’ll be right there.” She hung up and took a hold of Clark’s hand, “She’s alive, barely....”

“That... Clocktower in Gotham City?”

Lois shook her head, “No. Underground, under Bruce Wayne’s property. Batman’s cave.”

oOOOOo

Bruce was glad that Barbara had arrived before Lois and Clark, because when the red headed hacker got to the Batcave and saw LJ in the coffin that Clark had so recently occupied, she’d nearly gone crazy and Bruce had found out just how strong her upper body really was.

“She’s not dead, or dying, but that was the best way I could monitor her vitals. She’s been overloaded. She was in the core of the sun. Superman, he got close, but her momentum took her all the way in. I... I think she’s alive, but other than that...”

Barbara rolled over to the coffin and put her hand on it. She was like that when Lois and Clark arrived. Batman had, of course, put on his cowl again, but the only thing that she was watching was the rising and falling of LJ’s chest.

Batman tilted his head to one side, “Superman. I’m Batman.”

“What are you doing with my daughter?”

For just a half a second Batman was without words, but he recovered fast, “For awhile I was her
mentor. And, I work with Oracle sometimes.”

Clark frowned as he looked around, “Oracle? What... look. What happened to my daughter?”

Barbara spoke up, “She saved your ungrateful ass.”

Clark blinked and turned, his cape whirling behind him. “Excuse me?”

Barbara put a hand up, “I’m Oracle, and in love with your daughter, and your grandson has started calling me Mama, and... I’m the one who’s going to have to explain it to him if his mother doesn’t wake up.”

Both LJ’s parents went to the other side of the coffin and put their hands on it. Lois asked, “She... she risked her life for him.”

Barbara and Lois’ gazes met and Barbara nodded.

Clark spoke with no question in his voice, “We’ll take him to Dr. Klein.”

Batman inclined his head, “Of course Superman. We’re here for you if you need us.”

Clark was distracted from his daughter for a moment, “How many super heroes are there on Earth? I wasn’t back long enough before...”

“You died?”

Clark nodded, “Yes, people said there were more, but...”

Batman’s mouth almost creased into a smile, but he caught himself just in time and it didn’t. “There are, in most major cities at least a few, and there are others around the globe as well. Some protect and patrol their own city, others their own Country, some the entire world, and some... a whole sector of space.” Batman paused, “And... most of the heroes of Earth were inspired at least partially by you.”

Clark looked down at LJ, “I take it she wasn’t one of the ones I inspired.”

Batman shook his head, “No, I’m not sure why Superwoman does what she does, but no, despite the name everyone gave her, she doesn’t do it for you.” He was silent for a moment, then spoke again, “If you two go home, I’ll get her transferred to S.T.A.R. Labs Metropolis.”

Clark stepped towards Batman and put his hand out. After a moment Batman took it and shook it. “As much as all I want to do is stay here with her every second. I--”

“Have other responsibilities.” Batman nodded, “Everyone saw your miraculous resurrection. Unlike her crash landing.”

Clark put his hand on top of the glass coffin, “It’s always in the way, the ‘S’ will always be in the way.” He gave Lois a kiss and then was gone from the cave.

It was Barbara who took charge, “We need to get her out of these singed clothes.”

Lois blinked and seemed to snap out of her stupor a little, “Ah, I can...”

Barbara cut her off, “Ms. Lane, I have seen your daughter naked. More than once now.”

“Oh-- yes, ah, right.”
Batman shot Barbara a look through his cowl and Barbara softened her tone just a bit, “But, I wouldn’t mind help Ms...”

“Lois. If you’re sleeping with my child I think Lois is more appropriate than Ms. anything.”

Batman helped take off the coffin’s top and then made himself scarce, going back across the cave to his computers.

They had off her shirt when Barbara paused, “That’s new...” On LJ’s chest, just left of center, over where her heart sat in the body, there was what almost looked like a tattoo burned into her skin. Barbara got closer to it and her frown got deeper. There were two parts to the burn. A circle with what looked like a sai in a way that made the Venus symbol.

Lois came over and then looked away for a second. Barbara somehow managed not to roll her eyes and instead pulled LJ’s uniform shirt partially back up over her chest. “She’s more decent... Lois. Have you ever seen her hurt in this way, burned?”

Lois studied the burn for a moment, “No. Never. When she was very very young she got some scrapes, a bruise or two, but never burned. Is that symbol what I think it is?”

“A Venus symbol, I think so. I’m going to need to do more research on the symbol, but, not now...”

Lois seemed to steel herself, “Okay. Yes. Let’s prepare her for travel to Metropolis.”

oOOOOo

Jimmy leaned against the wall of the Daily Planet’s roof stair housing and watched Chloe pace back and forth. She’d never met Superman before and was a bit keyed up about it.

“He’s just a guy Chloe.”

Chloe stopped and turned, “He died, and is back. That... is not just a guy Jim.”

Jimmy shook his head, “Just, let me ask the questions?”

Chloe laughed, “Not on your life Jimbo.”

A voice came from the other side of the roof, “Sometimes the best way to learn, to be a better reporter is to listen to those who have been doing it for longer.”

Jimmy pushed off from the wall and met Superman halfway, shaking the super hero’s hand. “Good to see you Supes.”

Chloe’s eyes got large for a moment before she got a hold of herself, “Jim is your friend. I’m objective. Why should we trust you. Most of my generation didn’t grow up with you saving them. Hell, Metropolis seems to be doing a bang up job without you. Not to mention the rumor is that the man you fought was also a Kryptonian. Perhaps you have come back only to see our defenses.”

