

A Future Sooner Than Tomorrow

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A Future Sooner Than Tomorrow

by [Kitty_Camren](#)

Summary

The Justice League ends up several years in the future... Or maybe it's an alternate universe? After all, there seems to be an extra kryptonian protector of this time's Metropolis, one that goes by Superboy.

Alternatively:

Clark is ecstatic to meet another kryptonian, even if it's one from a (maybe?) alternate universe but... his fellow kryptonian doesn't appear to share the same feeling of immediate kinship. Luckily enough, Superman isn't known for giving up!

Notes

A normal day for the recently formed Justice League is going well until suddenly they're abruptly transported to somewhere awfully familiar...
At least the meeting had already been over?

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

A Today Sooner Than Yesterday

The Justice League had been in a meeting-

No, that's not completely correct. Some of the Justice League had been in a meeting in the Watchtower; others had been protecting their respective cities whilst the rest were on an off-world mission.

Batman had stood at the front, cape obscuring his body as he spoke about a foiled drug ring. Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl were sat to the right side of the meeting room's table with Martian Manhunter, the Flash and Green Lantern sat opposite of them. Superman had sat at the very end of the table, directly facing Batman. Batman had curtly finished his report and as he was the last one to speak, it had signified the end of the meeting. Green Lantern and Flash had eagerly gotten out of their seats, chatting amicably about something, whilst the Martian Manhunter, Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl leisurely got up.

And Superman? He'd been overcome with a sharp sense of wrongness as though the world had been tilted slightly off its axis. He had held onto the table for support as he got up, ignoring the crumble of quartz beneath his fingers. His legs had felt oddly weightless as colours had burst across the inside of his eyelids. Existence itself had seemed... Unsteady, as though an acute bout of vertigo had struck.

But that's silly, Superman had thought, I fly over Metropolis and leap off of buildings on a regular basis and I don't get vertigo. Looking back on it, that probably should have clued him onto something being strange...

"Guys... Does anyone know where we are?" Flash's voice breaks the silence. The Justice League is no longer in the meeting room of the Watchtower. Instead, they're in what looks like Metropolis yet... the buildings aren't right. There are flats where single houses once sat, sky scrappers in place of construction sites, and offices in strange places. Everything has a new sheen to it, brighter than Metropolis on the sunniest of days.

"I'd say it looks a lot like Supes' city, but... Something doesn't feel right. I've only been to Metropolis a few times, so correct me if I'm wrong, but I swear the buildings weren't this large," Green Lantern sceptically looks up at one of the flats. They are pillars of glass and concrete, spiralling into points like fractured crystals. There were several buildings of similar design, as though their sole purpose was to refract light until they formed stars onto the roads and constellations across bright billboards. Superman can imagine it what it would look like at night, as though galaxies had come alive and plastered themselves to the sleeping walls of this city.

"I can get a bird's eye view? Check out any buildings that stand out and come back. That way, we'll have a good starting point to figuring out where we are," Hawkgirl offers. The others unanimously nod. She spreads her wings and pushes herself off of the ground. Relishing the strong beat of her wings against her back, she weaves through towering buildings. Scanning

the area from above, she notes its layout is remarkably like that of Metropolis with similar highways and main roads. Looking around, she spots a glimmering golden dome in the distance. She heads toward it, hoping to check it out.

The remaining Justice League sit on nearby dumpsters or lean against walls as they wait for Hawkgirl's return.

"So, Supes, what's your verdict?" Lantern says, back against the wall of a white, glossy building. "Is this your home turf or what?"

"No. It looks similar... but it can't be. There are so many buildings I don't recognise..."

Green Lantern raises an eyebrow, scoffing as he says, "because we all obviously know every building where we live, don't we?"

"That's not what I meant! It's just that..."

"It's just that what?"

"This looks a lot like the centre of Metropolis-" Green Lantern begins to interrupt Superman.

"Isn't that a point for it being Metropolis?"

"No. Well, usually yes but this time, no. I know Metropolis pretty well, especially this area and there are buildings that should be here that aren't which have others in their place," Superman explains.

Green Lantern runs a hand across his hair and mumbles something. He looks up at Superman, and simply says, "And you're sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Isn't how we got here most important?" Flash asks. He waves a hand beside his head. "Like, where we are is great and all but are we just going to ignore that we were just in the Watchtower and now we're... here?"

"Where we are is our immediate concern. How we got here can wait for a little while," Superman says.

"And figuring out where we are is easier than figuring out how we got here. Appearing here had no forewarning or obvious cause," Lantern reasons. Martian Manhunter mumbles something and Superman starts to speak.

"Maybe not no forewar-"

"Hawkgirl is coming back!" Wonder Woman shouts and points into the air where the silhouette of Hawkgirl's large wings can be seen.

"Great! Maybe she's found something that can tell us where we are," Flash taps his foot against the ground, smiling all the while. Wonder Woman beams at Flash before turning back

to look at Hawkgirl soaring closer.

"I would not get your hopes up, Diana," J'ohn speaks up.

Wonder Woman looks over her shoulder, peering at J'ohn curiously. "And why's that?"

"She seems... distressed," he says simply.

"How can you tell? Are you doing your whole," Flash gestures animatedly, "psychic thing?"

"No," Green Lantern says. He walks forward from his place on the wall and looks directly at Hawkgirl's flying form in the air. "Even I can tell something is up. She's usually faster than this. Either she's injured, which I doubt, or she's got some bad news she doesn't want to tell us."

Superman raises his eyebrow, "Okay... And are you sure about that?"

"Sure as anything."

The Justice League waits with baited breath for Hawkgirl to come back. She lands steadily and locks her eyes onto Superman. She opens her mouth, pauses and then finally says, "You have a Daily Planet in Metropolis, right?"

"...yes? Why do you ask?"

"Does it have a gaudy, golden planet statue on the top?"

"I wouldn't call it gaudy..." Superman mummurs. Hawkgirl sighs and breaks eye contact.

"I was afraid you'd say that..."

"What do you mean?" Diana asks. She puts a reassuring hand on Hawkgirl's shoulder.

"There's a building just like that only a couple of miles away... I think this might actually be Metropolis."

"But there's no way that's possible! Buildings don't appear out of nowhere," Superman waves an arm at the various new structures.

"The impossible has happened before," Hawkgirl shakes out her wings uncomfortably.

"Not in mere moments," Superman says. Batman steps forward.

"Hawkgirl is right," Batman announces.

A series of protests comes from Lantern, Flash and Superman. Diana simply rubs Hawkgirl's shoulder comfortingly while looking to Batman, waiting for him to explain.

"Everyone, calm down," Batman walks over to the exit of the alleyway they are in.

"B, what do you mean? How is that possible?" Superman walks forward, his cape dragging against the ground.

"Kal, you were right when you said that the impossible rarely happens in mere moments. The thing is, I don't think these buildings just appeared in a second."

"A cloaking device, maybe?" J'ohn speculates.

"An illusion?" Flash pipes up.

"No. These buildings have never been hidden... At least, I don't think they have. I recognise these buildings, although I've only seen their blueprints."

"You've seen their blueprints?" Superman asks.

"Yes. The buildings were due to be built in ten years."

"And when did you see these blueprints?"

"A month ago." Everyone turns to face Batman. His cape flutters slightly and he clenches the fingers of his gauntlets. "Which is why I suspect we have been transported...

...to the future."

A Distant Today

Chapter Summary

Batman's announcement spurs on many feelings among the group. It results in a simple plan, one that will hopefully lead to getting a little help with the Justice League's situation...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Silence reigned after Batman spoke. The Justice League began to look amongst each other, in the hope someone would speak up and deny Batman's theory. None of them did.

Eventually, Batman gazes upon his teammates and, taking pity on them, guides each of them to sit on the ground. With no resistance, everyone is sat cross-legged in no time. None of them complain about sitting on the cold concrete, too concerned with their predicament. Batman finally sits down, completing the circle of Justice League members. Sat on the ground in a circle, they look like overgrown children; slumping forward like dejected toddlers.

"There has to be another explanation," Flash whippers.

"I'm afraid not," Batman, in a rare show of emotion, sounds sympathetic.

"But! But there was no sign of time travel, no big bang or flashing lights... Nothing," clutching at the material on his thighs, Flash stares hopelessly at the floor.

"There isn't always a sign that something has happened. Not all cameras flash, not every driver uses turn signals... Sometimes, these things happen without warning and all we can do is pick up the pieces," Batman's hand twitches towards Flash. For a second, Superman thinks the man is about to put his hand on Flash's shoulder like Lantern sometimes does and then remembers it's Batman he's thinking of. Superman isn't surprised when Batman retracts it and clasps those black gauntlet covered hands back together in his lap uselessly; just disappointed. Batman continues: "We'll figure this out. One step at a time if we have to."

"Okay... Okay, we can do this. We can do this!" Flash rises to his feet, putting both hands on his hips. His lips pull apart in a shaky grin.

Wonder Woman stands up next, declaring, "Both Batman and Flash are right, we are fully capable of fixing whatever this is."

Green Lantern and Hawkgirl get to their feet simultaneously. "Giving up won't get us anywhere," Hawkgirl runs a hand through her red hair. Green Lantern nods.

"She's right. You never succeed if you don't try," he says.

Batman stands up next. He gives a hum of approval and turns his head toward Superman and Martian Manhunter. "And you two?"

"I don't believe that our sudden displacement had no warning," Martian Manhunter says suddenly. Batman's white lenses narrow.

"What do you mean?"

"I felt something, a small something before we appeared here. Like a pull at the back of my consciousness," Martian Manhunter turns to Superman. "You felt something too, didn't you, Kal?" Superman glances away from Manhunter's knowing gaze and nods.

"For a moment, it was like gravity didn't exist except for the heavy feeling behind my eyes and temples... It was similar to when people describe sitting up too fast," Superman picks at the sleeve of his costume, all too aware of the one similarity between Martian Manhunter and himself that the others would think of as the reason behind their shared experience. Both are 'openly' alien. If he is lucky (and didn't have enhanced senses), none of them will mention it in earshot of him.

Batman glances between Superman and Martian Manhunter. "Makes sense," he says.

"Pardon?" Batman couldn't possibly lack that much tact, could he? Superman thinks.

"Martians and kryptonians both have an innate psychic ability. Both of your feelings could be explained by transition between time periods either causing an overload or lack of input," Batman offers a hand up to both his teammates. They take them gratefully.

If Superman lets out a relieved sigh, nobody notices.

"Can someone translate that to Not-Batman, please?" Green Lantern grumbles.

"...he's talking about a sensory thing," Flash mutters, tapping on his thigh. "What Superman experienced was being overwhelmed because of the sudden increase of what he heard probably because of a period of in-between in the two time periods while John's mind or like, psychic muscle or something was looking for input because of the sudden removal from our time. I assume since none of us remember how we got here, there must of been a period where no feelings were felt and no thoughts were thought."

"Excuse you?"

"Basically, Superman was the equivalent of being at a super loud party while John was like being in a mental sensory deprivation chamber," Flash shrugs awkwardly as he speaks.

"You sound pretty familiar with the sensory stuff."

"Let's just say I'm... empathetic to their situations."

"Good explanation, Flash," Batman sweeps his cape over his shoulder. "Now it's time to figure out what time we're in."

"Seems like it's time to explore then," Hawkgirl says.

The Justice League set out to find what time they're in. They read signposts outloud and point out any buildings that stand out. Nothing gives them an idea of what time they're in.

"We know for a fact we are at least ten years in the future," Batman states.

"That doesn't narrow it down very much, Spooky. That means we could be as little as fifteen or as large as one hundred years in the future," Green Lantern sighs and then pauses. "You said you came across a newspaper building, right, Hawkgirl?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"Did it have a stand or something where you can buy newspapers?" Hawkgirl nods at Lantern. Green Lantern smiles triumphantly and declares:

"I think it's time to go buy us a newspaper."

The Justice League walk to the Daily Planet. It has a large newsrack on both sides of the entrance. Green Lantern walks up, puts a dollar coin in the slot and takes out a newspaper. His eyes quickly scan over the paper. He swears under his breath.

"Woah, that bad?" Flash peeks over Lantern's shoulder.

"Yeah, 'that bad'. We're a good fifteen years in the future," Green Lantern turns the paper around so the others can see. Diana lets out a small wince, and Hawkgirl takes the paper gently, running her finger over the date in disbelief.

"Maybe it's not so bad," Superman says.

"Excuse you?"

"Well, it's only fifteen years. Most likely, the league is still a thing and we can ask for our-their? - help," Superman cheerfully announces. Batman tilts his head.

"Unless we've taken our future selves' places, in which case we're on our own," Batman takes the paper from Hawkgirl and flips through its pages. There are mentions of the Justice League but only off-hand. "Nothing world-ending seems to have happened recently, we're barely mentioned."

"Cheer up, B. We can figure out if your theory is right easily. We'll go fight some crime and see if ourselves show up," Superman smiles.

"We are all aware that they'll probably think we're imposters or evil alternate versions of them, right?" Flash's fingertips dance across the side of his thigh.

"We're reasonable people. Our future versions will try talking first, I'm sure of it," Superman pats Flash on the shoulder reassuringly.

"Most of us wouldn't resort to violence first, although others..." Green Lantern sends a quick glance at Batman.

"I can handle myself. Besides, a violent reaction to a look-a-like is warranted when you deal with Clayface on a regular basis," Batman adjusts his yellow utility belt slightly. Superman doesn't have to use his x-ray vision to know one or more are lined with lead. "It's as good an idea as any, Kal. We'll try it. If we don't encounter any of our future selves by the end of the day, we'll go to the Hall of Justice and see what is happening there."

Wonder Woman nods in agreement and asks, "Kal, do you hear any crimes in action? We should start as soon as possible."

After putting out a burning building, saving a child from their would-be captor, helping several elderly people across the street and rescuing several cats from trees-

"Seriously! How have we not bumped into one of us already? Even if Supes is off-world or something, one of us would've come to check us out by now," Flash grumbles. "Are we just... not together in the future? Are we no longer heroes? Maybe our mention in the newspaper was a fluke," he drums his hands against his arms, vibrating slightly.

"Hey, hey, slow down, Flash. It's okay, even without our future selves we will get back home. Besides, someone has to be here protecting Metropolis. I've heard snippets of some other crimes, but... they stop randomly, the criminals swear and the victims thank someone. I can't tell who, but they're fast, so it's probably me or you," Superman says warmly.

"Then why haven't you or me come yet?"

"I don't know, but if there is someone here, which I'm sure there is, then they'll head to the Hall of Justice to file one of our monthly reports. It is the end of the month, after all."

"Yeah... Yeah, Supes, you're right," Flash takes a deep breath. "We'll continue as we planned. Fight some crime, see if anyone shows up and then check out the Hall of Justice. If we can't get a hold of anyone, we'll just have to figure this out ourselves."

The Justice League nods unanimously. The others start to split into groups to cover more ground with a reminder from Batman to 'keep the comms on and check in hourly'. Green Lantern and Hawkgirl fly off in one direction, Martian Manhunter and Batman in another and Wonder Woman sets off by herself.

Superman goes to head off as well, except Flash tugs on the back of his cape.

"Hey, Supes?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks for the reassurance back there. I know it probably it didn't seem much to you but... it helped. Thanks," Flashes looks down, face red. His voice is quiet, unlike himself. Superman decides swiftly that he never wants to hear Flash's voice so meek again.

"Don't mention it, Flash."

"No, seriously. I was on the verge of a total freak out back there, and yet you knew exactly what to say and that means a lot to me and-" Flash's arms start to tremble. Superman notices.

"Flash, can I touch you?"

"-yes?" Flash says bewildered. Superman places his hands on Flash's arms. Flash almost pulls away but... Superman's grip isn't threatening or restraining. It doesn't hurt or stop any movement, it just... Sits there softly. A warm weight on Flash's arms.

"I'm glad I could help but you really don't need to thank me. I know the Justice League hasn't been a team for very long yet but... we fit. We fight well together and maybe our communication isn't the greatest yet but it'll get there, okay? And frankly, all I need to know right now is that my teammate is okay. So, are you okay, Flash?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. And really... I appreciate what you did- what you're doing, I mean," Flash chuckles.

"Do you want to go together? Pretty sure a bank robbery is about to take place twenty blocks north from here."

"You bet. Race you there?"

Superman blinks and then snorts. "Sure, why not?"

Stopping the bank robbery went without a hitch. The robbers were pretty low-risk criminals, carrying two pistols and one extra cartridge of ammo between them both. One of them had even forgotten to turn the safety off. Preventing the crime had gone well, great even but...

Something about the way the bank-goers looked at Superman left him feeling on edge. They looked confused, surprised even.

It doesn't make sense, Superman thinks. Looking at Flash surprised would be one thing but me? I'm always here, Metropolis is my city, Superman thinks.

The Justice League meet up in front of the Hall of Justice. Flash grins widely.

"Hey, guys!"

"You seem happier," Hawkgirl remarks.

"Me and Supes stopped a bank robbery together and guess what? One of the guys had the safety on his gun turned on! I think that's the easiest robbery I've ever been to."

"Good for you. Me and Lantern stopped a drug deal in process. Thankfully, they seemed to only be prepared for Superman. The only thing they were armed with was Kryptonite," Hawkgirl gestures to Green Lantern and he opens a fist. In it, there's two small shards of the green rock. Superman is quietly grateful when Batman takes it and stows it away in a lead-lined pocket of his utility belt.

"Batman and I caught a pair of thieves," Martain Manhunter adds.

"I caught three cars speeding to the point of being a danger to the other vehicles on the road," Wonder Woman pats her lasso.

The Justice League take a moment to relax outside the doors of the Hall of Justice before Superman speaks up.

"I'm surprised your crooks had kryptonite on them, Hawkgirl."

"Me and Green Lantern's crooks actually but continue."

"It's just... People here have seemed almost surprised to see me?"

"In what way?" Asks Martain Manhunter.

"Just... surprised. Not like when I first donned the suit but still... They were confused, like I wasn't meant to be there."

"It's a shame I didn't go with you then. I could've told you what the confusion was," Martian Manhunter regretfully sighs.

"Hindsight is twenty-twenty," Green Lantern says causally. "Besides, it could be something as simple as Supes being off-world at the minute or at his hide-out in the artic."

"Agreed. Do not beat yourself up over it, either of you," Diana places a hand on both Superman's and Martain Manhunter's shoulders. They both mumber their thanks.

"It's time we head in now," Batman says. With varying levels of anticipation, everyone nods.

They enter the Hall of Justice. It looks more well put together but other than that, it's exactly the same. Batman hums in approval whilst Flash zips in and out of every passing room, remarking on how every one is identical to their time's one.

Soon, they make it to the common room. Couches are laid out and there's an oval table in the middle. The zeta tubes line the back wall, all with the same glowing bases and clear glass doors. Superman pauses, tilting his head towards the direction of the kitchen.

"Someone's here," Superman whispers happily. Finally, they'd meet a future version of themselves, one who could hopefully help.

Footsteps come from the kitchen and the Justice League turn to face the door. The person walks out into the common room. Wonder Woman's eyes widen, Hawkgirl lets out a gasp, Green Lantern narrows his eyes in confusion and Flash's jaw drops. Both Martain Manhunter and Batman remain stoic.

Superman simply stares because standing there in the doorway of the kitchen is the most indescribable, impossible sight he has ever seen. A man- no, a teen- stands there in a black leather jacket and combat boots, his hair in a fade that poofs out into a pile of inky curls on the top of his head with sunglasses low on his nose.

But that wasn't the shocking bit, not even remotely. The truly chilling bit is that the cobalt blue eyes set in the boy's face are ones he sees in the mirror everyday. And even worse (better? Most confusingly?), the boy wears an eerily familiar suit underneath his open jacket and black tights. Blue, red and yellow with an eerily familiar crest. It's undeniable, Superman thinks.

Across the boy's chest is the crest of the House of El.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter two is here! Also, the first chapter on Wattpad has been edited to be the same as the one on here. (It took a little while because formatting between the two platforms is different on each.) Anyways, thanks for reading!

A Face To See Tomorrow

Chapter Summary

The Justice League meet someone new; someone who looks awfully familiar...

The boy takes his sunglasses off and seems to visually size up the Justice League. He puts his glasses in his pocket with a practised motion and says:

"What are you lot doing back? Thought you were all gonna be off-world for another week at least," the boy strides over to the nearest couch, flops down and kicks his feet up onto the table.

"Y-you've been... taking care of Metropolis while I'm away..?" Superman's voice is strained, feeling like something is caught in his throat. The boy rolls his eyes and rests his chin on one of his hands.

"Obviously?" The boy pauses and sits up straight. "Wait, is that why you came back? Because you don't trust me enough to take care of Metropolis for more than a week?" His face goes red with- embarrassment? Anger? Indignation?- emotion. He scowls at Superman.

"No!" Diana chimes in, having recovered from her shock. "No, of course not. I'm sure your Superman is very proud of you at the moment."

"My Superman? What do you mean, 'my Superman'?" The boy barely glances at Wonder Woman before turning back to squint at Superman.

"We are not your version of the Justice League. You see, we are from-"

"An alternate universe," Kal interrupts. "We're not sure how we got here but we were hoping this version of the Justice League would help," he smiles gently at the boy. The boy crosses his arms and plants his feet on the floor, leaning his crossed arms on his knees.

"Well, at the moment, they're not here. You'll have to settle for the Teen Titans if you want help. Either that or you could gather some of the solo-heroes."

"Thank you. What's your name?" Kal hurries to correct himself when the boy narrows his eyes further. "Your hero alias, I mean. Not your civilian identity."

"Superboy."

Kal fights back the urge to sob at the confirmation. His teammates give him an in sync concerned look that tells him he isn't succeeding in keeping the pain off his face. "And..?" Kal tries.

"And what?" Superboy's teeth audibly snap shut.

"Do you... Do you have a kryptonian name you'd be willing to share?" Kal sees Superboy pause for a moment and feels a flood of disappointment, relief and self-loathing at the idea that maybe he'd been wrong, maybe he had misunderstood the situation. And then Superboy speaks.

"Kon."

"No last name?" Martian Manhunter asks. Kal is glad because his throat seems to be doing its best impression of a squished straw, letting through only the tiniest sliver of air. At least someone is asking the important questions, he thinks.

"None that are mine to share," Kon says cryptically. The Justice League seems collectively stumped at his answer. The boy continues talking. "You guys can stay in your rooms in the Watchtower. I'll tell the others."

"You're awfully quick to offer us the rooms in the Watchtower. You haven't tested for DNA, followed no protocol whatsoever and have been completely at ease with us here," Batman chimes in. Green Lantern sends him a confused look. Kon simply sinks back into the couch.

"Your Superman, to borrow Wonder Woman's wording, has proved you're not from this world already," Kon glances at Superman. "Your reaction showed your ignorance of this world. Only if you lot were goons hired by Lex Luthor would that reaction make sense."

"What makes you sure we're not Lex Luthor's doing?" Martian Manhunter asks curiously. Both Green Lantern and Flash sigh exasperatedly. A dark look flashes across Kon's face.

"I know Lex's work. You seven are not it."

The Justice League zeta to the Watchtower. They all beeline to the meeting room, where everyone takes their respective seats. Everyone takes turns glancing at Superman. Diana is the first to speak up.

"Kal, why did you interrupt me back there? Not once had we discussed the possibility this may be an alternate universe," she says.

"That boy, Kon, proves this is an alternate universe. He doesn't exist in our world."

"Supes, with all due respect, that boy looked young. Really young," Green Lantern leans on the table. "And I mean, your planet was destroyed a while ago so there's no way he's from there. You know we won't judge, so think back a little bit. Is it possible that maybe he could be yours-"

"It's not."

"How isn't it?"

"Ignoring the fact the boy seemed older than fifteen, you mean? The first thing scientists did when I started wearing this suit was try and collect my DNA, trying to see what kind of 'meta' I was. One of the tests was to put human DNA and my DNA in a petri dish together," Superman explains.

"Invasive, much?" Lantern mutters.

"I thought you were always open about being an alien?" Flash asks curiously.

"It was before I had properly talked to any of the press."

"What was the result?" Diana inquires quietly.

"The kryptonian DNA ate away at the human DNA completely," Batman answers. "There was a rather derogatory news article about it. When researching Superman, I stumbled across it."

"It means me having a child with a human is impossible. Kon can't be my future child," Superman looks down at his hands clasped on top of the table.

"Who says the mother has to be human?" Flash gives Superman a gentle look and rests a hand on his back. "He could be your child with another alien," he says cheerfully.

"Can't be. Kon looks too kryptonian, too human, for his mother to be an alien. There aren't many human-passing aliens, especially on earth. And the few on earth are ones I know, ones that couldn't possibly be the other parent."

"Maybe his other parent was a shapeshifter, there are quite a few in our solar system," Martian Manhunter ponders aloud. Kal looks up and says:

"That's the most unlikely scenario. If we're trying to as realistic as possible, the most likely thing is that this is an alternate universe."

"He may have been another kryptonian child sent down to earth. It's possible that his pod was just a little late landing or opening," Hawkgirl taps at the side of her mask.

"The timing doesn't match up."

Flash pipes up, "could be a result of the space travel. I mean, we all know that travelling through space can screw with time." Several people shudder in their seats. They are well aware of that fact, unfortunately.

"And the fact apparently two kryptonians of the House of El were sent down to the same planet?"

"It's entirely possible you and him aren't biologically related," Batman says. Superman turns to look at him, confused.

"What? Why is he wearing the crest, then?"

"He's obviously younger than you. It's possible you saw a struggling, child kryptonian and took him under your wing," Batman's voice becomes lower and softer. "It would explain why he feels as though he can't share his last name. He may not know it, or maybe he's still in the process of taking your name. It's normal for kids who have been taken in to be... insecure about their place in the family."

"You think Supes would let someone who's not family wear the crest?" Flash asks.

"Family isn't always by blood or DNA. And going off by how Kal looks," Batman gestures to Kal's tired, mourning eyes, "he'd readily accept another kryptonian."

The Justice League waits for Superman to interject, to deny, to do anything. He picks at the corner of his cape and starts to speak.

"Batman's right. Kon... Even just seeing him has been a lot. He's the first other kryptonian I've seen and something in my chest just aches..." Superman gets out of his chair and starts to pace in small circles.

"I hope I'm wrong, I hope so badly that I'm wrong. I would love for us to go back home and for there to be something on the news or a tip off about some sort of space shuttle and for another kryptonian of whatever age to be there," he takes a deep breath and ignores the burning feeling in his eyes. He knows it's not heat vision.

"Humans are abundant, so maybe it's different but... If I saw another kryptonian, that would be it. We'd be family to me," tears stream down his face, landing in fat droplets on the floor. "I couldn't let them be alone... W-... When I got my powers, I had help." For a moment, Kal considers leaving it at that and pretending that that is all he wants to say, yet he continues.

"I had help from two lovely people who took me in. They're human and I love them but they had no idea what they were doing when I started developing heat vision and flight and super senses. I couldn't- can't - leave another kryptonian like that. Not in a million years," Kal stills and realises he's shaking. Tremors wrack his body as he tries to quiet his grief over family he'd never meet and the boy who's eyes looked like his that he will never see back home because back home, he is alone.

Back home, he is the last son of krypton.

Hands land on his arms. They are covered in smooth red fabric, cool to the touch; they're Flash's hands. Flash is stood by Kal's side, simply holding him as he falls apart.

More hands land on his back. Those of Martian Manhunter and Diana. They mumber hesitant but sincere words of comfort under their breaths.

"You shall be alright, Kal, but for now there is no fight or battle. You can let yourself be not alright and for as long as you need us, we shall stay here with you."

"It's alright to grieve what you've lost. I've done my fair share of grieving and it will hurt less eventually. Until then, know that we will stand by you. We can't fill the void of what you've lost but we are building something new here and now, with the League."

Hawkgirl and Green Lantern stand beside Kal in silence, their mere presence comforting in its own way.

Batman gets out of his chair last and reaches into his utility belt. He walks over to Kal and pulls out a black handkerchief. Kal can't help but to smile at the small yellow bat embroidered into one of its corners.

Kal wipes his wet eyes with it and gives a small smile. "Thank you. Thank you all."

The team separate, gravitating back to their own chairs. Flash stays beside Kal for an extra minute, hands resting on Kal's forearms gently. Kal smiles, leans towards Flash and quietly says, "Thank you. For you coming over here first, I mean. You could've just stood there, I wouldn't have thought any less of you if you did."

Flash squeezes Kal's arms gently before pulling away. He whispers, "Don't mention it. Right now, all I need to know is that my buddy is okay. So, Superman, are you okay?"

Kal chuckles wetly, half-heartedly scrubbing at the dried tear tracks on his cheeks. "Yeah, I'm okay."

They all head to their rooms for the night. As they get dressed for the night in their separate rooms, they look into their strangely full wardrobes with a feeling of satisfaction.

If they keep so many clothes in the Watchtower, they must spend a lot of time here, they think. A lot of time with their teammates may just be the best news they've had since arriving in this alternate world.

Martain Manhunter shifts underneath his bedsheets. Something about that boy, Kon, had been strange. Not bad, per say, but strange.

The emotions Kon had felt when seeing Superman weren't the feelings of familial affection, or child-like deference to a parent that would be expected from one's child but something else. Martain Manhunter had only felt it vaguely, in that quiet passive way that he simply can't help, but he could have sworn that Kon had felt dejected by Superman's imagined distrust in Kon's ability.

Most confusingly, the boy had felt indignant after the admittance that the Justice League were from another world.

It was peculiar. If the boy was close enough to wear the El family crest, shouldn't he have been overjoyed at seeing Superman? Shouldn't there have been a rush of affection, or at least a hum of content acknowledgement?

What is Martain Manhunter missing? What explanation would make Kon make sense?

A Story From Yesterday

Chapter Summary

It's the next day and the Justice League are ready to figure out what's going on! Except when they arrive at the Hall of Justice, a strange sight awaits them...

The Justice League wake up early. The day before, they and Superboy had planned to meet up in the Hall of Justice to discuss what they wanted to do next and who they wanted to go to for extra assistance, if anyone.

Superman isn't surprised when he's told he had zoned out when that talk was happening. He'd been much too occupied committing the boy's facial features to his memory (the boy who isn't his son, or sidekick or family because Kal-El belongs to a different time, a different world).

(A lonelier world.)

They all sit down to eat breakfast in the Watchtower's kitchen. For a moment, only the scraping of utensils against ceramic can be heard. Diana is the first to break the silence.

"Kal, are you going to be alright with Superboy around?" Her voice is kind, like she's approaching a spooked animal instead of a grown man. At first, Superman wants to bristle at the tone, remind her that he is a person and not a feral stray with a bite risk (because alien isn't the same as animal, isn't inherently dangerous). And then, he recognises her tone as the same one she uses on civilians who are frightened and deflates.

"I will be. This is my first time meeting another kryptonian and... I plan to make the most of it," Superman spoons some cereal into his mouth. Green Lantern drops his buttered toast back onto his plate and looks at Kal with a sombre expression.

"I hate to ask this but are you sure that's a good idea, Supes? Like you said, it's unlikely you'll meet a counterpart of the boy in our world. Wouldn't bonding with him and then not being able to see him again hurt?"

"It will but I think it'll be worth the pain. I can't just avoid him and honestly? I don't want to. For as long as we'll be here, I may as well be on friendly terms with Kon," Superman gently smiles into his cereal. "I'm happy for this universe's version of me. Kon seems like a great kid."

"He does," Martian Manhunter nods. "Although something seems off to me."

"What do you mean? You think the kid is up to something?" Hawkgirl stabs at an egg with her fork.

"Not up to something but..." he hums. "You are all aware of my passive ability to sense emotions? Especially the strong ones?"

Nods from all around the table.

"When he saw Superman, I didn't sense any of the emotions you'd expect from seeing a family member again after a long time. His feelings were surprisingly harsh," Martian Manhunter stares down at his pancakes. He thinks of how brittle the boy's emotional state had felt, fragile as the finest of cobwebs. "I suspect that maybe there is currently a tension between Superboy and his Superman. It would explain his immediate assumption that you had come back because you didn't trust him."

"Oh..." Superman blinks. "That's...not great, admittedly, but I think it'll be fine. I'm sure whatever argument he and my counterpart got into was minor. It can't possibly affect us getting home."

"Wait!" Flash calls out. "Maybe that's what Superboy meant about his name. If he and his Superman had a fallout, maybe he feels like Superman wouldn't want him using the name 'El' anymore." Diana looks up from her bacon and then starts to speak.

"You mean he feels as though he doesn't deserve to be seen as part of the House of El?" Diana's face bunches up slightly at the nose. "Maybe you're right, Kal. Talk to the boy. While you may not be responsible for his apparent upset, you may be able to help ease his worries until his Kal is back."

Kal nods, more intent than ever to form a bond with the young Kon.

Cutlery scrapes against bowls and plates as the Justice League finish their breakfast. The clock strikes ten.

All of them get out of their chairs and head to the zeta tubes. With the familiar warmth of teleportation on their skin, they find themselves in the Hall of Justice.

"He should be here soon," Flash gives Superman a supportive pat on the arm. "Good luck with your whole thing."

"He's already here," Martian Manhunter says lowly.

"What?" Hawkgirl's wings rustle against her back as she looks around. Batman makes a hushing motion as he creeps towards one of the couches and pulls the cushions off.

There lies Superboy in an oversized T-shirt and joggers with its drawstring knotted in the front. Superman absentmindedly notes that the shirt is a faded pink that clashes horribly with his lime green joggers.

"Did he fall asleep waiting for us?" Diana asks. Batman shakes his head.

"What he's wearing is clearly sleepwear."

"Why would he be wearing his night clothes in the Hall of Justice?"

Kon whines in his sleep and rolls over onto his stomach. Flash stares and says:

"Okay, I have slept on a couch before, and it was most definitely not comfortable. For him to be this asleep, he'd have to be exhausted or used to sleeping on the couch. With how those cushions were arranged, my bet is that Superboy here has been sleeping on the couch for a while," Flash taps his foot.

"Maybe it has something to do with his and his Kal's argument?" Hawkgirl speculates aloud. Kal looks horrified.

"There is no way I'd let him sleep in the Hall of Justice instead of at home!"

"Kal, keep in mind that this is an alternate universe. You wouldn't, but your counterpart might," Hawkgirl sends Kal a pitying look. Flash jumps up.

"Hold on, maybe alternate Superman doesn't know? He is off-world, after all."

The Justice League goes silent. None of them voice what Flash's suggestion would mean. That somehow Kon thought he wasn't welcome, wasn't wanted after one argument. Either it was one nasty argument or...

Kal breathes out slowly. I have my work cut out for me, he thinks.

Kon stirs and flips himself over sluggishly. He yawns, smacks his lips and opens his eyes. He blinks up at the Justice League and, in a much too casual tone, says, "Good morning."

Green Lantern can not believe this kid. Greeting them as though they hadn't caught him sleeping underneath the couch cushions like a modern-day stowaway.

"Good morning to you as well, Kon," Kal tries to sound cheerful. "May I ask why you were sleeping on the couch?" Kon blinks at Kal slowly, an action more befitting of a large drowsy cat than a teenager.

"I always sleep here?" Kal's smile doesn't falter but his eyes take up a look of pure confusion.