Superman was silent for a moment, “That statement has a lot of conjecture in it. Do you have facts to back up all those accusations young lady?”

Jimmy made a face and spoke, “Are you here to stay?”

“Yes. That’s my plan. Metropolis has always been my home and twenty years away didn’t change
“This... Superwoman, is she your daughter? If so, by whom? Ultrawoman?”

“No comment.”

Jimmy raised his eyebrows at that, but continued his questions, “Was the man you fought Kryptonian?”

“He was. His name was Pol, he had, lingering anger at me. And he fought me with the plan to kill me and enslave you all.”

Chloe interrupted, “And we’re supposed to just believe that you weren’t part of Pol’s plan?”

Superman stared at the blonde woman, “Young lady. If I had wanted to rule over Earth I had plenty of opportunities to do so before I left for New Krypton.” He tilted his head to one side, “I have to go-- Jimmy... good to see you.” He glanced towards Chloe, “Don’t make the exclusive too rough on me.” And then he was gone.

Chloe made a face, “That was useless.” She pushed through the door off the roof and disappeared back down into the Daily Planet building.

Jimmy shook his head, “She’s worse than Lois was.”

Matt sat on Barbara’s lap as they rolled into Doctor Klein’s lab. He looked worried and when he saw his Mom the worry lines got a lot deeper. He looked up at Barbara, “Not dead?”

Barbara nodded, “Definitely not dead Matt.”

“Pwmise?”

Barbara kissed the top of Matt’s head, “I promise. Want to say hi?”

Matt looked at all the wires and readouts connected to LJ and then quickly shook his head, “Here.”

“Okay. We can just watch from here.” She pointed, “See her chest. It’s going up and down and up and down. That’s how we know that she’s alive.”

Matt looked up at Barbara, “Like you now?”

Barbara had to think about that one for a moment, “I don’t know Matt. She’ll probably be able to walk, but no one has ever gotten as hot as she did. She went into the middle of the sun which is very, very, very hot. But, she’ll still be your Mom, and we’ll still love her no matter what right?”

Matt nodded seriously, “Love Mommy...” He looked up at Barbara again, “And Mama...”

Barbara smiled and blushed just a bit, “And just wait until you see the look on your Mom’s face when you call me that buster... C’mon. I’ll drop you off at Grandma’s. Your Great Grandma Martha’ll be there too.”

A voice came from the doorway, “I can do that if you want to stay with Superwoman.”

Barbara frowned, “Helena?”
It was in fact Helena Kyle. A Wayne Transport ball cap over her hair. “I remembered something. You talking me down from hurting myself when Bobby Kanawka broke my heart.”

Barbara pinned Helena with a look, “You drove us all the way from Gotham City to Metropolis just to tell me that?”

“No. But... you were the last one I was with before I was shot, I think.... you’re the key to me getting my memories back.”

Barbara pursed her lips for a moment, then shook her head and made the introductions, “Helena, meet Matthew Lane. Matt, this is my best friend Helena Kyle.”

Matt looked a little alarmed at that and stared at Helena so hard that if he’d had his heat vision yet there’d have been two holes in Helena’s forehead. “Not Mommy?”

Barbara managed not to laugh, “No, no. You see I love your Mom in a... and Helena and I...” She looked beseechingly at the brunette who just had a hand over her mouth trying not to laugh, “A little help.... bestie...”

Helena leaned against the wall next to the door and just smirked, “You got yourself into this... bestie...”

“Thanks, thanks a lot. Matt, your Grandma and Jimmy are friends right?” He nodded, “But, they’re not boyfriend and girlfriend, because your Grandma still loves your Grandpa.”

Matt didn’t look any less confused and Barbara put her forehead against his, “Okay. All you have to know is that I love your Mom okay?”

“Ice cream?”

Helena came into the room and held a hand out, “I know the perfect place, and if I have your Grandma’s address right, it’s on the way.” Matt took Helena’s hand, and squealed with joy when Helena hefted him up onto her shoulders.

They left the room and Barbara rolled back over to the table with LJ on it, “You damn well better wake up soon Lara. I’m flailing like a beached whale with this whole mothering thing.”

oOOOOo

“Whoa--”

The purple stool that his feet had been propped up on disappeared and Miguel’s heels slammed to the ground. “Dunc--”

Duncan put a finger up, “I swear to God Mig-- if you say you’re sorry again. What the hell was that?”

Miguel flexed his hands a little self consciously, “Ah-- I have an... ability. When I think of things hard enough I can make them. They appear purple.”

Duncan raised an eyebrow, “Anything.”

“Yes, yes, chairs, tables, weapons, even...”

“Miguel...” Duncan pulled Miguel towards him. “Those aren’t what I meant.” He leaned down just a bit, Miguel was just a little shorter than the red head, and kissed him into silence.
But Miguel wasn’t quite so easily distracted. And when they separated he spoke softly, “You’re not-- put off by my... powers?”

“Making purple things out of thin air. Nah,” Duncan smiled, “Nah, I’ve seen weirder things in my life. Did you know that my pops once turned into a turtle?”

“A tur--”

Duncan kissed Miguel again, “I think the time for talking has passed....”

Chloe stood in the paper closet and stared up at the window. Finally her phone connected. A tired sounding CJ was on the other end. “I thought you were at home CJ?”