"Excuse you?"

Kon gets up and grabs the cushions from Batman. He rearranges them onto the couch; put back so meticulously, it looks like nobody had slept there at all. "I sleep here. Where does your Superboy sleep?" He asks almost accusingly.

"There is no Superboy in our world," Martian Manhunter answers. Kon eyes light up in... Understanding?

"Oh, I get it now," Kon turns to face the Justice League. "Anyways, we need to discuss who could help you guys, if you want the help that is."

Kon strides in the direction of the meeting room, still in his tacky sleepwear. The Justice League follow behind with one question in all of their minds.

What on earth was that about?

"So, first up there is the Teen Titans. Me being one of them. There's quite a few of us; me, Robin, Aqualad, Miss Martian, so on and so forth," Kon lists the member of the Teen Titans with a practised ease. Martian Manhunter perks up.

"Miss Martian?"

Kon's face scrunches up, bewildered. "Yeah, your niece?" Martian Manhunter tilts his head.

"My family are all dead, Superboy. At least, in my world, they are."

Kon's eyes go wide and he snaps his fingers. "Oh! Not your biological niece, I mean your adoptive niece. She landed on earth around three years ago, I think?"

Martain Manhunter looks shaken. Kal leans over and pats his hand. They share a look of mutual grief. Martain Manhunter looks back to Kon.

"Is it possible for me to meet her before we go back?" Kon shakes his head.

"Sorry, she and some others are on a group mission with Shazam. They won't be back for a long while."

"I see."

Kon squirms, evidently uncomfortable with the conversation. "There's also the Titans."

"You have already mentioned them," Diana says.

"No, I mentioned the Teen Titans. The Titans aren't teenagers, at least not anymore. They were the original Teen Titans, they just changed the name after they grew up."

"Who do the the 'Titans' include?" Hawkgirl asks.

"Nightwing, Raven, Cyborg, Starfire and Beast Boy."

Batman hums in approval. "I recognise those names, Robin has told me about them, they're his teammates."

"Wait, I thought that Superboy said Robin was part of the Teen Titans?" Flash asks.

"He is," Kon declares unhelpfully.

"Robin would no longer be a teen at this time," Batman looks at Kon. "He'd be an adult."

Kon looks confused for a moment before facepalming and saying, "Oh, you mean the first Robin. I've been talking about the third." He chuckles.

"What do you mean, 'the third Robin'?" Batman clenches and unclenches his gauntlets repeatedly.

"Well, adults usually don't want to go around dressed as traffic-directing elves so the former Robins took on their own hero identities. 'Robin' for them was like training wheels, I guess. I don't really understand the whole ritual of it but it makes them happy so whatever. Nightwing is the first Robin. A lot of his teammates still call him 'Rob'," Kon babbles.

"And who were the Robins after... Nightwing?"

"Your kids, obviously?" Kon says flippantly and then stares as Batman lets out an exhale that sounds concerningly like a broken kettle.

Kal looks between Martian Manhunter still reeling from the shock of another martian and Batman's twitching lips and thinks, this is going to be a long day.

The Faces From The Future

Chapter Summary

Meeting people from the future isn't any easier the second time around. At least one's a familiar face... Sort of?

Sitting around the Hall of Justice meeting table, all that could be heard was the tapping of Flash's foot against the ground. A fast paced, repetitive tap, tap, tap against the floor.

Superboy had left to call in Batman's sidekicks, both former and current.

Batman is still, so still that his chest barely moves to breath - most gargoyles would look livelier than Batman in this moment. Martian Manhunter isn't any better either, looking somewhere over by the doorway as though lost in thought.

Superboy, the Robins, Miss Martain; their existence enough to shake the foundation of some of the strongest heroes. Superman looks over to his shaken companions and finds himself inexplicably grateful. At least when his mystery relative popped up, he had been the only one experiencing a world shattering revelation at the time.

"You know..." Flash starts. "I'd like to ask him about the other heroes but honestly? I'm scared as to what his answer will be."

"Aren't we all?" Green Lantern sighs and looks at everyone in turn. "Manhunter, Batman, it's good to keep in mind this is an alternate universe. It's probable that these... acquaintances of yours don't exist in our world."

"For better or worse," Martian Manhunter replies.

"I'd toast to that!" Superman tries to smile; his team had been a steady pillar of support in his time of need, the least he can do is try to keep morale up while his teammates try and piece themselves back together.

Batman uncharacteristically snorts. His voice is trembling slightly, a pitch off to Kal's ears.

Hawkgirl and Diana look at each other. Diana leans forward, and starts to speak;

"Superboy shall be back soon. Batman, the vigilantes he will be bringing are associated with you. Do you wish to remain in the room or leave?" Her voice was filled with soft sympathy that, paired with the warm eyes of his teammates, purveyed their unspoken meaning effortlessly.

'We won't judge if you need to leave' is what their expressions so clearly meant. And for a moment, a very short moment, Batman considers it. He considers the Robin he has at home, wonders how one turned to two turned to three and then lets the thought die. It is obvious how it happened; just like how he took in his first Robin. Children, boys from the sound of it, who reminded him of himself. Ones he couldn't let fall into the darkness that permeated the streets of Gotham.

He would never let the shadowed underbelly of Gotham take another child's heart, no matter how many bones he needs to break or children he will need to take under the kevlar cape of the Bat.

"I'll stay."

"It's okay, you don't have to feel guilt- what?" Diana blinks owlishly.

"I'll stay," he repeats. Diana sends him a grin after she recovers from her shock. Green Lantern raises his eyebrows quizzically.

"Are you sure? I'm pretty confident you're allergic to emotions, a reunion may be too much for you," it's said humorously but there is concern lurking in the depths of Lantern's green eyes.

"I'll be fine," Batman speaks confidently with the same surety he uses when discussing his varied arrange of gadgets and his rogue gallery's unique quirks.

Superman nods at Batman. He then looks over at Martian Manhunter, "John, I'm sorry that your... Miss Martian is away. Despite the stress that may come with being aware of an alternate relative's existence, it would have been nice for you to have had the choice to see her and interact with her."

Martian Manhunter raises a hand. "Do not worry, Kal. It is... somewhat upsetting but I am fine. As much as meeting another Martian would be... nice right now, we have more important matters on our plate."

They all nod in unison. Then, the wait begins.

The zeta tubes call out, "B-04, B-01, B-13, B-20."

"Holy- it goes all the way to twenty now?" Flash splutters. The Justice League all share surprised looks until Batman stands up - thankfully, back to his usual, composed self.

"Let's go meet them in the common rooms," He announces.

They all march towards the common room, preparing themselves for whoever awaits them on the other side. It's an alternate universe, they all think, who knows what's different? Age, memories, personality... Nothing in an alternate dimension is set in stone.

They step in and the first thing they all notice is the iconic colours of Robin's suit. Red, yellow, green all wrapped around a physique too short and thin to be that of Batman's usual protégé.

This is obviously the most recent Robin. This Robin's cape is black on the exterior and yellow on the interior, unlike his own Robin's fully yellow cape. Another change is the steel-toed combat boots (protective and possibly offensive - Batman is impressed). And with a subtle sigh of relief, Batman notes this one has full-length pants.

The next person they notice is a tall, lean man clad in black and blue. His suit is mostly a shining black but with blue highlights and the silhouette of a bird across where his chest begins and collar bones end. He wears a black domino across his face with the same white out lenses as Batman and Robin. This one is presumably Nightwing, Batman thinks.

The last one they notice is already slouched on the couch, speaking amicably to Kon. He wears a red helmet, unlike the other two. A leather jacket is stretched across his large shoulders over a black chest plate with a red Batman symbol across the front (taller than Batman but not broader). He's the most visibly armoured and with a spike of panic, Batman notices the full holster that is slung over the man's hips. There is no name to pair with this one.

Kon looks towards the Justice League and gestures for the three newcomers to stand in a group. They all easily take their place in a line up, with Nightwing to the left and Robin to the right. The tallest stands in the middle.

Kon points at each in turn, "He's Nightwing, the first Robin. The one beside him is Red Hood, the second Robin. Finally, there's Robin, the current Robin. Nightwing is part of the Titans, Robin is with the Teen Titans and Red Hood..." Kon trails off and looks towards Red Hood. The man shrugs.

"I mostly operate alone in Crime Alley but when I'm not, I'm helping out Artemis and Bizarro." The Justice League looks at Red Hood and seven overlapping voices all ask;

"Bizarro?"

Red Hood nods. His modulated voice makes telling whether or not he's serious difficult as he says, "Yeah, It's my friend's name. We've asked if he wants to go by something else but... he doesn't seem to want to. Not sure if he likes the name or if he's just too used to it to consider changing it."

"Who names themselves Bizarro?" Flash mumbles. Kon turns his face towards Flash and begins to talk loudly.

"Not everyone who goes by a name, chooses it. Besides, what matters isn't anyone else's opinion but that of the owner of the name," his words are clipped. Martian Manhunter looks at Kon curiously, sensing waves of aggravation coming off of the boy. It feels personal in a way, which is... Strange.

Flash nods apologetically, glad that whoever 'Bizarro' is isn't in the room. Sometimes, he forgets his verbal filter and apparently, the stress of the last not-even twenty-four hours has made him forget his manners. "I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to be rude. It was just... Unexpected and I said the first thing that came to mind."

Kon looks Flash up and down in an eery mirror of their first meeting. Seemingly happy with what he has found, he makes eye contact with Flash, "It's alright, Zippy. I should have realised you meant no harm."

Red Hood speaks up, "Besides, Biz wouldn't be offended if he were here. Dude's a huge teddy bear, really. Though that does mean others sometimes have to stick up for him, so don't be surprised if we get a little defensive over the big guy, okay?"

Superman tries to mentally imagine a man big enough that the bulky Red Hood would call them 'big guy'. The only person he's seen both taller and broader than Red Hood is himself.

"Who's 'we'?" Hawkgirl asks.

"Me, Superboy and Artemis, if you get to meet her."

"I understand you and Artemis - you've said you work together - but why Superboy? What's his stake in it?" She questions. Surprisingly, it's Kon himself who speaks up.

"Me and Bizarro are family, brothers actually," Kon plays with his earlobe which is sloppily pierced. Superman wonders how Kon managed to get his ear pierce when his kryptonian DNA should leave him invulnerable to any needles or sharp objects in general until what the boy had said catches up to him.

"Brothers?" Superman chokes out. Batman and Martian Manhunter share knowing looks as they discretely move towards Superman, both standing on either side of him. Kon doesn't seem to notice. All of the Robins tilt their heads slightly, like triplet owls.

"Yeah," Kon says. "Although, I guess you may not have him either."

"Is he... available?" Superman asks.

Kon shrugs. Red Hood steps forward and answers for him. "Biz is busy at the moment. Besides, that isn't what we came here to talk about, is it?"

The Justice League nods. Diana nods at Red Hood, "Well, it is lovely to make your acquaintance. And your brothers..?"

A verberating sound comes from Red Hood. He motions wiping something off the lenses of his helmet and clutches his stomach. Only then does Superman realise that Hood is laughing.

"Well, you all have already met Dickiebird." At the Justice League's confused looks and Batman's small sigh, Hood elaborates. "I mean Nightwing. Us birds use a lot of nicknames and shorthand but don't worry; you'll pick up on who's who fast. For example, Nightwing is usually Dickiebird or when I'm particularly mad at him, Dickface."

Green Lantern and Flash let out ugly snorts. Batman remains stoic, although his shoulders shake. Diana and Hawkgirl let out similar mumbles that sound like "boys."

Red Hood then nods to the littlest of them. "Robin, the current one, is the youngest of us three as you can probably guess. Luckily for you, we usually just call him Robin unless we want to mess with him - if we say Baby Bird we mean him."

The Robin in question lets out an indignant squawk of protest. Nightwing ruffles Robin's hair and, with a toothy grin, says, "I don't know what Little Wing means - I call Robin here Baby Bird solely out of affection. Oh, and if I say Little Wing, I mean Red Hood. Also, if anybody says Hood or Red, you can assume it's him."

Nightwing directs his shining grin at the Justice League and then hones in on Batman specifically. "Hey, B."

"Hello. I'm told you're the first Robin?"

"Yes. I suppose it could be different in your world, though, but... From your expression, I'd say it's the same." Nightwing shrugs afterwards, as though it's a simple afterthought.

"Yes, although I could be wrong. It's a strange situation like that."

"I know, right? Like, holy alternate dimensions, Batman! This is so bizarre." Nightwing chuckles. Surprisingly, so does Batman.

Robin waves a hand in the air and, in a quiet voice, says, "Come on, we need a plan of action. Let's go to the meeting room."

A Plan For The Present

Chapter Summary

Now is the time for action! And that means figuring out how the Justice League got here - one step forward to going back... wait, how is Luthor involved in this?

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Unintentional self-injury, blood. Neither are graphically described but I thought it would be best to warn you all.

The Justice League sits on one side of the table and those from the alternate universe sit on the other. The Justice League are all straight-backed with arms either crossed or folded in their laps. Contrastingly, those of the other universe seem relaxed; Kon and Red Hood are slouched back in their chairs whilst Nightwing is leaning his elbows on the table - Robin is the only exception, equally as professional in his posture as the Justice League.

Robin is the first to speak.

"First and foremost, we need to know how you got here. Was it purposeful? A horrible accident? What's the deal?" The Justice League looks at each other and unanimously shrugs. Kal looks at Robin.

"We don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"We don't know. We were at the end of a meeting and then both me and John started to feel strange... Somehow, a second after that, we showed up here." Kal shrugs again, at a complete loss.

"Alright, not great but I can work with that," Robin gets up and begins to pace. His brothers and Kon turn in their chairs to look at him. "Did you guys appear in the Watchtower or Hall of Justice?"

Flash taps the table and says, "Neither. We appeared in the middle of Metropolis."

Robin spins on his heels and levels his white lenses on Superman. "Is what Flash said true for all of you?" Superman nods. "If I gave you a map, could you pinpoint exactly where you

appeared?" Another nod.

Robin quickly strides out of the room, presumably to get a map of Metropolis. Diana looks at the door he left through.

"Is he normally so..." she gestures vaguely with her hands. Red Hood makes a noise made indecipherable by his voice modulator whilst Kon chuckles good-naturedly.

Nightwing ends up answering her question. "If he's been given a task, he's like this. Baby Bird is one hell of a detective, although he'd never say that about himself..."

"Why wouldn't he?" Diana asks.

"He compares himself to me and Hood too much, especially Hood."

Red Hood sits up straighter. "Not sure why. I was a major screw-up as Robin," Red Hood's voice is lower than usual even under the strong distortion. Batman goes still.

Nightwing turns toward Hood, his domino scrunching up around the lenses. "No, you weren't, Little Wing. Honestly, you and Robin have the same problem. You both compare yourselves to others too much."

"Hard not to, Boy Wonder. You leave large shoes to fill, no matter who takes on the mantle."

"That's where you're wrong," Nightwing puts his hand on top of Hood's and begins to talk louder. "The best thing about Robin being passed down is that everyone adds something, everyone brings something new. Neither I nor Robin can talk so well with the Crime Alley folk as you do and no Robin has ever been as analytical as Robin is now."

Red Hood bumps his shoulder into Nightwing's affectionately. They look back to the Justice League. Batman relaxes into his seat.

Kon clears his throat and asks, "Does anyone have any questions before Robin comes back with the map?"

Green Lantern nods. "I do. Why were you sleeping under the couch cushions this morning? You know, instead of on them?"

Kon flushes red, and the two men next to him look at him as though they have only just realised that Superboy is still in his nightwear. Nightwing smiles.

"So, the clothes do fit you alright, then?" Kon, relieved at the change of topic, nods.

"Yeah, they're really comfy. Thank you again." Kon rubs at his neck. Red Hood shrugs.

"Don't mention it. If you didn't wear them, they would end up living in the attic back home. We're just glad they fit you right. You should probably get changed, though."

Nightwing laughs, "Yeah, don't want to answer the call of crime looking like that, do you?"

Kon is gone in a flash and returns in his suit and the jacket from yesterday. Batman notices how similar the jackets Superboy and Red Hood wear are. Apparently, Hood does the same thing because he nods at Superboy's outfit and says;

"I knew you would like the leather jackets. You seemed like the type," Red Hood brushes off his own jacket.

Green Lantern crosses his arms. "That's lovely and all but does anyone care to explain why a child was sleeping in the couch of the Hall of Justice? Superhero or not, that's weird."

Robin walks in with the map and pushes it into Superman's arms along with a thick marker. "Here you go!"

After blinking owlishly at Robin, Superman marks down the place and begins to speak. "I agree with Lantern. Why wasn't Kon sleeping at home? And why is he wearing you guys' old clothes?"

"Waste not, want not?"

"Safety reasons."

"None of your business."

Kon looks between Nightwing, Red Hood and Robin as they all answer simultaneously with different answers. The three seem to realise this as with one shared glance they all say;

"All of the above?"

Green Lantern raises an eyebrow. "We're not going to get a straight answer on this, are we?" The silence is answer enough.

"Anyways," Robin calls out. "Are you done marking the map?" Superman nods. Robin swiftly takes the map and splays it across the table. "Well, would you look at that," he whistles.

Red Hood leans over to look at the map. "That explains a lot."

Nightwing shrugs, "Doesn't explain how he got away with it, though."

Superboy frowns. "Of course, he'd get away with it. He's one of the only people alive who could get away with stone cold murder. All he would have to do is throw money at the right person and the evidence would be gone like that," he clicks his fingers and his eyes flash red for a moment. Swiftly, he presses the heels of his palms against them.

Hawkgirl stands up and looks at the map. She raises her head, exasperated. "Are any of you going to explain what you're talking about? This map means nothing to us." She shakes her head. "It's not even labelled."

Robin perks up. "I can explain that!" He points to where the spot Superman marked is. An alleyway in a block of unremarkable skyscrapers abstracted as squares. "That is where you all

appeared, which is strange because it's not where you were when you were transported. That means that it is highly doubtful that your... relocation was a natural phenomenon."

Martian Manhunter nods along and then starts to speak as Robin stops to breathe. "Yet you could have told us that without the map."

Robin nods. "Yes, but that's not what me and the others were talking about. Sorry about that by the way, it's easy for us to assume everyone is following along with what we're saying. Me and the former Robins were all trained the same so..."

"So they are on the same wavelength, so to speak," Superboy finishes. Robin smiles gratefully and then continues.

"What's most notable about where you all appeared is the buildings that it's next to," Robin points to the three buildings, all surrounding the alleyway. "This tells me that most likely your arrival here was caused or aided by something with these buildings."

"It could be a coincidence," Flash says.

"Unlikely. These buildings have always been unusual in that the owner of these buildings are the same person. And this person never puts his buildings in clusters like this."

Red Hood pipes up, "Plus, he's been real secretive about the purpose of the buildings to the public. That place has the highest security on the block, fingerprint scanners, facial recognition and all that pizazz."

Nightwing gently takes the marker from Robin and circles all three buildings. "The buildings are also strangely unremarkable considering how they are usually designed with huge logos plastered all over them."

Kon sits down, still covering his eyes and says in a strained voice, "Not to mention you have shown up here conveniently when our Justice League were away. The placement, the timing, everything all points in the same direction."

"And that direction would be..?" Hawkgirl steps forward slightly, curious.

"Lexcorp," Batman's protégés scowl.

"Lex Luthor," Kon grits out. Blood seeps through his fingers. Alarmed, Superman jumps up and rushes to Kon's side.

"You're bleeding!"

"I'm fine. Give me a minute."

"You are not fine, you are hurt. Let me see," Kal goes to gently pry Kon's hands from his face. Kon hisses when Kal touches him.

"Unless you want lasers to the face, I wouldn't do that."

A Past Wound Reopened

Chapter Summary

The Justice League go on the defensive, even though it turns out it's not necessary.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains blood and injury just like the last one but here it is more descriptive.

Another chapter is here! It felt strange rewriting such an angsty chapter whilst in a good mood (I finished writing a fic of mine recently) but it was fun.

The Justice League gets up from their seats, defensive at the perceived threat towards one of their own. Hawkgirl's mace rests against her thigh, Wonder Woman's hand twitches toward her lasso and Batman's fingers rest on his trusty utility belt. Flash, Martian Manhunter and Lantern simply stiffen, widening their stances.

Superman doesn't move his hand from where it hovers restlessly above Kon's hands. He looks at the gleaming blood dripping through the boy's fingers and longs to help but... Kon couldn't have been clearer about his refusal and who was Superman to deny this child (not his child, not his blood, not even his to care for) his bodily autonomy?

"Justice League, stand down," Superman says. Even if the threat was unnecessary, he wouldn't begrudge the child setting boundaries. Kon makes a small, curious sound.

"Stand down..? What do you mean?" Kon's hands relax some. Hawkgirl ignores him, ruffling her feathers.

"Kal, the kid just threatened you! Not even subtly at that. You seriously don't see something wrong?"

Robin, Nightwing and Red Hood step forward protectively. They stand between Kon and the Justice League with the eldest two at the forefront.

"Threatened?" Kon asks. There's a pause in which Hawkgirl makes a disgruntled huff.

"Oh...Oh! No, no, no, that was not a threat, it was a fact. I don't... It's not purposeful, it just happens occasionally." Kon finally removes his hands from over his eyes with a wet squelch.

Superman's eyes follow the blood that spills onto the floor - it smells of strongly of iron. Superman tears his gaze from the bloody floor and looks back up at Kon.

The top half of Kon's face is covered with blood like a morbid recreation of Robin's domino mask. Superman lets out a choked whimper. "It's over now anyway."

Superman reaches for Kon's face and then stops, licks his lips and says, "can I touch your face, please? Just to clean it up." Kon blinks at him warily but nods slowly.

Superman speeds to the kitchen, wets a towel and is back in the blink of an eye. He kneels before where Kon sits, looking out of place on the Hall of Justice's shining floors. He gently dabs at Kon's face, taking in the boy's familiar swollen eyelids. To the average person it may look like the result of crying or hay-fever but Kal would know that irritated pink skin anywhere. After all, it's how he looks after battles involving Luthor; involving kryptonite. If he tries using his heat vision too soon after being in the presence of kryptonite, his still delicate skin will go red with residual heat. To see the look on another kryptonian, though, is horrific.

"Why didn't you stop?" Kal begins ruining the towel over Kon's hands. Poor, small hands stained with blood and marred with burnt skin. Kal had never wondered why only his eyes were completely immune to his lasers but now he curses his biology. Seeing such small hands so damaged makes him think of the more severe house fires, of those times where he doesn't succeed in saving everyone. Those times are few and far between but seeing even one person rolled out of a smoking building on a gurney is too many.

Kon jerks back and venom coats his words as he says, "Don't you think I would if I could? Do you think I enjoy fearing how badly I could hurt someone if I weren't careful? There's a reason I was covering my eyes, moron."

"You can't control it?" Kal whispers. He had always had some form of control over his heat vision, some form of unconscious action like breathing or blinking. To think Kon didn't have that is... Curious. Dangerous.

"Did I not just say that?" More metallic red drops hit the floor. Kal reaches for the boy's hands again but refrains when Kon shouts, "Quit it! I've had enough of you for one day. Go play house with somebody else." Kon is out of the room before anyone reacts. Kal sits there, dumbfounded, with a wet bloodied towel in one hand.

Robin shakes his head. "I'll go and check up on Kon."

Red Hood turns his helmet in Robin's direction. "He was too fast for you to have seen where he went."

"I don't need to see it to know where he's going."

Nightwing hums and then clicks his fingers. "The red room?"

"The red room."

Red Hood's helmet lets out a vibrating noise. "Why would the kid want to be there?"

"You wouldn't get it, Hood. You're used to Bizarro and, as similar as he and Kon are, there is a major difference. Bizarro is an adult."

Nightwing nods. "Yeah, have to agree with Babybird on this one. Not only that but... Bizarro is overwhelmingly positive. Which is great! But also not how people usually are, meaning you can't really apply his logic to Kon, if that makes sense?"

Red Hood nods slowly. "Guess so. Biz is really one of a kind... You go take care of Kon, Dickiebird and I have this handled."

Robin leaves, his cape sweeping behind him.

"What's the red room?" Flash asks.

"A room lined with lead that has red sunlamps as its only source of light," Nightwing explains. "Originally, it was for when red kryptonite was involved but Kon has been making use of it when his powers go out of control. He'll rest there until he feels better."

Kal shudders at the mention of red kryptonite. The pure unfiltered rage it causes... Red kryptonite, while not deadly in and of itself, is most certainly one of the most sinister. "So, he just sits there? Alone?"

"No. Quite often, either me or Robin will sit with him. His team does so as well but less frequently."

"Oh, that's good," Kal twirls the towel between his hands. It's still warm and tacky from blood. "It seemed like he had history with Luthor?"

Red Hood plucks the towel out of Kal's hands. "Yeah. His mention was probably what triggered the kid's heat vision. It's an emotional response, I think?" He roots around in his pocket.

Kal dusts himself off. "Alright... Would you be willing to explain why he has such a strong reaction to Luthor?"

"Not my place."

"I see."

Red Hood nods. He leans down to wipe the floor clean of any spilled blood and then straightens back up. Unexpectedly, he then pulls out a lighter and sets the towel on fire. Kal blinks at the display and Martian Manhunter reels back faster than Superman does when faced with kryptonite.

The reflection of the flickering fire dances across Red Hood's helmet. Surprisingly, the burning orange embers seem fitting when flitting over glossy red metal and pure white lenses.

The towel burns in Hood's hand, crumbling to black ash. Hood drops it and puts out the lingering orange flame with the heel of his boot. There is nothing left of the towel.

"You should go wash your hands," Red Hood says nonchalantly. "Wouldn't want to have to burn them too."

The Justice League stand there, most still looking at the pile of charred remains of the towel on the floor.

"What?" Superman splutters.

"Kidding. Well, mostly at least. I'm inclined to trust Kon's judgement of you all but until I have solid evidence I'm not taking unnecessary risks. Go wash your hands, Supes."

Superman looks toward Nightwing, who from his impression was the more understanding and, most importantly, understandable one of the two. Nightwing just shrugs and points to the kitchen. "You know where the sinks are, don't you?"

Superman silently walks to the kitchen. Nightwing follows.

As Superman begins washing his hands, Nightwing begins speaking. "I'm sorry but Hood is right. Kon, as clever as he is, sometimes lets his feelings affect his judgement more than it should. Meaning we can't be lax around any of you, even if we do believe you."

"I don't understand. You and your brother make it sound like burning a towel and making me wash my hands is preventing something catastrophic. It makes no sense," Superman finishes washing his hands and turns the tap off. He dries his hands off.

"I'm hoping the fact you think that means we can trust you're not one of Luthor's," Nightwing leaves the kitchen, apparently satisfied. Kal leaves afterwards.

Sitting in the meeting room, the lack of Kon and Robin's presence is felt acutely. Both Nightwing and Red Hood seem to sit straighter and have become more tense without their third sat beside them.

And Kon? It is like everyone's eyes keep wandering to his empty chair, none more than Superman's.

Superman still feels the warmth of blood on his clean hands and the phantom feeling of too tender skin beneath one of his hands as he wipes away the blood off his- the boy. A nonsensical feeling but one that leaves Superman's stomach in knots. After all, he wasn't able to patch Kon up properly.

"So, that's the long and short of it. It has to be one of Lex Luthor's plots. You see that now, right?"

The Justice League gives hums of agreement and the meeting is called to a close. Both Nightwing and Red Hood leave through the Zeta tubes, saying that Robin will return to them when he feels like it.

The Justice League go and do the same, Zeta tubing back to the Watchtower. Lantern and Hawkgirl head toward the common room, Diana and Flash head towards the kitchen and Batman goes to his room. Martian Manhunter and Superman both sit beside the Zeta tubes.

"It only gets more confusing the more we know, doesn't it?" J'ohn asks.

"Unfortunately."

"Apparently, Kon has an adult brother which does prove you right. This must be an alternate universe."

"I know."

"Did you have the same issues as young Superboy does when you were younger?" J'ohn turns toward Superman fully, blatantly curious.

"No, never. It's instinctual, once your brain catches up with your heat vision it's quick to stop. At least it was that way for me."

"His feelings are no less confusing. Even what Superboy said didn't entirely make sense to me. Playing house is a game for children, correct?"

Superman runs a hand over the flooring. "Yes."

"How were you at any point 'playing house'?"

"It's a metaphor. It has a couple of different meanings but given the context I think he was saying something along the lines of 'stop playing nice' or to stop doing traditionally parental things?"

"This universe is... concerning. Why would Kon hold such anger towards you?"

"I don't know, J'ohn. I really don't know."

A Way To Stem Future Bleeding

Chapter Summary

The Justice League talk to each other and Superman goes to The Batman. This can only go well, right?

Chapter Notes

I'm not as familiar with Hawkgirl and Green Lantern as I am with the others so I hope their part is okay?

Superman and Martian Manhunter bid each other a curt goodbye. Superman walks aimlessly, finding himself at Batman's door. He debates with himself for a moment before deciding that nothing can make this situation worse than it already is. He goes to knock and the door opens.

"This is about Kon, isn't it?" Batman asks, his large frame taking up a good portion of the doorway.

"That and... Some other things."

Batman moves out of the way and goes to sit in the chair in front of the desk. Numerous case files are scattered across the desk, sticky notes strewn over them - all written on with red pen. The handwriting was inconsistent. There was Batman's non-descript, legible writing but also one that was akin to a doctor's writing - uniquely indecipherable in every conceivable way. Superman sits on the bed, looking curiously at the piles of cases.

As though reading Superman's mind, Batman says, "Not my work. It was like this when I walked in yesterday. Someone else's handwriting is on it as well and it's not Robin's... Or at least not my current Robin's, Nightwing as he seems to go by now."

"Current Robin's..? You make it sound like you think it's likely you'll have others."

"I didn't before I came here but... Seeing the boys - my boys - today has made me realise something. If another child ever were to fall into the darkness as I have and I didn't do everything in my power to stop it, I wouldn't ever forgive myself. So yes, I do think that I may take in others." Superman goes to interrupt, to declare how unlikely that the same two boys would later fall into the pits of Gotham and even later, Batman's care. But he doesn't get a chance because Batman continues.

"Is it likely to be these future's boys? No, but they are Batman's Robins in this world and they deserve my respect and care the same as my current does."

"So, you don't care that may never be your... your boys in our world?" Superman feels his throat tighten.

"I do care, that's why I think this way. It hurts knowing that maybe the reason one of those boys aren't back home in our universe is that they've already fallen. They may be dead or injured or going down a bad path but they are also just as likely to be fine. It's possible in our world that they are in a better position than they are here... I hope so at least."

Superman stares at his usually stoic teammate, wondering how someone so touched by the world's evil could speak so lovingly about two children he had just met. There was only one he actually knows-

"Batman?"

"Yes?"

"How do you know that Nightwing is the same person who is Robin in our time?"

Batman's lips twitch and for a moment, Superman thinks he won't answer. "Dickiebird."

"What?"

"It's how I knew. Now, what did you come here to ask me?" Batman folds his hands in his lap.

"Who else's handwriting do you think is on the files on your desk?"

"One of the boys. You're avoiding the question."

"You usually don't leave things in such a state, you know? I wonder why."

"The boys most likely have access to this room so that they can work on them at their convenience whilst I'm away. You are trying and failing to change the topic."

Superman sighs and lets his shoulders slump in a way that's normally reserved for Clark Kent. "Martian Manhunter has noticed Kon's behaviour around me is... strange. Since you are the only League member I know is a... guardian, I thought I'd ask you what you could make of Kon's whole thing," Superman waves a hand around vaguely, hoping it gets his point across.

"All children are different, Kal," Batman's voice is uncharacteristically soft. Superman flinches at the tone and snaps;

"Well, it's good that you're the world's finest detective then, isn't it?"

Batman gets up and sits beside Superman on the bed. "Kal, you're worried right now. Scared, even. I don't want to say something to make the situation worse purely based on barely two

days of observation." Amused, he adds, "Even the world's finest can be wrong."

"I just- I know I probably won't like what you'll say but I think I need to hear it."

"And why do you think that?"

"Because I already suspect it and if it's really so blatant, we need to do something about it. I can't just leave it, not if- not if this feeling I get is right because if so, a person might be in danger," Kal pauses and corrects himself. "Two people may be in danger and like you said, just because they are from an alternate universe doesn't make them any less my... my family."

Batman sits silently and then begins to speak.

"Hey, Diana?" Flash jogs in front of Wonder Woman, his face lined with worry.

"Yes, Flash?"

"I'm worried about Superman. He's been so quiet since we met Superboy and to be honest? I don't think he's taking this well at all. Like, he's trying obviously and I don't want to disrespect that but sometimes the best someone can do is hold themselves together with sheer will and glue, which is what I think Superman is doing, which is really bad. He'll fall apart eventually and at that point he'd already be hurt and it'd be too late and-

"Flash, breathe. You're hyperventilating. You're also about to walk into a wall," Diana says calmly. She walks past Flash and into the kitchen.

Flash stops, turns around and grins sheepishly at the wall before following Wonder Woman. "Whoops?"

"Your concerns are well-founded, Flash. I've seen some of my Amazonian sisters do similar things. What did you call it? To hold yourself together with will and glue?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Another of Men's World's sayings?"

"Nope, just a regular metaphor," Flash reaches into a kitchen cabinet and pulls out a bag of chips. "Chips are in the same place as they are back home. It was like this during breakfast too - everything is in a similar place to back home." He sits on the counter with his legs swinging over the side. Diana sits on the table opposite Flash.

"Kal isn't alright but until he comes to us for help, we can not do anything."

"What do you mean?"

"Kal needs to reach out for himself. We can offer the olive branch but we can't make him take it. For now, we need to be present and willing to lend an ear, shoulder or advice. Though, I feel like Kal had already chosen to seek someone to confide in for this matter."

"What do you mean?" Flash looks at how Wonder Woman twirls her lasso around her hand and waits for her to explain.

"He didn't leave from the room with the Zeta tubes, did he?"

"No, I don't think so? What does that have to do with anything?"

"Martian Manhunter was also there. Seeing as J'ohn has also been confronted with the existence of a potential relative, it makes sense for Kal to seek solidarity with him, if not comfort."

"Wouldn't going to Batman make more sense then? He had to meet two kids that are apparently his sons! Wouldn't that hit closer to home than a niece?"

"Superman and J'ohn are both sole survivors of their kinds. Meeting another, especially one you're said to be close with, would have a different effect on them than on Batman."

"You've got a point but... What if Batman also needs to talk? I know he's got this whole rep of being the big, bad bat but... I think seeing Hood and Robin was hard for him. He kept looking over at them during the meeting."

"Flash?"

"Yes?" Flash turns at the waist to face Diana head-on. Diana smiles and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"You have a loving heart, my friend but trust in me when I say this; our teammates will be fine and even if they aren't, we shall be here for them."

"This is a bad situation," Hawkgirl kicks her legs up onto the arm of the couch and lies down.

"I know," Green Lantern replies. He spins his ring around his finger.

"Superman, Batman and Martian Manhunter now all have emotional stakes in this."

"J'ohn hasn't met his 'niece' yet."