CJ let a sigh out over the connection, “No. More work... Are you okay?”

Chloe blew out a breath, “I just totally screwed up with Superman. Jim brought me in on the questions for the article and instead I accused him of orchestrating an alien invasion. I don’t even know why I did it.” CJ laughed, “It’s not funny. I’m always on thin ice with your Mom and now.”

“Well... I don’t know Superman, but I do know my Mom, and, I know you. Maybe you know something that you don’t know you know.”

Chloe took the phone away from her face and stared at it, “Ah, I think that you need to get some sleep CJ.”

“Preach to that. But, I’m serious. I know Superman wouldn’t lead an invasion, but maybe the man he fought... follow that. And Chloe, please, please, please don’t go trying to find out who Superman is.”

“I wasn’t...”

CJ cut her off, “You were, I could hear it in your silence. Please.” He was answered by silence, so he pushed ahead, “Okay. Are we still going to get breakfast tomor--” He paused, “Well, okay, now it’s later this morning?”

“Yep. Across the street from the Daily Planet, usual table?”

“I’ll be there...” He paused again, “...bye.”

“Bye.”

CJ hung up and glanced at Barbara who sat next to him at a computer, a slight smirk on her face. “God, she’s going to hate me if she ever finds out that my father is Superman.”

Barbara raised an eyebrow, “How long have you been going out?”

CJ shrugged, “A couple of dates.” He cleared his throat, “Anyway I’ve looked at everything from Dr. Klein, and from this Batman. And I don’t think she’s in a coma, and... I do think that my father was actually dead.” He closed his eyes and took off his glasses, pinching the bridge of his nose, “I don’t know. Everything’s blurring together, and I’ve been up and down and Dad’s gone and back and dead and alive, and I just got off a long shift and...”
Barbara put a hand on CJ’s shoulder, “Go home. And, thank you CJ. I know that you don’t know me well or...”

“My nephew likes you, and that’s good ‘nough for me.” CJ waved a hand towards Barbara as he stumbled out of the lab. After a moment he stuck his head back in, “Try a bucket of water. It worked when she was a kid...”

Barbara frowned at all the readings again, then took off her own glasses and stared over at the table with LJ on it. She rolled over and looked towards the door. What she was about to do wouldn’t be pretty and she didn’t want any witnesses.

She gripped the table with both hands and dragged herself into a standing position, then she leaned down. Still with a good grip on the table she kissed LJ.

When LJ’s eyes opened and she moved Barbara was so stunned that she tumbled backwards, winding up sprawled on her back with her wheelchair on the other side of the room. LJ looked down from the table with a frown, “Babs?”

Barbara closed her eyes in relief, “Thank God.” She opened her eyes again, “Are you going to help me up or not?”

LJ was frowning pretty deeply, not looking at Barbara anymore, but down at her hands. “I... I think my powers are gone.”
“Ah.... I can’t breathe Mom.”

Lois pulled back with a frown, “What?”

LJ shrugged as CJ put a blood pressure cuff on his sister’s arm and took the blood pressure. He winced when he got the result, “Your BP is terrible. 150 over 100.”

LJ shrugged, “Is Matt here?”

Lois shook her head, “Barbara went back to the house, and I think Clark’s there too.”

LJ’s eyes sparked at that and she shot her Mom a look, “What?”

“Will you ever let your father explain?”

LJ hopped off the table, putting on her glasses. “No.” She grabbed a jacket that her mother had brought off the table and swung it on. “I-- I need some time.” And she walked out of the lab.

CJ hurfed, “Same LJ, powers or no powers.”

Dr. Klein looked at the doorway, “Should someone go after her?”

Lois sighed, “No, no... she’ll be back. If for no other reason than to pick up her son.” She put her arm through CJ’s arm. “Thank you Bernard.”

“Always Lois.”

“Need a ride?”

LJ had been walking around Metropolis for a while. A Hummer pulled up next to her and the passenger window rolled down, “Helena?”

“Well?”

LJ climbed up into the truck’s cab. “What’re you doing in Metropolis? I thought you’d be in Gotham City trying to get your memory back.”

“I was your driver. So, you’ve gone AWOL?”

LJ blew out a breath and stared out the passenger side window, “Something like that. Powers are gone.”

“Right.” Helena nodded, “And you’re worried that Babs’ll break up with you.”

“No, yes... no. Hey,” She looked over at Helena, “Cut me a little slack ‘kay, I just freakin’ lost my super powers, a little sensitivity would be nice.”

Helena snorted a laugh, “Pulese... poor me, poor me. Look around you, so soon you forget...”

LJ looked out the window again. Helena had driven them into the hardest hit area of Metropolis. The area that hadn’t come back yet. “Didn’t you tell those kids that I was helping that you should
just do one good thing. Well... I’m gonna go help that man clean up his store. You comin’ with me or what?"

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Matt and Clark sat across from each other. Clark was in his street clothes, glasses on, and Matt seemed to be studying every part of him. “Granpa.” He seemed to be trying out the name to see if it fit Clark. Clark simply sat still and waited, “My Granpa.”

“Yes.”

Matt blew out a breath, “Okay. Play?”

“All day if I had a choice buddy.”

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"Some people say a man's made out of mud,
A poor man’s made out of muscle and blood,
Muscle and blood, skin and bones,
A mind that’s weak and a back that's strong.

You load sixteen tons and what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt.
Saint Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store."