"Did you see the look on his face? He was devastated by not being able to see the girl."

"Yes, he was... upset." Lantern sits on the couch by Hawkgirl's head.

"What's going to happen when we have to go home? What kind of state are they going to be in afterwards? What if their emotional attachments to these strangers get them hurt? Superboy could have lasered someone in half earlier!"

"Well, we'll just have to be there if they fall apart. It's the reason this League was formed after all, so that if one of us goes down the rest still remain swinging."

"You don't get it. Since we made the League, we're all connected like... Like a chain link fence, Lantern. And I'm not sure if it's a good thing," Hawkgirl crosses her arms. Lantern brushes a stray hair off her shoulders.

"Why's that?"

"When everything is connected, everything falls." Hawkgirl looks up at Lantern, lips pressed in a frown.

"It's easier to knock over one than it is many. With everyone supporting each other, we'll make it work."

"Will we?" Hawkgirl rests her head against Lantern's thigh.

"Trust me, we will. Don't worry about that fence falling because no one will fall in the first place, not while we all work together."

A Future Fumble

Chapter Summary

Day three and a plan is made. One group will be checking out Luthor's buildings and the others will stay at the Hall of Justice - coincidentally, the same place Kon will be. This will go splendidly.

Chapter Notes

This is the last chapter that will be a rewrite. From this point on, updates may slow down because what I'll be writing is new content instead of just transferring chapters over from my Wattpad account.

This also means that the Wattpad version of this fic and this version will be updating at the same time from this point onwards. Hope you all enjoy!

The next day begins with much of the same. Eating breakfast at the Watchtower, getting ready and heading over to the Hall of Justice through the Zeta tubes.

Unlike the previous day, Superman's eyes are narrowed in determination as he looks at the four people waiting in front of the Zeta tubes.

Nightwing, Red Hood, Robin and Superboy all stand facing the Justice League. Nightwing steps forward.

"We need to go check out the buildings around where you guys appeared. We are not to act or attack unless strictly necessary - this mission will simply be to scope the place out. If it seems like it's involved in your little trip across dimensions, then we'll come back afterwards when we have more information." Nightwing's brothers nod approvingly and Batman lets out a small hum.

"What about Superboy?" Hawkgirl asks.

"If you're talking about Superboy, you can ask him directly," Nightwing places a hand on his hip. Hawkgirl's feathers rustle and she turns to Superboy.

"What about you? Are you going?"

"No! I mean, no. No, I'm not," Kon rubs at his jacket's sleeve. Green Lantern looks at him curiously and begins to talk.

"Why's that? By your own admission, you seem to know the Lex Luthor of this world the best. Why wouldn't you come along?"

Robin steps in front of Kon as though to block him from view. It isn't very effective considering Kon is at least an inch taller than Robin. "It's a simple mission to retrieve information, it's not a brute force attack. We need subtlety and stealth and frankly? Kryptonians aren't exactly made for that."

Superman raises an eyebrow and Robin crosses his arms and he continues.

"Tell me I'm wrong. Laser eyes, super strength and ice breath may help you break into a place but it doesn't do your discretion any favours," Robin looks towards the rest of the Justice League, eyes daring them to say otherwise. Red Hood slings an arm around him and begins to talk.

"What we're trying to say is that this kind of mission is more suited to our more... Sneaky members. Basically, this is a job for a couple of birds."

Batman steps forward. "I'll come with you."

Nightwing claps his hands loudly. "Great! Ideally, we should have a pair for each building so that if something does happen, we have one person able to get the other out. Batman, you're with me."

Nightwing slides in beside Batman as though it's the most natural thing in the world. Batman, like he would with his Robin, stands slightly angled towards Nightwing. An almost invisible, protective gesture that catches Superman's eye.

"Martian Manhunter, would you be up for this mission?" Nightwing looks at J'ohn expectantly and grins when he nods. "Fantastic! And Wonder Woman?"
Diana nods. "Okay, that makes six! Now, you two will pair and Robin and Hood will pair."

Almost everyone nods at the groups but Batman looks between each of his boys and tilts his head.

"What about the rest of us?" Superman asks. "What should we do?"

"Stay in the Watchtower, of course."

"You're...kidding. You must be kidding. You expect us to sit around and do nothing?"

"Yes, actually. The more you guys go out, the more your respective rogues will take notice. None of you are the experienced individuals that you are in this time, some of your rogues you haven't even met yet," Nightwing's voice is clear and firm. Hawkgirl speaks up.

"Why do we have to stay in the Watchtower specifically? Some of us have bases of operation that would be free for us to use, like Batman's cave or Superman's Fortress of Solitude," she

gestures to Batman and Superman in turn. "Or why not stay here in the Hall of Justice?"

Superman looks at Hawkgirl, confused by her reluctance to stay in the Watchtower specifically. That is until she turns his way, winks and gives a tiny nod in Kon's direction. If they stay in the Hall of Justice, Superman could spend more time with Kon. He feels his heart warm at one of his teammates trying to help in such a way.

Nightwing pauses and says cautiously, "I don't think it would be an issue for you to stay in the Hall... but it's better for you all to stick together so you'll have to pick one place to be."

Red Hood's helmet turns to look between Hawkgirl and Superman. His head tilts in a move reminiscent of when Batman is piecing the clues of a case.

Superman goes to speak, to say that they would prefer to be in the Hall when-

"No!"

Everyone's head swivels to Robin, who's stiff-backed with his fists clenched at his sides. His shoulders hunch under the scrutinising gazes of everyone, everyone except Kon that is.

"You can't stay in the Hall."

Diana's soft voice breaks through the still air. "And why is that, young warrior?"

Robin looks up at her and speaks bluntly. "Kon stays here. We will not leave one of us surrounded by so many of you and it's not right to kick Kon out. You will have to go back to the Watchtower."

"That's a noble reason but why can't Kon be alone with us?"

Robin's eyes don't betray where he's looking but Superman swears the he feels the teen's gaze on him.

"Better safe than sorry."

Kon walks to Robin's side and says in a gentle voice, "Robin, it's okay. I'll call in one or two of the other Teen Titans, you don't have to worry about me." Kon runs a reassuring hand down Robin's back.

"Are you sure? You don't have to compromise if you don't want to."

"I'm sure. Besides, if I missed anymore phone calls from them, they would end up breaking in here anyways."

"The worst thing is is that they would totally do that." The boys chuckle quietly. Robin, seemingly content, looks back at the Justice League. "Correction: you can stay here."

The Robins, Batman, Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter take their leave. The rest of the Justice League sit in the common area whilst Superboy goes to another room to call some of his teammates to the Hall of Justice.

Superman ignores the fact that his super hearing can't pick up on so much as a whisper. After all, why would Kon feel the need to take his phone call in the red room? That's obviously not the case, exhaustion is simply fogging my senses, Superman thinks.

Kon walks back to the common area after his phone call is done. He and the Justice League sit in awkward silence.

Nightwing pulls out a familiar bat-themed lock-picking set from somewhere on his person. Batman watches with a blossoming pride as his son expertly picks the window lock of one of Luthor's buildings.

"You've gotten quicker at this," Batman mummurs happily.

"Sure have. With enough practice it became second nature, even easier than using keys."

They enter the building, looking at the sterile, white walls for any sign or clue that pointed to the building being involved in their predicament.

"You still don't trust us, do you? That's why you paired Robin and Red Hood together."

"You're right."

"Good. Even though I know the distrust is misplaced, it's nice to see you being cautious." Especially when it comes to your brothers, Batman thinks.

They climb up a narrow set of stairs and crouch out of sight when two guards walk by. They wait until the footsteps have fading to the left until they start walking again.

"The fact we haven't seen any other guards before this point probably means the building isn't currently in use for anything, right, B?"

"It means Luthor isn't currently here, that's for sure."

Batman reaches into his utility belt for a collapsible bat-screwdriver. He unscrews a large grate close to the ground and pops off the cover.

"You know how to put it back on from the inside, Nightwing?"

"Of course. Couldn't exactly fight Killer Croc without knowing how to put a grate back, could I?"

'Killer Croc' must be a rogue that either doesn't exist back home or only shows up later, Batman thinks. He climbs down first, Nightwing following soon after.

Nightwing effortlessly slides the grate back into place.

"The whole nickname thing you and your brothers did was a ruse, wasn't it? Or rather, it wasn't about the nicknames itself."

"What do you think it was about then?"

"I think it was you trying to figure out if I knew your identity. If I did, it would prove that I'm not a trick or trap. It would prove the validity of my teammates as well."

Nightwing stays comfortably silent but nods. Batman turns to him and slides a hand onto either of the young man's shoulders.

"You've grown into a fine man, Richard 'Dick' Grayson."

A Touch Of The Past

Chapter Summary

A Batman and Nightwing talk about their revelation, Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter discuss everything, Superman fails at making conversation with Kon (he's trying, alright?) and who is Kon's friend?

Nightwing looks up at Batman and his face splits into an affectionate grin. Before Batman realises it, he has an armful of his son buried into his chest plate.

"It really is you."

"I'm correct then?"

"Obviously, B. I'm so glad... If you all really were lackeys of Luthor, things would have gotten ugly," Nightwing's grip tightens slightly and then releases as he pulls himself away. "Time to get back to the mission, huh?"

"Of course."

"Wait! Give me a moment, it's time to check in over comms," Nightwing presses a finger to his left ear and starts speaking. "Robin, Red Hood?" There's a moment of silence. "They're legit, B's just proven it... Yeah, me and B got a little sidetracked but we're close to where we need to be, I think... Uh-huh, bye and love you both!"

"I take it they're doing well."

"Yep, those two are like a well-oiled machine out in the field. They have some schematics and files that don't look like they've been touched very recently."

"Makes sense. Once something is made, there's be no use for its schematics anymore unless it's broken or needs frequent repairs," Batman flexes his gauntlets and looks around. "And the fact that it was the Justice League that was transported instead of one of the Lex Luthors tells me this was meant to be a one-way trip."

"Your Luthor may be here, B. Just because no one has gone running around screaming that they're from an alternate universe doesn't mean no one else had been transported," Nightwing begins climbing a ladder to get to a grate above him.

"You know how to undo the screws?" Batman asks.

"Psh, I could do this in my sleep. These aren't even the good screws," Nightwing pulls out a gadget from his belt (third pocket to the left, Batman thinks, must be the bat multi-tool) and

makes quick work of the grate.

"Luthor, of my world, at least, knows I can get past average screws and attachments in seconds. If he really were trying to properly guard this place, he would have at least had custom screws made."

"Another point to whatever is here being intended as a one-use only item, huh, B?"

Batman hums affirmatively.

The grate slides to the side with ease once Nightwing gets the screws out. They both pull themselves out. They are in a corridor with a large metal door. There's a keypad beside it. Nightwing looks at it in disbelief.

"Seriously? Was Luthor even trying with this one?" Nightwing pulls out a different gadget, this one seemingly a new addition, and attaches it to the keypad. "At this point, he may as well be using child safety locks."

Batman can't help but agree. Most children can short-circuit an average keypad with two double A batteries, some chicken wire and eleven minutes by age ten. Although upon reflection, that may strictly be Gothamites - when any possible public area is at risk of being filled with fear-gas or whatever new concoction Ivy has come up with, people tend to learn how to escape being locked inside enclosed spaces.

Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter walk through the deserted halls of their own building, looking at the white-grey walls for any sign of what may have happened. Wonder Woman is the first to speak.

"This place doesn't look like it's been used very recently, does it? There is dust building up and the beginning of cobwebs."

"I think you're right. The question is why? Why would this building be so unkempt after such a recent use? We've only been here for three days so far," J'ohn runs a hand down the wall. It comes back with dust covering it. He wipes it off quickly.

"I'm not sure..." Wonder Woman walks past a closet door. "You spoke to Kal last night, yes?"

"I did."

"How was he? Did he say anything about his... thoughts on this situation?"

"You are worried," J'ohn says, looking over to Wonder Woman.

"Of course, I am. He and the rest of the Justice League may be different from my Amazonian sisters but in a way, it's the same... we are all siblings in battle. Brothers in arms as I think men's world calls it," Wonder Woman begins defensively but as she continues, her arms reach up to hug herself.

"Diana... I hadn't meant for it to seem like I was questioning why you worry for Superman, I was just thinking outloud in the moment. Please, forgive me."

"It's alright, J'ohn. I shouldn't have assumed the worst."

"Superman had been... confused yesterday. Kon's behaviour had left him with many questions, I could tell that much," J'ohn keeps his gaze on the ground as he walks alongside Wonder Woman.

"Is that all?" Wonder Woman sees J'ohn nod.

"We didn't talk for very long. He clearly had questions I couldn't answer."

"Oh, that's... That's concerning."

"Yes."

They arrive at a large steel door. On the side is what looks to be a fingerprint scanner. Wonder Woman looks at it and chuckles.

"J'ohn, I think your shape-shifting ability may help here," she points at the keypad with a flourish. Martian Manhunter sighs and looks away.

"While I can hypothetically shapeshift into someone whose fingerprints could grant us access, I would need to have actually seen a person who fits that description and would need to have studied their fingers in detail."

"Oh."

"Apologies for the inconvenience. Even shapeshifters like me have limitations."

"No, it's fine. In hindsight, we probably should've discussed our individual skills as a team after everyone agreed to form the Justice League."

"Indeed."

Wonder Woman looks around for a minute, searching for anything that could help them bypass the door.

"I could break it down?" She suggests.

"We've been asked to be subtle."

"Ah..." Wonder Woman purses her lips as she thinks. "You can phase through objects, right?"

"If I did that, you'd still be on this side of the door."

"There is probably a way to open the door from the inside and if there isn't, you can search while I guard the door?"

John looks at Wonder Woman and for a second, she thinks that maybe there's something wrong with that plan too. Maybe John can only phase through certain things, she thinks.

Then, John phases through the door and within seconds, there is a quiet mechanical click. The door swings open and on the other side, John stands almost sheepishly.

"That should have been our first plan, shouldn't it?" He asks.

"Yes but to be fair to us, we have all had a very stressful couple of days. I think we are allowed to be 'a little off our game' as Flash would say. Besides, this is a simple intel mission, better we make mistakes now than in the heat of battle," she strides forwards. Both her and Martian Manhunter begin their own search for clues.

The tension is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Superman, Hawkgirl, Green Lantern and Flash take up two of the couches and Kon sits on one of the ones on the very opposite side of the room.

It's so quiet that Superman can hear everyone breathing.

Hawkgirl's wings flex against her back in visible irritation - obviously made uncomfortable by the silence. Her eyes meet Superman's and, with what he can confidently say are the most aggressive eye movements he has ever seen, she looks between him and Kon meaningfully.

'Go talk to him', her eyes scream.

Superman stays where he is for a moment, wondering whether he should get closer to Kon or talk from where he is. He decides to stay where he is; the kid deserves his space and Superman doesn't want to accidentally make Kon uneasy.

"So, Kon... How's school?" That's what maybe parents, maybe caregivers, ask their possible children from the future, right?

Kon blinks at Superman. Very slowly blinks, in a way that is clearly purposeful. He doesn't speak or open his mouth or even move his jaw in a way that suggests that he is going to respond.

Superman drums his fingers against his knees.

Hawkgirl stares at the floor as though she'd rather be anywhere else. Green Lantern's shoulders shake with what Superman can guess is suppressed laughter. Flash, supportive as always, gives Superman a subtle thumbs-up.

Kon rubs at his temples and, seemingly taking pity on Superman, curtly replies, "I don't go to school."

Every Justice League member in the room goes still.

Superman can't help but feel utterly out of depth talking to Kon. Every other sentence paints a picture of what this universe's Superman is like - an awfully disturbing picture.

"What do you mean you don't go to school?" Flash asks. "Does it have to do with what your friends were talking about earlier? About how you stay here for safety reasons?"

Kon's eyes fall on Flash and with a slight hesitance, he nods.

Superman hopes that means that this dimension's Superman has nothing to do with Kon's lack of current schooling.

After that, nobody talks much. Everyone seems too uncomfortable to really say anything. Superman is sure that Flash would love to talk to anyone about anything at the moment but it's obvious that he is being quiet in the hopes that Superman and Kon will talk to each other - Flash is kind like that as Superman is now finding out.

Everyone tries to ignore the Flash's restless fidgeting and Green Lantern's stiff shoulders and Hawkgirl's fluttering wings beating at the back of the couch. It's easier to let silence fill the air, almost as easy as letting an infection spread.

...

A yellow blur streaks into the room at such a high pace that there are visible smoke trails dancing along the floor. When it stops, all Superman can think is, 'here we go again'. The Justice League get up; none of them truly worried but all of them too used to the unexpected to not be cautious.

The person standing in front of them is clad in yellow and red in a strange inversion of the Flash's costume. That paired with the signature lightning bolt on his chest all pointed to him being in some way associated with the Flash.

"Hey, Kon! How are and why did you ask me here? Not that I have a problem with that but it seemed out of the blue, especially since you haven't been answering your phone the last two days which is super weird for you and-" The figure, as though just noticing them out of the corner of his eye, swivels on his heels to face the Justice League. He lets out a small gasp and, with a face-splitting grin, yells;

"Uncle Barry!"

All anyone sees next is a blur of yellow ramming into the Flash and making both him and the miniature Flash tumble to the ground. Flash lies there on his back with the child lying on top of him, hugging his torso.

The Justice League try to collect themselves - the child obviously doesn't mean any harm to the Flash. And did mini-Flash just say 'Uncle Barry'?

If how still Flash is says anything, he is just as shocked by the appearance of the mini-Flash as the rest of the Justice League.

The Today You Face

Chapter Summary

Flash's unexpected hug gets even weirder as the Justice League learn that the young speeder in Flash's colours is another new face who doesn't seem to exist in their own universe. Hopefully, the ones that are on the intel mission are faring better...

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! I know this newest chapter has taken a while but I hope you'll find it's worth the wait. Please, enjoy.

Kon looks scandalised in a way Kal can't help but compare to the old ladies that sometimes buy the Daily Planet newspaper in the morning - their mouths would part slightly and their eyebrows would raise in miniscule increments as they read the front paper, truly a spectacle to behold. The younger employees, ones the Clark would see everyday, would chuckle at the elder ladies and their careful reactions to the things they found 'shocking' but it was something that the older workers had always seemed sad about.

"Kid Flash, get off of him! He's not our Flash, you shouldn't be hugging him!" Kon hisses frantically. The words swim mutely around Kal's head as he thinks.

Clark had asked some of the elders at the Daily Planet about the little, old ladies' almost non-reactions before. They'd all answered almost the same way...

'Woman from that generation were judged rather harshly for their supposed "dramatics", you know?'

'It wasn't a great time to be emotional or heavily reactive. No one would take you seriously and you'd end up feeling all the worse for it.'

'Ever heard of hysteria? Or being hysterical? That's what big, grand feelings would get a woman accused of.'

'Those times were less... empathetic than now. Old habits die hard, I suppose.'

And all Kal can think is why Kon would share those mannerisms, that hiding of or lessing of his expressions.

Did someone make you feel ignored, Kal thinks. Did someone tell you that you were wrong for your feelings, Kon?

When Kal comes back to himself, he sees that the other teenager has gotten off of the Flash and is latched on to Kon's arm.

"Kon, what do you mean that's not 'our Flash'? Wait, hold up, is that a cyborg? A hologram?" Kid Flash squints skeptically at Flash for all of three seconds. "Wait, no, I touched it, it can't be a hologram. That one rogue of Batman's? Clay man, I think? Is he a clone-"

"Kid Flash." Kon's voice sounds monotone. His eyes are facing his feet. Kid Flash's head jerks upwards to look at him, eyes apologetic.

"I'm sorry," Kid Flash says nonsensically. "I'm so sorry, I didn't think before speaking, I-"

"Try not to call anyone by their civilian names, okay? Not anymore, now that you know," Kon shrugs, looks at Kid Flash and gently pats the red spandex covered arm still resting on his bicep.

The Justice League stares, befuddled by Kon's complete non sequitur but Kid Flash simply smiles at Kon and relaxes.

Kal looks over at his teammates and, seeing that Green Lantern is looking his way, mouths, 'Am I missing something here?'

Lantern mouths back, 'I am just as confused as you are. Why did the kid apologise?'

"Well, are you going to introduce us or what?" Hawkgirl asks. Her wings loosely rest against her back and her hand doesn't so much as twitch towards her mace.

Kon runs a hand through his hair and gestures to Kid Flash. "This is Kid Flash. If you haven't figured it out yet, he and the Flash of this universe are related," he says. Kid Flash mumbles 'of this universe' under his breath as he looks between Kon and the Justice League at break neck speed.

Flash pulls himself off of the floor at last, dusts himself off and more casually than anyone could have hoped for, starts to speak. "Hey, Kid Flash. Nice to meet you. Me and my friends here are from an alternate universe. We're not holograms or Clayface, promise," he snorts. Kid Flash looks up at him wide-eyed and mouth agape.

"Oh, wow... Also, so sorry for tackling you earlier, I thought you were... Well, yourself but from our universe, I guess and that was a totally normal assumption to make, so I don't think I was wrong for thinking that but I am sorry for like, invading your space and stuff. Probably pretty weird for you to be hugged by your alternate universe nephew, huh?" Kid Flash taps his right hand against his thigh. "I'm not making you homesick by being here, am I?"

Flash shakes his head quickly. "No, not at all. It's a little strange but not in a bad way, you know? How old are you?"

"Sixteen!"

The Justice League share a look with one another. They could all do the math. There's no way that this kid could exist in their universe if Flash didn't already know him.

Kon steps forward and places a hand on Kid Flash's shoulder. "We're not sure if what they say is true yet, Kid Flash. We can't be sure that they're not a trick. It's why I asked you here, strength in numbers and all," Kon's voice is gentle. It shakes on the word 'trick'.

Kid Flash stands straighter and steps closer beside Kon so that they're shoulder to shoulder. "What do you mean 'we'? Have any of the other Teen Titans been here?"

"Yeah, Robin was here. His brothers stopped by as well."

"And yet you were alone here. Why?" Kid Flash crosses his arms and stares at Kon in what Kal can only describe as a scolding manner.

"The birds and some of these lot," Kon gestures at the Justice League, "are out on a mission. Just retrieving intel but it could be important in getting them home if they're telling the truth."

"So, you've been alone with them for how long?"

Kon looks down at the floor. "A little less than half an hour?" His left foot kicks at the heel of his right, scuffing his boots.

"Kon! What were you, and the others for that matter, thinking? What if they're a ploy of Luthor's? Do you have any idea how dangerous this could have been for you or how badly this could have gone if something had happened? I wouldn't have known what was going on if you went missing and by the time the birds came back, anything could have happened to you!" Kid Flash shouts.

The Justice League stares dumbfounded at the scene in front of them. Seeing someone so similar in appearance to Flash raise his voice and berate someone unsettles them for a moment until they step closer and see the boy's body language more clearly.

Kid Flash's hands are trembling and his eyes are watering. It's a startling contrast to how the Flash reacts to situations but the emotion beneath it all is clear. The kid isn't angry, not truly.

He's just scared.

Kid Flash's tirade dies off when a loud sniffing is heard throughout the room. "Kon?" He asks.

Kon looks up. Tears stream down his face as he takes in shallow breaths. Kid Flash looks horrified.

"Kon, I... I shouldn't have yelled, I'm sorry. I didn't... I forgot. I forgot that it upsets you and I shouldn't have shouted in the first place," Kid Flash puts his hands on Kon's shoulders.

Kon flinches.

"Kon... I'll try to remember better, okay? I'll make sure it doesn't happen again. Are you okay?"

Kon wipes a hand across his wet cheeks and lays his hands over Kid Flash's. "Yeah, it's just... I know Lex's work. I know that these people are not it and I wish that for a moment, someone would just take my word on that. Was being alone with them a bad idea? Yes, obviously. That's why I called you. Yet somehow, I'm still in the wrong. I still screwed up. For once, I'd like to be able to do something right."

"Kon, I wasn't upset because of your decision. Don't get me wrong, I'm not entirely happy with it but it wasn't just you who had a lapse in judgement. The birds are at fault too and I will talk with them about that later," Kon winces at Kid Flash's words. "Don't give me that look, Kon. I'll be nice about it, I swear."

Flash steps forward slightly, as though he wants to intervene. Green Lantern puts a hand across his chest and mouths, 'Wait. Give the kids a moment'.

Kon tilts his head. "Why were you so mad then?"

"I wasn't mad, Kon. I was frightened," Kid Flash says. Kon reels back, far enough that Kid Flash's hands no longer reach him.

In a horrified voice, Kon asks, "I scared you?"

"No, no, Kon... I was scared for you. The idea that we could've have lost you because of one silly mistake is terrifying. Sure, maybe they're not Luthor's but if they were then... then you might not have been here anymore. Not in one piece at least."

Hawkgirl tugs at the sleeves of both Kal and Green Lantern and jerks her head towards the doorway, where Flash is already standing. The two look at her confused. She mouths, 'We've seen more than enough. We'll talk to them when they're not in the midst of a mutual breakdown, yeah?'

They go to leave the room but before they leave, Kal hears Kon whisper, "I know. Really, I do and I'm sorry too. I... Hug?"

The Justice League leaves to give the two boys some privacy.

The gadget gives a satisfying hiss as the doors come open. Nightwing takes the gadget of the keypad and grins.

"Open sesame. You want to go first, B?"

"Sure." Batman goes through the doors. On the other side is a large room that could have passed for a normal, if excessively grand, study if it weren't for the tank-like machine in the centre.

"What on earth is that?" Nightwing peers over Batman's shoulder, looking at the device with mounting dread clear across his face.

"I don't know but it's pointed to the only window in the room."

The window in the front of the room is large and uncovered. The glass that makes it up is cut oddly - almost like the fractals you get shown in science class.

"B, how did nobody see this from the street? People would be concerned if they saw a giant glorified machine gun pointing at them here. After all, this is Metropolis, not Gotham."

"I think it's one-way glass. That way the people in here would've been able to see through to the street but those below would have been none the wiser," Batman looks up to the ceiling. His white lenses narrow. "It would also explain the lack of lights. One-way glass only works if the side you're not meant to see through is darker than the other."

"Crafty."

Batman approaches the device. He hums as he runs his finger across it, picking up a sheen of dust. It hasn't been touched recently, he thinks. How? We've been here for barely three days.

"Dust, huh? That's odd. Haven't you guys only been here for a couple of days?"

"Yes. Yet this would suggest this machine hasn't been touched for a while," Batman inspects the dust on his glove. There's only a miniscule amount. "Maybe it was on a timer? Still, that would be strange. The time we were brought here bears no significance."

"Yeah, and I doubt that Lex Luthor would've let you all wander about for as long as you did... Have you considered it needed to warm up or charge?" Nightwing asks. He runs a hand over the main body of the machine. "It's still warm."

"It would explain the timing."

"It would, wouldn't it?"

A peculiar machine, almost like a gun, stands in the middle of the otherwise unassuming room. Its cogs are shiny and new and there are tracks of reel tape stretched out further into it. The walls of the rooms are lined with bookcases full of leather bound tomes that are covered in layers of grime.

"What is this place?" Wonder Woman turns towards Martian Manhunter imploringly.

"I do not know but it is clearly nothing good."

"It's pointed towards the street! What could Luthor possibly be doing aiming a mechanical monstrosity like this at the street?" Wonder Woman slides her hand across the contraption and quickly retracts it when it becomes coated with dust and a tacky, black substance. It shines a radiant green under the light of the window. "This... is disgusting. What is it?"

Martian Manhunter looks at Wonder Woman's hand. "Could it be oil?"

"Oil usually reflects more than green."

"Does it hurt? Sting?" Martian Manhunter rips one corner of his cape off, handing it to Wonder Woman.

"No, it doesn't feel like anything. And, John, what is this for?"

"To wipe whatever that is off... Even if it doesn't seem dangerous at the moment, there's no point in risking it."

Wonder Woman wipes her hands and lets the ripped cloth fall to the ground afterwards. She looks between the window and the machine before mumbling something.

"Diana, what was that? I did not hear you."

"It's pointed to exactly where we appeared when we first arrived," she looks out towards the other buildings. "And so are the others."

Loud footsteps echo from the hall. Voices start shouting.

"Hey! The door is unlocked! Who did this?"

"There must be an intruder! Intruder, everyone! Intruder!"

"Get going! It's our paychecks on the line!"

"And our heads too if Luthor finds out about this!"

Martian Manhunter and Wonder Woman give each other one look before they both scatter to find a place to hide as armoured guards barge into the room.

Tomorrow's Worries

Chapter Summary

Hearing about the future is strange, especially when it concerns a teammate like Superman. It really shouldn't be as troubling as it is...
A sinister force overlooks Metropolis and with one phone call, decides to intervene soon.

Chapter Notes

It feels like forever since I've last posted but I really wanted this chapter to feel right, so hopefully you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Wonder Woman hides behind an oak cabinet whilst Martian Manhunter ducks into the hollow inside of a desk.

Stomping fills the room.

"Where could they have gone?"

"Check anywhere large enough to fit a person. All units, the backsides of bookcases, turn this place upside down if you have to!"

"What's the point of a full search? I thought this building didn't matter anymore," one of the younger sounding guards whine.

Wonder Woman turns her head to the direction of the conversation, curiosity piqued.

"There are certain individuals that shouldn't be here. Ones Luthor will want to know about."

"Like who? If the police find out, the boss will just pay them off. It wouldn't be the first time..." one of them grumbles.

"That's confidential."

"Doesn't matter anyway. Mark my words, it was probably just some bored teenagers."

"What teenagers would break in anywhere knowing full well that this is Superman's turf?"

"Lots of people are moving to Metropolis nowadays. Got some from Fawcett, Jump City and that lot - they might not realise Superman deals with petty crime."

"Besides, Superman isn't even here right now. And we all know how lax Superman has been about anything involving Luthor or LexCorp recently."

There's the scrape of wood against wood as objects get moved out of the way by the guards.

Wonder Woman peaks over the cabinet and, seeing that the guards have all turned away from the door, gestures to Martian Manhunter. He nods.

Both make a break for the door.

"I think we've found everything we can, B."

Batman nods reluctantly. Looking through all the pictures that had been taken with his bat camera, he feels like what they've found is insufficient. Looking past his usual distain for Lex Luthor's schemes (Superman, from what Batman has gathered, is a wholly undeserving target), he can acknowledge that the man had managed to clean the building of anything incriminating for the most part. "Unfortunately, I think you're right, Nightwing. This building is unusually lacking the proof Luthor's crime scenes are typically littered with."

"Yeah. Luthor really upped his game a couple of years ago, back when Red Hood was still Robin. Superman really struggled at that time," Nightwing stows away his own camera (second pocket to the right, the same one Batman puts his own in).

"How so?" Batman follows along, closing the door behind them. Nightwing brings out the new gadget he had used for opening the door (it's in the first pocket on the right, where lock picks are usually put) and attaches it to the keypad.

"It's when Luthor started making more active grabs for power in Metropolis. That paired with Luthor's newfound skill of properly desposing of evidence was dangerous at the time..." Three light clicks and some metallic noises and the door is once again locked.

"There would still be whistle blowers. It wouldn't be as good as concrete evidence but it would be enough to cast suspicion if there were repeated accounts," Batman and Nightwing's steps fall in tandem as they walk back to where the grate was.

"Money keeps a lot of things quiet if you know how to use it," Nightwing kneels down and lifts the grate to the side.

"Not everything. Not everyone."

Nightwing frowns, the corners of his mouth creasing slightly. "True but Luthor knows that. Has known that for almost over four years now, I'd reckon."

They climb down the ladder and Batman puts the top of the grate back in place.

"Even if he knows it, there's not much he can do about, is there?"

"That's what Superman thought. That's what everyone thought. We were wrong, though, so dreadfully wrong. For almost three years, things with Luthor had been relatively quiet - peaceful, even. And then the Justice League got wind of strange happenings and went to check it out and..." Nightwing takes a deep breath and Batman watches how the young man's whole chest shakes as he exhales.

"Luthor did some horrific things, Batman. Stuff even the Justice League of this universe refuses to talk about. It's been almost a year since everything was... uncovered and yet the damage sticks with everyone - even those of us only there for the aftermath," white lenses stare into Batman's own. "Three years. Three years of no whistle blowers or eyewitness accounts or tip-offs."

Batman puts a hand on Nightwing's shoulder and bends at the knee slightly to be eye to eye with his eldest. "And did any of you ever figure out why there wasn't anyone who spoke out against the... atrocities committed by Luthor?"

Nightwing nods jerkly and fists his hands into Batman's cape like the Robin he used to be, like someone seeing the horrors of the world for the first time.

"We think..."

We think Luthor kills them."

Heels and boots stomp along the flooring as Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter run along the halls, tailed by guards.

"We can't let them see us, they know we're meant to be off-world," Wonder Woman makes a sharp turn into a connecting hallway.

"At some point, there is going to be a path that is straight ahead, Diana. We can't keep out of sight forever."

"There must be something we can do. Hide and wait for them to pass, maybe? I did see what looked like a cupboard door somewhere up ahead..."

Martian Manhunter frowns and the reflections across his pupilless eyes move in way Wonder Woman had learnt means he's looking around. "Even so, they will hear that our footsteps have stopped and begin to search if we both hide. Although... I think your idea could work with a few alterations."

"What are you thinking?" Diana asks, smiling.

Martian Manhunter begins to shift in shape. For a moment, he looks almost liquid with how his body loses form and condenses itself. Only once a general structure forms does details begin to become clear.

The body is scrawny and slightly on the short side and the hair is curly black and put in twists. Dark brown skin, dark eyes and acne that suggests that this form is meant to be interpreted as an adolescent.

The clothes are typical of a lot of teenagers, simple blue jeans and a large hoodie, but the shoes are odd. One is a heel and the other is a flat-footed boot.

"You hide in the cupboard whilst I run. I'll let them see me and then they'll think it is just what they thought earlier - a bored teenager breaking in," he nods in his usual manner, which is decidedly unsettling on such a youthful facade.

Diana nods and when the door to the cupboard comes up, she ducks into it. She hears Martian Manhunter and the guards run past and holds her breath until they pass by her.

John will come back, she knows. Besides, leaving individually could cause issues if the other is in trouble. So she sits on the floor of the cupboard and waits.

One minute passes.

And then five more.

Then ten...

The door is pulled open by the fifteen minute and Diana is met by the sight of her (once again green) teammate.

"Apologies for not coming back sooner. I led the guards to the other side of the building so we would have ample time to escape," John bows his head almost sheepishly.

Diana holds one of her hands out to John and waits until he takes it to say, "Let's get out of here."

Superman, Hawkgirl, Green Lantern and Flash all wait in the kitchen. Stools had been pulled out from under the counter and the four share a bowl of chips between them.

"That was... a lot," Hawkgirl says and looks over to Superman. "Kon's kind of your kid here, so what do you think of the whole situation?"

"Which one?" Kal looks at the bowl and taps the side of it gently. Weirdly enough, it seems to be old fine china. His future self was definitely not the one who had put it in with the other cutlery. "So far, we've had a lot of 'situations' the past couple of days. We might need a list."

"Don't deflect. I obviously mean Kon's whole staying here for safety reasons thing. Do you think future you is somehow involved in that?"