Helena regarded LJ with a smirk, “You havin’ fun?”

LJ swung Helena around and continued, “Well, I was born one mornin’ when the sun didn’t shine. I picked up my shovel and I walked to the mines. I loaded sixteen tons of Number Nine coal, And the straw-boss hollered, ‘Well, bless my soul’.

Sixteen tons and what do you get?
You get another day older and deeper in debt.
Saint Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store.

Well, I was born one mornin', it was drizzlin' rain.
Fightin’ and trouble is my middle name.
I was raised in the bottoms by a mama hound.
I'm mean as a dog, but I'm as gentle as a lamb.

You load sixteen tons and what do you get?
You get another day older and deeper in debt.
Saint Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store.”

Helena frowned, “Wait, I....”

LJ made a faux bow and gestured towards Helena who sung, though not well, “Well, if you see me a-comin' you better step aside. A lotta men didn't and a lotta men died. I got a fist of iron, and a fist of steel. If the right one don't get you, then the left one will.”
LJ joined in on the chorus, “You load sixteen tons and what do you get? 
You get another day older and deeper in debt. 
Saint Peter, don’t you call me ‘cause I can’t go, 
I owe my soul to the company store.”

LJ chuckled a little before she answered, “Fun. Don’t usually get this kinda burn. Everything I do 
takes very little effort. Thank you Helena. So, you comin’ home with us?”

Helena looked around, “Nah, I think I’ll stay awhile longer. You good with that?”

LJ gave Helena a whack on the shoulder and Helena rubbed at it, “Just don’t miss your ride home...”

oOOOOo

“Lara.”

LJ leaned down and kissed Barbara, brushing a lock of hair from her forehead. “We can go home 
any time you’re ready.”

Barbara narrowed her eyes at LJ, “Lara. Just, talk to him, alright? He was great with Matt. And, 
he’s your father. You only get one of those.”

LJ blew out a breath, “Yeah, mine was named Jonathan.”

“Lara...”

“Fine. Fine. He’s in the kitchen?”

LJ started to walk away, but Barbara caught her first, “Ask him questions Lara. Or... something. 
Give him a half a chance.”

LJ nodded and walked to the kitchen. Clark was there, making some sort of sauce at the stove. He 
didn’t look up when she came in. He just waited.

“You’re alive.”

“I’m alive. Thank you.”

LJ crossed her arms over her chest, “You’re welcome.”

“My father...”

“...helped raise me, yes. Was the father figure that you should have been, yes. Did I practically fall 
apart when he died, yes. So... I guess that both of us have lost fathers huh.”

Clark finally turned, “I’m sorry Lara.”

LJ put a finger up, “No. LJ. I’m LJ. My mother, my grandmother, my brother and Babs get to call 
me that. They’ve been there for me, you. Have not.”

Clark nodded. “I want to be there for you in the future.”

“I’m living in Gotham City with Matt and Barbara and... whoever the hell else I take in. Duncan 
maybe, my family has never just been about blood.” LJ shot Clark a look, “You leaving is the 
reason for that.”
Clark walked over to LJ and took her hands in his own, “Every day from here on out I’m going to try and make not being there for you up. I promise.”

LJ gently pulled her hands away from her father and tilted her head to one side, “You ever gonna actually marry your baby mama?”

“Excuse me?”

“Pop the question. To Mom. Again. And actually marry her this time?”

“I... ah...”

LJ pursed her lips, “Yeah, the only right answer to that question is yes. So... good luck with that.” She left the room and nearly ran into Barbara. “Eavesdropping isn’t very ladylike.”

Barbara smirked, “Oh, you think that you’re putting in with a lady.” She whipped out an expandable baton and all of a sudden LJ’s legs went out from under her and she wound up on top of Barbara’s lap.

“Sorry...”

Barbara took the closeness of LJ’s lips as an opportunity and kissed her silent for quite a while. When she felt LJ’s hand on her waist she managed to get out, “Couch...”

LJ and Barbara were still on the couch, everyone else was upstairs in bed. She made a fist and let it go, then stared at her hand. “This is probably more a question for Dr. Klein or Batman, but, do you think it will come back, they’ll come back?”

Barbara slowly nodded, “I do. Do you want them to?”

LJ sighed, “I don’t know. I’m supposed to want it all back, right? But, maybe it’s punishment for not saving everyone’s life, or maybe it’s the universe-- correcting itself. Realizing that I didn’t deserve to be immune to Kryptonite, to have so much power.”

Barbara pulled LJ down to one knee, then put a hand to LJ’s cheek and waited until the dark haired woman looked up, “I--” She shook her head, “Batman’s scared of you, most of the JLA, the JSA to, but none of them really know you Lara. You would never kill--”

LJ cut Barbara off, “I did, once, it was my first try at this hero crap, and....”

“I know. I mean, I know you think you did.”

LJ looked up, a surprised look on her face and met Barbara’s gaze. “You, knew?”

Barbara shook her head, “Information is what I do, right? When I looked into your background, yes, I found the death.”

“It was an accident.”

Barbara took one of LJ’s hands in her own. “I never thought any different Lara.” She paused, “What happened?”

With her free hand LJ made a fist again and let it go. “I was drunk. I don’t know how. I had just gotten out of Metropolis after leveling my grandfather, and... It was a police chase, and he was
putting in danger so many people. So I stopped his car, just, not slowly enough, and he wasn’t wearing a seatbelt and... The police said that it was some serial killer they were looking for too, but... That’s... the one thing that I even remotely liked about the hundred and one stories about my Dad that my Mom told us was that he never ever took a life. Ever. And then, the first time I try and... I kill someone. The police said that I saved everyone, but…”

Barbara put her fingers over LJ’s lips. “Did you ever stop to think that perhaps they were right?”

LJ took her hands away and stood. “Oh, and it’s somehow better because he was a ‘bad guy’. Do you know how much it takes to get me drunk? I think my Mom passed that onto me, ‘cause, my father can’t get drunk on all the booze in the world. Even if I didn’t kill him, I didn’t save him, and he’s…”

“Okay. So, you’ll never have powers again. Then what?”

LJ paused for a moment, then turned. “Well, I’d have to get an earpiece wouldn’t I.”

Barbara laughed and rolled over to Lara. “Let’s go to your room.”

LJ frowned, “Are you sure? I may drop you.”

Barbara gave LJ’s abs a slap, then shook out her hand as it stung. “I think that your powers might be coming back already woman with abs of steel.”

As LJ stood with Barbara in her arms and walked up the stairs Barbara was silent. It wasn’t until they were both under the covers that LJ finally broke the silence. “Is it bad that I still think that this isn’t over?”

Barbara was silent for a moment, then nodded. “If you feel it, I believe you... But, I also think that we’ll get through whatever it is fine. As long as we’re together.”

LJ frowned at Barbara, “How do you know?”

Barbara gave LJ a kiss, then smirked, “Are you planning on breaking up with me anytime soon?”

LJ frowned for a second, then chuckled, “Ah, no?”

“Somehow.... someway, I think that I saw our future in a dream. Of course, now that I’ve seen it, maybe it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy sort of thing.”

LJ put a hand to her head. “Time gives me a headache.”

Barbara pulled LJ closer to her. “Then just wake up next to me.”

LJ sighed and closed her eyes, “Every damn morning if I can.”
Chapter 15

“I’ve got it CJ. I’ve got it. The scoop of the century. Look, look...”

CJ squinted through his glasses, he actually needed them. “It looks like a bunch of sort of greyish blackish lumps to me.” He passed back the pictures and looked up at Chloe. “What is it?”

“My road to the Kerth. I was right. They’re coming. Look at the formation, they’re warships. Coming for Earth. We have to prepare, and, and...”

“Ah, shouldn’t you first print it before anything else.”

Chloe shook her head, “Oh, right. Yeah. Getting it past Ms. Lane. That’s gonna be fun.”

CJ took one of Chloe’s hands in her own, “Don’t sugar coat any of it. If the story has holes, let her see the holes.”

“It doesn’t.”

CJ kept talking even as Chloe talked over him. “And let her help you. Take her advice. Alright?”

Chloe smiled, “Yeah. CJ, Wow... just, wow.” She shook her head, “We’re going to be invaded.”

CJ winced, “Ah, Chloe, could you maybe say that with a little less happiness?”

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“Oh...”

Miguel froze. He hadn’t known that Duncan lived with anyone. And there in the doorway was a red headed woman in a wheelchair, a young boy walking next to her, and a very tall, very dark haired, very scary looking woman glaring at him. “Ah, hola?”

LJ made a face, the young man looked about Duncan’s age, about her age, though she always tried not to act her age. “You are?”

Duncan came stumbling from the bedroom and LJ raised an eyebrow as Barbara covered Matt’s eyes. “Nice one Duncan... or should I say two?”

Duncan’s entire body seemed to blush and then just like that there was a purple covering over Duncan’s private parts. LJ frowned, “What the hell?”

Duncan looked between LJ and Miguel. “Ah... he sort of has a power. Like the Green Lanterns, except, not with a ring, and not green, ah, obviously.”

LJ just shook her head and picked up her son. “Yep. Not one normal day ever...” LJ sighed, “Ever...”

Barbara spoke at LJ’s back, “Oh stop it, you love it...”

Miguel’s head was bobbing back and forth as he followed the conversation, “Lo siento, I can leave if...”

Barbara rolled past Duncan, giving him a whack on the butt, and making the 18 year old jump. “Put on some clothes while I talk to your friend.”
Duncan opened and closed his mouth, then turned and walked towards the bathroom, rubbing his
backside.

Miguel still looked confused, “Are you two related?”

Barbara frowned, “Oh, the hair. No. I’m LJ’s girlfriend.” She smirked just a little, “I think that he
freaked a little when I whacked him on the butt.”

Miguel laughed, “Ah, yes.”

Barbara went about starting the coffee, “I’m trying something new. I’m embracing the chaos
instead of trying to control it. Lara brings quite the chaos with her. So, I’m diving in feet first.”

“Ah...”

“So to speak.” Barbara smiled, “So. What is your name?”

“Miguel Barragan. A pleasure to meet you Miss...”

“Barbara Gordon. So. You can make constructs with your mind. Wait...” Barbara frowned,
“You’re Bunker.”

Miguel’s mouth dropped open just a bit, “I, how did you know that?”

Barbara shook her head, “That is a much too complicated question.”

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“Rock solid source?” Chloe gave her shortest nod at Lois. “Okay.” Lois picked up her phone and
pushed a button. “Upload it Trevor...” Lois stared at Chloe as she hung up the phone, “If you’re
wrong...”