The cabinets are slightly off-white, Kal notices. It's almost unnoticeable but he would bet that if he held a piece of printer paper and a piece of high quality art paper up to the wall, it would be more similar to the art paper.

"Kal?" Hawkgirl leans over slightly, looking at his face intently.

"I don't know. I hope not."

Green Lantern and Flash look at each other, uneasy with how somber their teammates seem.

"Hey, it's possible you don't have anything to do with it, Supes," Flash takes a handful of chips. "Both of the kids mentioned how much danger Kon could be in because of Lex Luthor, right? Him staying here is probably just like witness protection but a bit different."

Hawkgirl gives Flash an approving look and even Kal almost seems to perk up.

"Isn't witness protection only used after something terrible has happened?" Green Lantern asks.

Hawkgirl glares at Lantern and motions zipping her lips shut frantically. Her eyes dart between him and Kal.

Kal slumps and lets his head hit the counter. Concerned, Flash looks over.

"You alright, Supes?"

"No."

"Look, I'm sure whatever may or may not have happened wasn't this Superman's fault-"

"Of course, it is," Kal sighs. "Look at the signs. Everyone we've met here has either been uncomfortable around me or wary of me and I'm pretty sure Red Hood's and Nightwing's display the other day was a subtle threat-"

"That was meant to be subtle?" Hawkgirl mumbles.

"So in this universe, I'm obviously a bad person."

"Why would you still be in the Justice League then?" Flash asks.

"I don't know, Flash. I really don't."

Green Lantern sighs. "I hope the others will be back soon."

Somewhere not too far off, a tall building with large windows overlooks Metropolis. Sickly white light pours from the inside of it, leaving only black silhouettes of things to be seen from the outside.

The outline of a man can be seen, holding a telephone to one of his ears.

If someone were inside the building or had super hearing, they might hear;

"An intruder in one of my buildings? Did you catch them?"

The man pauses and muffled sound comes through the phone.

"Then what do I pay for? To sit around and be useless? You and your whole team couldn't catch one intruder. You've failed."

Another pause, shorter this time.

"Give me one, singular good reason not to fire you."

...

"You saw them? What did it look like?"

...

"A teenaged boy. Do you have any idea how many of those we have in Metropolis?"

...

"He had mismatched shoes? A boot and a... excuse you?"

...

"I know what a heel is, you dimwit! I'm questioning why a teenaged boy would be wearing two shoes of completely different types, especially when breaking in somewhere. It's not exactly productive to running, is it?"

...

"He left something?"

...

The man's voice twists, almost like he's smiling. "I'll be there tomorrow to check it out. Put it in a zip lock bag and place it on the desk, would you?"

...

"There's a stain on it? Make sure you wash your hands in the lavatory before leaving the building. The substance on it isn't harmful, just irritating."

He hangs up and slides the phone back onto its base. He looks out of the window, turning his head in the direction of a building with a globe sat above it.

"Not harmful to humans, anyway."

The Future Tastes Of Poison

Chapter Summary

The Intel mission ends, and those still at the Hall of Justice get to learn a little more about Kon from Kid Flash.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kal hears the footsteps before he hears the light knock on the kitchen doorway. He turns around on his stool and isn't remotely surprised to see Kid Flash standing there.

"The kitchen is a communal area, Kid - at least it is in our universe. You really don't have to knock," Green Lantern says, standing and dusting himself off. Flash soon follows and hops up to his feet.

"Neither is the common room," Kid Flash walks forward and sits on the counter. Lantern sits back down, curiously looking at Kid.

"We left because you and Kon were having a conversation we thought you wouldn't want us to be privy to. What's your excuse?" Hawkgirl asks. She's put her elbows on the counter beside Kid and is looking up at him.

"I didn't know if you were talking about something private and all that, so I thought it was best to be sure," he picks at his gloves. "I wouldn't normally talk to you all alone like this - I was telling Kon off for that earlier, after all - but I needed to talk to you and Kon... wouldn't be happy with what I'm saying, I don't think so anyway."

Flash leans towards Kid slightly, apparently thinking the same thing Kal is. The birds and Kon himself haven't been very forthcoming about what's going on with the young Superboy and yet here Kid Flash is without any of the same discretion.

"Thanks for giving me and Kon privacy earlier, we probably should've moved our discussion elsewhere but..." Kid Flash wrings his hands. "It's been difficult, you know? Having a new member has been hard for us Teen Titans and sometimes, we don't really know how to handle certain conversations and stuff," Kid waves his hands defensively and his boots lightly hit the counters underside. "It's not because we don't care - we do - it's just that it's hard understanding him and that's not his fault at all, it's just... he's so different compared to well, everyone..."

Different. It's shockingly odd to hear Kid Flash utter that word. Kon doesn't seem to be the only alien on the team - there's a Miss Martian, after all - and these people would obviously

be vaguely familiar with Krytonians (this universe's Superman and apparently whoever Bizarro is) so what would be different? Kal can't really come up with an answer.

"Usually, we can move conversations from one place to another but he just doesn't do that. He takes it as an opportunity to not have that discussion or maybe he just gets uncomfortable but either way, it kind of means we have to take those moments as we get them so he doesn't go closing himself up again.

So, what I'm trying to say is thank you for your understanding and sorry if we made you feel awkward," Kid Flash smiles and pushes himself off of the counter, seeming lighter after having spoken to them.

Kal thinks he hates himself - his alternate self, that is. Whatever life Kon has led with the other him has left the poor child with behaviours even other children find baffling. How bad must he be? Why is this Superman still a part of the Justice League?

"Wait. Kon's a new member?" Flash looks over at his teammates and then back at Kid.

"Uh, yeah? Obviously?" Kid Flash chuckles. "He's been a Teen Titan for a little less than two months now. Anyways, what do you lot think of watching a movie with me and Kon? It'll be fun while we wait for everyone else to get back," he smiles and walks off, not waiting for the Justice League to follow.

Kal looks over at the rest of his team and mouths, 'two months?'

They helplessly shrug.

Stepping out of Luthor's building is a relief, Wonder Woman thinks. There's only so long you can stay in a maze of sterile grey-ish hallways until it becomes unsettling and from the way Martian Manhunter's shoulders relax upon exiting, she can only assume the feeling is mutual.

Stood outside already are Batman and Nightwing. Nightwing is smiling casually, at home leaning against the alleyway's wall. He says something lowly and Batman's mouth twitches upwards before looking at where Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter stand.

"You're here. What have you both found out?" Batman approaches them.

"There's a machine in the room that window," J'ohn points upwards at the building, "belongs to."

"Same with ours," Nightwing rests a hand on Batman's shoulders. Oddly enough, Batman doesn't seem to mind. "It was still warm too which is weird. It's been three days since you've gotten here so that thing must have been boiling hot to not have gone cold already."

"Ours was leaking oil," Diana adds. "At least, it looked like oil. Black, glossy and rather reflective."

Nightwing's lenses narrow. "That's unusually messy for Luthor's handiwork."

"Another point to this only being intended for one use," Batman mutters and then turns to nod at Diana. "You're right about that sounding like oil - it was probably different than the kind you're used to from Themyscira, though. Most likely modified in a way."

"Where are the others?" She asks.

"I'll call them up on comms," Nightwing's hand raises to his earpiece. "Hey, where are you and Robin?"

A pause and then Nightwing grins. "We'll be there right away. Good job, team," he clicks off his comms. "They finished a little earlier, so they've been waiting a little farther up so the scarce guards on rotation won't see them. We're all heading back to the Hall now."

"You mentioned the machines only being a one-time use?" J'ohn directs this at Batman, although he does nod in acknowledge in Nightwing's direction.

"Yes. The lack of a substantial amount of guards and upkeep says it all. Lex Luthor doesn't plan to make use of this again and the only reason the guards are here is to make sure nobody finds out what he's done or doing."

"Then why not dismantle the machines?" Diana questions. J'ohn shudders.

"With how warm those machines' outer shells are, how hot do you think they would be internally?" He asks. She has to suppress a wince - she'd seen oil burns on her sisters and civilians and they were always grisly.

"It's good we got here soon then," Nightwing walks slightly in front so he can turn to face them all, "otherwise, all the evidence would have been gone."

They walk through the street, mostly using back alleys to avoid the public eye. Sooner than expected, they reach the Hall.

Robin is sat crossed-legged in front of the door, a pile of files sat on his lap. Next to him is what can only be Red Hood, except his red helmet is clasped in his hands instead of on his head.

He has a red domino mask on with the same white lenses as his brothers and father, with mostly black hair with a tuft of white in the front. Striding forward, he comes to a stop in front of Batman and gives the man a hard hit to the shoulder.

"Sorry for the cold welcome earlier, you understand, right? Paranoia was practically the first unit in our training," Hood's amused words sound nonsensical to Diana but Batman must've made sense of it because he claps Red Hood's shoulder in return and says:

"I understand. You did the best thing for the given situation."

Robin quickly lifts all the paperwork up, walks over to Nightwing and pushes it into the older hero's arms. He practically bounces over to Batman and, beaming, says, "B, you and your team need to see all the new tech in the Watchtower. Maybe it'll give you some ideas to implement into your own!"

Robin latches onto Batman's arm and goes to drag him inside before looking back and yelling, "are you all coming or not?"

Diana and J'ohn share a confused glance, bewildered by the birds sudden changes in attitude around Batman. Red Hood and Nightwing seem to notice this as they both laugh. Red Hood is the first of them to straighten up and talk.

"We'll explain later but for now, we should really talk to everyone else, okay?" His unmodified voice sounds warmer and clearer than Diana had expected - she'd been imagining Batman's growly voice but pitched up slightly.

"Of course. I am assuming this," she gestures good-naturedly to Robin chatting at Batman's side, "has been caused by the same thing that brought on that?" She points at his helmet in his hands and his (relatively) bare face.

"You'd be right."

They begin to go in but J'ohn lags behind slightly, frowning. He can feel the buzz of familial affection in the air, the excitement the littlest one has, the calm contentment of Red Hood and the pleasant joy that Nightwing carries. It makes sense for the situation and it's undeniably a good thing.

The only issue is that it proves him right, Kon's feelings that first day were indeed strange - he felt almost none of the feelings he senses now back when they had first arrived.

Poor, poor Kal, J'ohn thinks, he's going to be so upset.

How did we get here? Superman can't help but ask himself.

Farthest from the front of the room are Hawkgirl and Green Lantern are sat on opposite sides of the couch, both lying down with their feet intermingled in the middle. To their left, Flash has made himself at home slouched on a beanbag (one that is most definitely not in their version of the Hall). None at all uncomfortable, unlike Kal.

Kal sits in one of the two recliners, both of which are to the right of the couch. There's nothing wrong with it - it's the same as they have back in their universe - but it isn't his own position that makes him feel uneasy.

It's Kon's.

Kon was the first one in the room and yet, for some reason, he's sat on the floor. Or huddled may be the more accurate word for what he's doing as the floor has been covered with blankets, pillows and what Kal is sure are extra couch cushions.

Music fills the room as skeletons start dancing across the TV screen.

Comparatively, Kid Flash is sat in the other recliner which is definitely big enough for both boys to share comfortably.

"Kon," Kal whispers. "Wouldn't you rather sit on the couch? Or maybe the other recliner? I'm sure Kid Flash will let you if you ask."

Kon reluctantly pulls his eyes from the screen where a blue woman (Kal thinks she's meant to be a zombie?) dances with the one-eyed skeleton and is dipped. "No," he says quietly and turns back to the movie.

"Why not? It can't be very nice down there," Kal nods at the floor and leans on his armrest to better see Kon. The boy is half buried beneath a patchwork blanket.

"This is my spot," Kon huffs and defiantly shuffles deeper into his bizarre nest of blankets.

Kal frowns.

On the screen, the blue woman and the rather sombre looking human spin around. The lady's skeletal arm comes off.

"It's the floor, Kon - you shouldn't be sitting there. Come up and sit on the couch or even share a seat with someone else - I don't think any of us would mind," Kal tries to keep his voice low and calm. He's angry his other self isn't here because Kal should not have to be the one dealing with whatever this conversation is.

Kon is a child and yet he sleeps on a couch and thinks the floor is 'his spot' - what child thinks their place is on the floor?

Wanting to punch yourself can't be healthy but Kal feels like he can give himself a pass considering it's an alternate version of him.

"No," Kon hisses, "this is my spot, stop asking." Kon sprawls himself out to the right (away from Kal), headbutting Kid Flash in the leg.

To Kid Flash's credit, he barely even flinches. He simply looks down at his teammate, then up at Kal and finally back at the screen. His left hand comes down to rest on Kon's head.

Kal looks around. Green Lantern is looking straight ahead at the movie playing, Flash is peeking intermittently at the two boys across the room and Hawkgirl is peering at Kal from the corner of her eye.

'What am I doing wrong?' He mouths.

'I don't know but whatever it is, you need to stop doing it,' she mouths back. Kal sighs.

'I'm trying my best here,' he mouths. Hawkgirl squints at Kal, clumsily mimics it and shakes her head. She doesn't understand.

This time, he whispers, "I'm trying my best here. I just... don't know what I'm doing wrong."

Hawkgirl goes to nod but jerks back in surprise when a pillow smacks Kal in the face. They both look in the direction it came from.

Kid Flash is shushing them but his expression is odd. His brows are furrowed and his expression is serious. His eyes dart from the two to where Kon is sat, engrossed in the movie, against his leg and back again.

The message is clear.

Both Hawkgirl and Kal go back to watching the movie and don't attempt to talk to each other again.

When those who were out on the mission return (he can hear their footsteps in the common room), Kal can't help but be relieved.

"The others are back," he announces. Flash, being the one closest to the TV, is the one to pause the movie. The zombie woman, a spider and a caterpillar had been singing. Kal had been too busy stressing over Kon to really pay attention to most of what had been going on.

They all file out to go meet up with Batman, the birds, Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter.

"It's good to see you all back," Kal smiles at them - none of them are injured, which is expected but still nice. "How'd the mission go?" He asks and pats Batman lightly on the arm.

Kal feels heavy. He tries to ignore it.

"Well. Nobody got caught and we all gathered as much information as possible."

Kon walks over to where the birds are standing between Batman and Wonder Woman. "Are you all alright?" Kon looks over all of them.

"Yes and even better yet, we have solid confirmation that these lot," Nightwing gestures to the Justice League, "are legit. You were right, they're not Luthor's work after all."

Kon grins but his eyes go funny for a second - twitching about before rolling downwards. His smile drops as he stumbles. Wonder Woman catches him by the wrist.

Kon wails.

She lets go in shock and backs up. Kon is on the floor, eyes unfocused and cradling his wrist. It's swollen and red like an allergic reaction.

"Kon!" Both Robin and Flash cry. They hurry over to his side but don't touch him.

"What is wrong with him? Is he alright?" Diana kneels down.

"Wonder Woman," Robin turns to look at her. "His wrist is swelling up. The wrist you touched. Did you find and hold anything unusual at the building you were in?"

"Only the machine."

"That shouldn't have done anything, though..." he turns back to Kon. "Hey, buddy. How are you feeling?"

Kon's mouth opens and closes for a second before he croaks out, "Unwell."

Kal goes to stand by Wonder Woman, who gets up. She's focused intently on Kon and he can't help but think she's blaming herself.

His chest feels tight.

Robin looks across to Kid Flash, "Did Kon seem ill before this at all?" Kid Flash shakes his head and pulls one of his gloves off to fidget with.

"He was alright before this, nothing unusual."

Wonder Woman flinches and Kal whispers, "it's not your fault." He tries to give her hand a reassuring squeeze.

Tries because when he does, he feels like he's put his palm against a hot flame.

Kal pulls his hand back and examines the red irritated skin there. It looks almost exactly like Kon's except less severe.

"Kal, Kal, are you alright?" Diana looks horrified.

He breathes unsteadily and asks, "Are you one hundred percent sure you didn't touch anything?"

Batman answers for her, "the oil."

...

"Everyone who went on the mission and everyone who has touched someone who went on the mission, decontamination showers now!" Nightwing shouts.

Red Hood and Robin react immediately. Batman and Martian Manhunter walk over to where Kal and Diana stand.

"Quickly," Martian Manhunter prompts.

Kid Flash stays sat beside Kon until Nightwing say, "Kid, help Kon to the decontamination showers. The sooner that hand gets washed off, the sooner it will heal."

Confused and concerned, they all head to the decontamination room.

Chapter End Notes

The movie that they watch in this chapter is actually a real movie. I wonder if any of you know it? 🤔

As always, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter and thanks for reading.

Past Wounds are Present Scars

Chapter Summary

The Justice League find out what the oil was, only to be left with more questions than answers...

Chapter Notes

I really enjoyed writing this chapter and I used it to give some of the Justice League that haven't been used as frequently some much needed attention. Hope you all enjoy :)

When the Justice League gets out of their decontamination showers, it's late. Luckily, extras of their uniforms had been in their lockers.

"Woah, Batman! That's really different from your usual get-up," Flash circles Batman, staring at the suit. It's bulkier than Batman's usual one and the cape appears thicker.

"It's also a size too big. The height is fine but there's too much room," to demonstrate, Batman slowly waves his arm from side to side and with too much ease, the armour moves around it.

"Oh, that is definitely too loose," Green Lantern steps forward to better look at it. "I guess the Batman here is larger?"

"More muscular, maybe," Flash guesses.

Humming, Batman nods. "That's the most likely explanation, yes. The different suit is... a surprise although it makes sense. Despite the obvious similarities between this world and ours, some things are clearly different," Batman nods in Kal's direction.

"Why is yours so different? Mine is the exact same and so is Hawkgirl's and the Flash's?" Kal asks.

"I think mine is made out of a sturdier material actually," Flash pinches his own suit to demonstrate. It's textured roughly unlike the material of his previous suit.