They both jumped when the door to Lois’ office opened with a bang. Jimmy stepped in, adjusting
his glasses. “Lois... problem... Dr. Klein just called. Ships...” He paused, “Superman’s going to
meet them, and... they’re nearly here. He thinks that they hit some sort of warp drive or, or
something...”

Neither Jimmy or Chloe moved until Lois stood, waving her hands, “Go, go, go... get outside, tell
me what’s going on, get the stories. Go!”

That snapped both of them out of it and they both left the Editor’s office as if their butts were on
fire.

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LJ laughed at something Miguel had said and Barbara had an exasperated look on her face as
Duncan slid out of the bathroom half dressed. At least he had pants on. “My Dad... the ships...
Superman’s going to...”

LJ whacked her childhood friend on the back, “Slow down Duncan.”

Duncan nodded and took a breath, “My father’s on the phone. There are ships, the rumor is from
New Krypton, that they think that Superman is dead. They’re nearly here, and... and Superman’s
going to go against them all.”

LJ looked at the phone, “He still on the phone?”
Duncan nodded and handed the phone to LJ. “Uncle Jimmy, give me to Supes. Yeah, yeah, I know. Just do it okay?”

Superman looked down as a phone was put into his hand. “It’s... Superwoman.”

Superman frowned but with one eye still on the sky above Metropolis put the phone to his ear, “This isn’t a good...”

“Shut up and listen to me-- Superman. I have a plan.”

“Young lady, I’ve done...”

“Really. Are they Kryptonian? From New Krypton?”

Superman was silent for a long moment, then after breathing out and trying to calm his heart he answered, “Yes.”

“Then I have a plan.”

“L.... Superwoman. This is the fate of possibly the entire world.”

Superman could have sworn that he heard a growl on the other end of the line. “Do you honestly think that I don’t know that. I have a genius level IQ, I graduated high school before half of my classmates had their driver’s license. And, unlike you, this is my home and the Only home I’ve ever known. I don’t have any split loyalties, I will fight until I die for.... My... planet. Earth. So trust me, don’t, I don’t care. Just... don’t do anything stupid.... Dad.”

Superman took the phone away from his ear and looked down at it for a moment before he gave it back to Jimmy and looked up at the approaching Inspector Maggie Sawyer.

“Bunker, can you fly?”

“Um... fly?”

“But...”

Barbara put a hand up, “We can talk about everything and anything after the crisis. Can you fly?”

“I can... use, sí, yes... I can move through the air.”

LJ seemed to pick up Barbara’s train of thought without either of them having to look at the other. “Good, good. I need you to go to all these places.” LJ handed Bunker a piece of paper. “When you get to the first place, give her this...”

“Her, who?”

“Wonder Woman...” Miguel looked a bit green around the gills, “Don’t pass out on me now Miguel. Between the two of you... we’ll save the world, ‘kay?”

Miguel nodded and frowned as Barbara and LJ went towards the elevator, “You’re going?”

LJ shook her head, “Don’t worry about me, and Duncan?”
Duncan gave LJ a thumbs up, “Got your back sis from a different mother, I’ll stay with Matt.”

They got in the elevator and Barbara put a hand to her head, “We’re going to have a lot of explaining to do when we get back.”

LJ winced, “If I get back. I don’t have my powers all the way back yet. Not even sure I can fly.”

Barbara reached over and took LJ’s hand in her own, “That... I can do something about. You ever flown via Batplane?”
Chapter 16

A Kryptonian soldier approached Lord Zod and saluted, “Sir we are in geosynchronous orbit of Earth. Do you wish to repair to the surface?”

Lord Zod held a hand up, “Not quite yet. No... they need to wait for a moment, they need to.. anticipate my coming.”

The soldier saluted again, “As you wish my Lord.”

LJ stepped up next to her father with assuredness. She wore her Superwoman uniform with a cape even but hadn’t flown in.

Lord Zod laughed as he approached them, “Father and half breed daughter. How cute. I thought that the Earth would be void of all Kryptonians by now. But, it’s no matter. My plans are always adaptable.”

LJ laughed right back and Clark looked over at her with a surprised look on his face, “You’ve already lost Zod.”

Clark frowned, “Superwoman, don’t--”

LJ took a step forward, “Don’t antagonize him? Why? He thinks that I’m a half breed--” LJ smirked, “You think crossing your precious Kryptonian DNA with Human DNA makes me weaker. It doesn’t, and I’m not.”

Zod didn’t seem to believe LJ, “You’re resting all the people of Earth’s lives on a bluff?” It was his turn to smirk, “You have more balls than your father. I have an army of a thousand super powered, highly trained Kryptonian soldiers. Against the two of you? Oh, it’s a cute bluff, but it would be advisable if you surrendered now.” Zod laughed.

“Superwoman?” Clark tried not to look and sound worried, but he was. He could tell just by looking at her that she wasn’t all the way healed, all the way back to normal from her trip into the sun.

LJ ignored her father, “What do I have? I need nothing. I could win against you and any army you brought down here. But what do I have? Oh, I have Aquaman, who can control the moisture that’s all around you in the air, can you breathe water yet? And Wonder Woman who’s got a good portion of your powers and a couple of surprises too, not to mention she’s the best field general I’ve ever met. Or, how ‘bout the Flashes, I have ‘em coming out my ears, grandfathers, grandsons, nephews, random others who call themselves the Flash. They all make most Kryptonians look like you’re standing still. Or, how about the actual Generals and Inspectors, and all the other men and women who have no powers, some with uniforms and some with costumes. They may not have powers, but they have amazing brains and muscles trained to within an inch of perfection. And they’re just a few...”

There was movement all around Clark and LJ. The Kryptonians found themselves surrounded by hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of the heroes of Earth. There were all sizes, genders, nationalities, colors (including some skin colorings that weren’t quite natural skin tones).

LJ took another two steps towards Zod, “...of my friends and the Army of Earth. So,” she gestured with her hands towards the sky, “give us a try, I have the holes dug on the dark side of
the moon for your bodies already.”

Zod had no witty repartee for that. He stood there studying LJ. “What would you have me do?”

LJ stepped into Zod’s personal space and spoke so softly that Zod had to lean forward, “Go home Zod.”

There was a long pause from Lord Zod before he turned on his heel, made a motion in the air with his hand and in the blink of an eye was gone. The Metropolis citizens who had watched the entire thing were silent for a beat, and then their applause was thunderous. They clapped for the heroes that were in amongst them.

Through LJ’s suit came a welcome voice, “Superwoman.... remind me to never, ever, ever play Poker with you.”

She looked up when Superman’s hand came down on her shoulder. His eyes were hard, “Let’s talk...”

LJ gave a short nod of her head and let her father help it look as though she was flying away. They went to the North Pole. LJ saw it as a good sign that the cold only barely made her shiver. She was almost back to, normal, whatever that meant.

“What the hell do you think you were doing.”

LJ stood in front of her father, her arms crossed over the ‘S’ on her chest, “Savin’ the world. Sure, I stayed on Earth to do it...”

He cut her off, “Stop it. I... I had to go LJ, I had to. Don’t you understand that?”

LJ shook her head, “No, I don’t. Everyone has free will.”

Clark threw his hands out, “They were going to devolve into Civil War. It was the only way. I had to save their planet, I had to be there for them.”

LJ took a step forward and pushed Clark back a step. “Oh... you.... had to be there for THEM? What about me? About your son? What about US?”

“I didn’t, I didn’t know.”

LJ turned her back on her father with a shake of her head, “Yeah, and, never once did it occur to you to take a look back, take a look in on the people you supposedly loved? Hmm?”

Clark was silent for awhile before he again put a hand on his daughter’s shoulder, this time a much gentler one. “I’m sorry. And, you’re right. I should have, but... you love the red headed woman. I can tell that you do. Think of if you had to leave her, would-- you-- be able to look in on her and not... say ‘screw it’ and come back?”

LJ was silent for a bit too before she turned, “I... it’s not Fair. I loved Grandpa with more than... but he wasn’t my Dad. I didn’t get to have you coach my teams, or, or grill the boyfriends I pretended to have, or... or to come out to, or... to just-- be-- there...” LJ stared down at the ground and cleared her throat a couple of times.

All of sudden it was like her knees went out from under her and Clark got there just before she hit the ground. He managed not to jump in surprise when she curled into him and she cried and cried.
Chapter 17

A Week Later

Clark pushed his glasses up on his nose. He’d have to get new ones, the ones he had seemed to have gotten bigger, or perhaps the New Krypton diet had made him lose weight. He put an arm around Lois and smiled. “Wow...”

Lois looked over at Clark, “You’re not backing out of this are you?”

“Are you kidding? Your daughter would kill me....”

“My daughter? Oh no, she’s definitely your daughter. You didn’t hear me, but the many times that I wanted to rip my hair out when I was raising them, it was never CJ, always LJ...”

Clark frowned, “Why do you call her LJ, I mean, I understand why her friends and...”

“It hurt too much. I had this great idea to name her after your birth mother, and then, I every time I thought of using her first name it hurt to even say it. Crazy huh?”

Clark tilted Lois’ chin up and kissed his almost bride, “Yes, but, I do love your crazy, always have.”

Lucy Lane and Martha appeared out of nowhere and yanked Clark and Lois apart. “No seeing the bride before the wedding son.”

Clark held his hands up, “I’ll just go see what Jimmy is up to.”

Lucy made a face, “Probably hitting on his new partner. Blonde, and all...”

Lois covered her sister’s mouth with her hand, and smiled at Clark, “See you at the altar.”

Clark nodded and went towards the kitchen. His son and Jimmy were inside, trying to get Jimmy’s bow tie tied, while Jimmy’s son Duncan and a laughing newcomer were watching CJ and Jimmy.

Clark held his hand out, “Clark Kent.”

The young man shook hands with a firm grip, “Yes sir, it’s an honor to meet you sir. I am Miguel Barragan. Duncan’s.... ah... his, ah....” He trailed off, not sure how to finish the sentence.

Clark gave him a pat on the back, “Young man, I feel that way about Lois all the time. I am Lois’, and, if I had figured that out years ago, there would have been a lot less pain brought to this family.”

Miguel looked seriously at Clark, “But sir, if not for that pain, then perhaps James and Lucy would not have married and I would never have met Duncan. Or, your own daughter would not have had Matt, or met Ms. Gordon. I believe that everything happens for a reason sir, and...”

Clark put a hand up, “Okay, okay. And, please-- Mr. Barragan, stop calling me sir?”

“Right si.... Clark?”

Clark smiled, “Better. Now, why exactly isn’t little Matt down here with the rest of us men?”
Jimmy shook his head, “Won’t let LJ out of his sight.”

“Mom, you look gorgeous.”

Lois kissed LJ’s cheek with a smile, “Thank you honey. And, unlike a compliment from my sister, or Barbara or Martha, I know it’s true, because you’re a lesbian.”

“Momm....”

Lois laughed and laughed and laughed so much that the rest of the women in the room just had to join in. Matt on the other hand looked a bit confused. When the women got ahold of themselves Lois hugged her daughter to her. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t make fun. But, I’m just so... happy, my entire family is back together...”

Barbara muttered, “And talking to one another.”

“So... when will we be doing one of these for you two young ladies?”

LJ shot her Grandmother a look, “Funny grandma.”

Barbara cleared her throat, “We’re taking it slowly. For... the little ears.”

Lois waved at the two of them, “Oh, pshaw.... have I not just shown you two that you need to live every day of life as if it were your last?”

Matt pulled at his mother’s sleeve, “Mommy... marry Mama?”

Barbara had been right, the first time that Matt had called her that the look on LJ’s face had been priceless, a cross between being a bit constipated and total and utter shock as if she’d just walked in on her parents having sex. But, over the last week Barbara had been happy to see that LJ had been fast getting used to Matt calling both of them some form of Mom.

“Well Lara?”

“Bu... bu....” LJ narrowed her eyes at Barbara, “You know Barbara Gordon. Just ‘cause I’m large with the butch doesn’t mean that I’m the one who has to pop the question. C’mon Matt...” Matt practically jumped into his Mom’s arms. “Let’s go see what the guys are up to.”

They left the room and a stunned silence. It was Martha who finally spoke up, “She is right you know.”

Lucy spoke up too though, “Don’t do it. Marriage... it’s not worth it.”

Lois frowned at her little sister, “I thought you were getting married to... ah... Pete Ross?”

Lucy made a face, “He was having an affair with.. it doesn’t even matter who. Some blonde.”

Lois nodded, mostly to herself, “Remind me to give you the number of Ron Troupe. He just went through a hellish break up too.”

“Loisss....”

Lois held her hands up again, “Hey, I just want everyone to be as happy as I am. Is that a crime?”

oOOOOo
"You know, that was quite anti-climactic. I mean, I thought that from what they said that spy vs. spy would come parachuting in, or something like that. That there'd be a submarine melting down somewhere under the polar ice caps and..."

Barbara cut LJ off, "Were you serious? About me asking you?"

LJ shrugged, "Have you not learned one thing about me? I'm never serious."

"Lara. Please."

LJ smiled and pulled Barbara onto the dance floor that had been the living room mere moments before. "Here's the thing. I love you. I never thought that I'd even get that far. Do I want to have a family with you, and wake up next to you every day for the rest of my life? Of course. But, I'm not your average person, I come with so much damn baggage that..."

"Marry me LJ. I never in my life thought that I'd be saying that to a woman, I thought that I'd wind up with Grayson, we'd have our two point five kids and be the photograph perfect, well, except for the wheelchair, family. But, that's not what I want anymore. You've opened my eyes Lara Lane."

LJ wiggled her eyebrows, "I do believe that they were closed not open when you c... Hey, if I weren't me that would have hurt." She glanced around, and then gestured with her head towards the kitchen, which her almost entirely returned super senses told her was empty. When they got there sat down in one of the kitchen chairs, "Sorry, I just... My whole life has an audience, I don’t want..." She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them back up and took Barbara’s hands in her own, “I’m going to screw up. And, not be serious at the wrong times, and...”

Barbara put two fingers over LJ’s lips. “I don’t care.”

“We haven’t even...”

“I don’t care. Marry me Lara Joanne Lane.”

LJ was silent for a long moment, then a smile came to her face, “Yes.”

Barbara tilted her head to one side, “That’s it, just yes? Now, what the hell, or, sure, or...”

LJ winked, “I’m workin’ on my seriousness... so, do I get to meet your father now...”

Barbara winced, “Ooh, ah... was I supposed to ask your father, or mother or grandmother for permission or something?”

“What century were you born in? So, are you gonna kiss me or what?”

Barbara smiled, “See, I knew LJ was in there somewhere.” Barbara leaned forward and obliged LJ’s request and then they were both gone in the blink of an eye, only the wheelchair still there.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

~ Quite A While Ago - Greece ~

"Tell me how to find Xena, to bring Xena back."

"All will come child, but you must wait."

"I can't do that, how can I just... wait Elpis."

Elpis laughed, "There is no just waiting child, you can see the world, you can save the world, be a Queen to the Amazons, be a mother to your child. Live a life that Xena would be proud of, and you will get your reward."

"Child?"

Elpis laughed, her Amazon necklace tinkling. "You ask me of the future, and are surprised when I know you're pregnant?"

Gabrielle frowned, "I'm... how..."

Elpis frowned back, "Young one, if you do not know that by now..."

"I have not... not since Perdicus on our marriage bed. Not in a way that could... make me with child... With no one, but... but..." Gabrielle trailed off as her hand came up to her mouth, "Gods."

"Your love was legendary. Where did you think that your daughter Eve came from? Your Xena may not have been a demi-god in the mold of Hercules, but... " Elpis put a hand on Gabrielle's shoulder. "The girls will be loved by many aunts in their lives."

Gabrielle gave a cough, and then another, "Girls?"

Elpis just smiled.

Gabrielle closed her eyes and dragged a hand through her hair, "So, I wait."

"You wait, and live."

Chapter End Notes

And, for the record, I did win NaNo with this. And I'm actually surprised that I didn't cut more than ~400 words in the editing process.

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