Hawkgirl shrugs, "My one is the same as always."

"Mine has also changed," Diana holds her arms out to her sides, showing off a more armoured look in comparison to her almost fabric-like outfit she had on before. "My skirt has

been exchanged for... I am not sure what this is."

"Looks like swimsuit bottoms to me," Lantern calls out. "Strangely modern. Maybe it's because this world's Wonder Woman has spent more time here."

"You think any version of me would abandon my Amazonian roots to comply with the standards of Man's world?" Diana crosses her arms - her face is set in a scowl. Flash puts himself between her and Lantern.

"Woah, nobody said that. He just means that maybe you want to show off where you live now, you know?" His arms gesticulate frantically. "This Wonder Woman is still wearing Amazonian gear just... in a newer way. Maybe she wants to show off both her roots and the world she fights for at the same time?"

Wonder Woman pauses and wets her lips. "Yes. That would be a good reason, wouldn't it?" At that, Flash nods happily.

Hawkgirl shuffles closer to Wonder Woman.

"I suppose some of us are less alike in this world," J'ohn says.

"Then shouldn't Superman's outfit be the most different?" Flash points at Kal's unchanged outfit.

"Not necessarily. His suit is based off of his kryptonian heritage and he has always lived among humans, so there'd be no reason for a change."

"Oh, I get it. And I guess more armour wouldn't really make much sense since Superman is already invulnerable to most things," Flash grins.

"Except kryptonite," Green Lantern pipes up.

"And whatever the oil Diana touched was," Kal adds. "That stuff burned badly and Kon seemed to have a similar if not worse reaction than me. If what that was exists in our universe, we need to figure out what it is and quick."

"Nightwing seemed to know what it was," J'ohn says. Light reflects oddly off of his pupil-less, sclera-less eyes for a moment, suggesting that his gaze has moved elsewhere. Kal wonders if he'll ever be able to tell exactly where the man is looking.

He hopes so. Maybe he'd be able to understand his teammate better if he could.

"What makes you say that?" Hawkgirl's feathers fluff up slightly as she speaks. "If he knew what it was, why wouldn't he have just told us? Whatever that substance was put Kal at risk so at least Kal should know what it is to better protect himself from it in the future."

"His priority was Kon in that moment. If only you had felt it - Nightwing had been terrified, the feeling was practically seeping out of his pores."

Curiously, Diana steps forward. "But John, Kal was also injured. Was that not also worry for him?"

"There was concern for Kal but not fear. He seemed sure Kal would be fine," John pulls at the opening of his gloves, pulling them up higher.

"But Kon..?" Kal moves forward slightly. John looks down.

"I cannot say for certain but Nightwing felt very strongly about the entire situation. I would be surprised if he hasn't already burned our contaminated clothes."

"You do know there's a washing machine for that, right?"

"I am not sure if he would use it."

It would sound like a joke coming from anyone else but John's serious tone and the last time one of the birds had burned something with little to no provocation leaves no doubt that that is an actual possibility.

"Why don't we just... ask him? It can't hurt, right?" Lantern suggests. There are mumbles of agreement from around the room.

"He may not be out of his own decontamination shower yet," Hawkgirl suggests. Despite it only being necessary for some of them to decontaminate, Nightwing had managed to convince everyone to take one for precaution's sake so she couldn't imagine him slacking on his own shower.

"Let's check the building. If we don't find him, we'll just go back to the Watchtower, get some rest and ask him tomorrow," Kal heads towards the door to the locker room. The others follow.

Upon opening the door, they see Nightwing suited up and sat on a table in front. His hair is damp and his skin is flushed a raw red colour - Kal wonders whether Nightwing simply had the shower hot or if he'd scrubbed his skin too harshly.

There are empty, available chairs tucked underneath the table top so the Justice League all pull one out and sit down.

"I know you're all going to want an explanation but there's only so much I can say," Nightwing starts.

"What do you mean by that?" Hawkgirl asks. She brushes her own wet hair off of her shoulder.

"I don't know much about that stuff - it's not something you really ever encounter in Gotham. It's not even common in Metropolis," he kicks his legs back and forth and keeps his head down.

"Okay, so what even is it then?"

He takes a deep breath and quickly says, "it's altered kryptonite."

For a moment all that can be heard is quiet breathing.

Kal should have expected it. Of course, it's kryptonite - what else would it be? But the 'altered' bit concerns him. Kryptonite has never been discrete, it's a green glowing rock that's only reliable way of being hidden would be to put it into jewellery of some kind.

But a liquid? That's easily disguised - it can be painted onto objects if it can dry or put into drinks or even just put into an opaque container.

He's about to ask for more elaboration when Batman beats him to it.

"Nightwing, do you know how exactly it's been altered or why?"

"I don't know how but I know it's done by Lex Luthor and his scientists - luckily, no other criminals seem to have caught on to the fact it can be changed in such a way. I'm not sure why it was in the machine."

"Luthor was obviously expecting us," Hawkgirl grinds her teeth.

"I don't think so. Luthor only ever uses solid, natural kryptonite against Superman," running a hand across the edge of the table, Nightwing looks up from the ground and nods at Kal.

"What's the point of it then?" She demands.

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you that," he pushes himself off of the table.

"Then what use are you?" Hawkgirl shouts. "Why is it nobody is able to tell us anything useful for some reason? We need to get home and we can't do that if we have Luthor on our heels!"

"You don't have Luthor on your heels or at least you shouldn't as long as Martian Manhunter and Wonder Woman didn't get found out - which they say they didn't. So, you're all fine."

"You say that but how can we trust any of you when you refuse to tell us anything? We've been having to prove our own legitimacy this entire time and yet none of your little group has had to do the same," Hawkgirl gets up from her chair, seething. Diana stands and puts a hand on her shoulder.

"We've been helping you, haven't we?" He asks.

"Your 'help' got Kal injured mere moments ago."

"And you think that was purposeful?" Nightwing strides forward, scowling. "Kon got injured as well. Do you have any idea how terrifying that was for us all? If we knew that your friend would be covered in kryptonite do you really think we would have let you anywhere near Kon?" His voice shakily raises. "How dare you? How dare you suggest we would put Kon at risk like that!"

"Enough," Batman calls out and pushes his own chair out of the way. "Hawkgirl, I understand your frustration but if this is all he can tell us then nothing is going to change that. And Nightwing-" Batman puts a hand on his shoulder. "Please, calm down. Hawkgirl wasn't trying to accuse you or either of your brothers of not caring for your teammates."

Nightwing's shoulders slump and he rests his head against one of Batman's shoulder pads. "I know- I know that logically. But it's so difficult to try and balance telling you and your team certain information whilst not hurting anyone or doing more damage than good," his breath hitches.

"Why couldn't you have all come when our Justice League were here? It would have been so much easier to just have them sort this!" Nightwing raises a hand to steady himself against Batman's side. Batman hums slightly and runs his hand up and down Nightwing's back.

"I can't tell you anymore about the altered kryptonite, okay? Or its purpose. You'd have to ask someone else," Nightwing straightens up. There are tears seeping through the edge of his mask.

As he turns to leave, Green Lantern asks, "Where are the rest of your lot anyway?"

Nightwing looks over his shoulder. "They've all head to bed. I was just waiting in case you had questions," he sighs. "Don't badger Kon about this, okay?"

He leaves. It takes only a couple of minutes before they hear a Zeta tube go off from farther in the building.

"We should probably get some rest too, huh?" Flash rubs at the back of his neck.

"You all go do that. For now, me and Diana need to talk," Hawkgirl points her thumb at Wonder Woman.

Diana blinks owlshly, "we do?"

"Yes."

J'ohn shakes his head. "I do not think I will be able to sleep very well at the moment, Barry."

The Flash winces, "I was hoping that you all had conveniently forgotten that Kid Flash totally blew my cover."

"Not entirely. We still do not know your identity, just your first name. I am sure that there are plenty of Barrys in the world," J'ohn smiles at Flash.

"Besides, there are more pressing matters at the moment. We still don't know how we are going to get home," Kal says.

"Tomorrow, I'm assuming there will be a meeting about all that was found at Luthor's buildings. It may give us some ideas," Batman nods at his teammates. "I'm retiring for the night. If anyone needs me, you know where my room is. Goodnight." He swoops out of the room. His cape flows less than it usually does.

“I’m with Spooky on this one. If we’re all exhausted we’re good to nobody,” Green Lantern looks over at Hawkgirl. “Make sure you and Wonder Woman get some sleep, okay?”

She nods at Lantern as he heads out. Soon, the others file out as well - chairs scraping against the ground as they’re pushed in - leaving only Hawkgirl and Wonder Woman.

“What did you wish to talk about?” For a second, Diana hands go to play with her skirt only for her to remember it’s no longer there. Hawkgirl sits on the ground and leans against one of the table legs.

“You were really upset earlier. That’s not normal for you, especially not over something so minor. What’s up?” She looks up at Diana.

“It is nothing, Shayera. I was just being sensitive,” Diana turns away and crosses her arms but her voice doesn’t sound angry instead it’s monotone - empty in a way.

“Diana, even if you were being sensitive - which I’m not saying you were - it’s not ‘just’ anything. I know how strange this whole situation is and-“ Hawkgirl looks to the ceiling and gives herself a second to collect herself before carrying on.

“I’m worried; about you, about Kal, about everyone. So, talk to me. Tell me what upset you and I’ll make sure whatever it was doesn’t happen again, yeah?”

“It is not something you can help,” Diana sits down beside Hawkgirl, still not looking her way.

“How is it not? Green Lantern said something and I can tell him not to do that: it’s easy,” Shayera puts a hand over Diana’s comfortingly.

“It was not something he said. What he said was just...”

“The straw that broke the camel’s back?”

“If that is how you wish to put it,” Diana grips the hand in hers. Her voice is quiet and unsteady.

“Then that’s fine, we can work with that. What was it that was really bothering you?” Shayera tries to keep her voice gentle - usually it’s not her who has do any comforting or tell people that ‘everything is going to be okay’. More often then not, it’s Flash and Superman or if it’s a child, Batman.

“I worry that my mother and amazonian sisters will not accept me back,” Diana turns her head, allowing Hawkgirl to see her face. It’s splotchy red and her pursed lips and concentration on a point somewhere above Shayera’s shoulder seems to be the only things keeping her from crying.

Shayera doesn’t truly know what to say. Of all the people to somehow be having family issues brought up at the moment, Wonder Woman is probably the least expected.

“Oh... And what makes you think that?”

“I would have no other reason to modernise my costume otherwise. Sure, what Flash suggested may make sense for anyone else but that’s not how I think. My suit is a mark of honour as much as it is a nod to my heritage. To change it would be unfathomable,” tears begin to drip down the corners of Diana’s eyes.

Hawkgirl wishes she had asked somebody else to be present for this conversation or even to do it for her.

“But that’s you. Maybe this world’s Wonder Woman doesn’t see it that way - if this universe’s Kal is so different, you might be too,” she doesn’t really know what’s she’s saying: she just wants Diana to stop looking so distraught.

“It is not even made of the same material, Shayera. There is not a scrap of the original in it - why would I do that? Why would I not preserve something I hold so dear to me?”

I don’t know, Shayera thinks.

“The original may be too battered from a fight to still wear. It could be hung up somewhere,” she says instead.

Sobbing. Full-blown sobbing tears through Diana’s throat.

Shayera wraps an arm around Diana’s waist and pulls her into her side.

“Look, if you really think being... disowned, discommunicated, whatever you want to call it is an actual possibility then I won’t try to convince you otherwise. You know your family better than I do,” Diana’s head comes to rest above Shayera’s collar bone. Shayera keeps talking as she rests her chin on Diana’s hair.

“And you know what? When you do try to talk to them again, I’ll even come with you if you want. Be your emotional backup,” Shayera finds herself saying completely honestly. She would face the amazonians if Diana asked - no, even suggested that that’s what she wants.

Diana lets out a hiccup and then a giggle. “Like a cheerleader?”

“Not quite. Save that job for the Flash.”

“And no matter what happens, me and the team will be there for you. I may be no amazonian sister but... a teammate works well enough too, right?” Shayera puts one of her wings around Diana’s shoulders. She’s surprised when Diana hugs her tightly.

“My sister in battle.”

They sit there in the floor for a long while. At some point, Shayera takes off her mask. She trusts Diana not to look.

J’ohn sits in the kitchen of the Watchtower, a piece of paper laid out in front of him. He has a pen clasped in his right hand. He looks up at the doorway.

“Hello, Barry. I thought you were going to get some rest?” J’ohn watches as Flash grabs a bowl from a cupboard, pours a pack of oreos into it and puts it on the table.

“Couldn’t sleep. How did you know I was here?” Flash slouches into the chair beside J’ohn. He doesn’t have his gloves on.

“You feel... anxious.”

“Of course, I do. Our team is falling apart at the seams,” Flash takes a rather vicious bite out of an oreo.

“You normally would not say that.”

“What’s the point in lying to you? You can read minds anyways, you probably already knew what I was thinking.”

“I never try to actively read any of your minds and the only reason I can feel your emotions so acutely at the moment is because you may as well be broadcasting them,” J’ohn takes an oreo out of the bowl and thinks whilst chewing it.

“You do know that, right? That I would never purposefully invade your privacy.”

“It’s difficult sometimes to- to remember that. It scares me, I’m going to lie. Not because I don’t trust you but...” Flash waves his hands about hopelessly.

“But..?”

“Sometimes we have to lie to ourselves. Or maybe you don’t but others do,” Flash looks at J’ohn. J’ohn sees his pleading eyes and wishes that he doesn’t need to ask but-

“Why would you need to do that? What do you gain by deceiving yourself?”

“Comfort.”

“I do not understand...” J’ohn wracks his brain to try and come up with a reason why someone would need to tell themselves falsehoods and think of one. It wouldn’t work anyway would it? The purpose of a lie is that the other doesn’t know it’s not true.

“What do you think this universe’s Superman is like?”

Surprised by the change in topic, J’ohn stammers out, “I- I am not sure, we have not met him yet.”

“I think it’s great that you think like that - that you don’t make assumptions like I do. It hurts, you know?” Flash’s fingers drum against the table.

“I want to believe he’s a good person, just like our Superman. I want to think that all of the things that say otherwise are coincidence but... but then I see that kid and I don’t think that. So, I lie to myself because it’s easier than thinking about it.”

J'ohn stares at Flash. "But you know it's not the truth."

"I do."

"Does it hurt that badly that you need to ignore it?"

"It's easier," Flash says. "What's the paper for?"

"I... I do not know. I was going to do something with it but... I am not sure what that was anymore," J'ohn looks down at his pen and paper. Tries to figure out why he grabbed it and can't.

"It's alright, we all have days like that."

They sit in silence, sharing the bowl between them until Flash begins to fall asleep sitting down. Then they both leave to go to their rooms.

The Past Speaks

Chapter Summary

The Justice League get ready for the big talk with the future heroes.

Chapter Notes

I'm afraid not much really happens in this chapter but I swear that it's only because I want the next chapter to be dedicated to the group's conversation and I really didn't want it to be split awkwardly across chapters. So...

Have some some one on one and group interaction instead, I guess?

The morning is somber. The Justice League wake up, none feeling ready for the talk to come. They gather in the Zeta room and are surprised to see that in front of the Zeta Tubes, their old suits have been placed down.

"Looks like Nightwing didn't burn them, huh?" Flash elbows Martian Manhunter slightly, smiling.

"Looks like I was wrong. You had all better get changed out of the borrowed uniforms now, I am sure that this universe's Justice League would not appreciate them being missing when they come back."

Eager to get back into their regular uniforms, they all go to their respective rooms to change except for J'ohn (who shapeshifts his clothes) and Green Lantern (whose outfit is created by the ring).

"Hey, Manhunter. How are you holding up?" Lantern asks, walking closer.

"Well enough, I suppose. You do know that you can call me J'ohn, right?" J'ohn has three names in total, two of which are known by the Justice League: Martian Manhunter and J'ohn J'onzz. Usually when off the field, his teammates opt for the more intimate choice of calling him J'ohn.

"I could but I'd rather not. It'd feel strange," Lantern scratches at the back of his neck, sheepish almost.

"And why is that?"

"It's just- just that I know a guy called John and it'd feel weird calling you both by the same name," anxiety flares up around Lantern like a smoke cloud. J'ohn decides not to read into it.

"It is said J'ohn, actually. I understand but being called 'Manhunter' feels a little... impersonal."

"I get that," Lantern sighs and then his face lights up. "What associations do um... Martians have with last names?"

"It is slightly formal to be referred by it but other than that and the fact your family share it, it's not much different from a first name," J'ohn replies.

"How about I just call you J'onzz then?"

"Yes, I would like that."

They stand in comfortable silence and J'ohn basks in the camaradery of it all.

Soon, the rest of the Justice League file into the room, comfortable in their usual armour. Green Lantern goes over to pat Batman on the shoulder and asks, "does it feel better to be in a suit that actually fits?"

"Yes, actually, it does," Batman gives his arm a shake, seemingly satisfied with how the material doesn't move around his arm.

"Now, that everyone's comfortable," Kal starts. "Let's go to the Hall of Justice and speak with everyone over there."

"Wait, shouldn't we have breakfast first?" Flash asks.

"We'll be having that at the hall. That way we have more time to discuss before the boys head out for patrol," Batman goes over to one of the panels to input their destination.

"Kon would be there to answer questions as well though," Kal says, confused.

"He also has patrol," Martian Manhunter interjects. He walks over to stand beside Batman, closer to the Zeta Tubes.

"But Kon hasn't patrolled since we got here?"

"He's right, Kon's been at the Hall all around the clock from what I've seen. So that's two days without patrol," Flash says.

"But we've been here for three days?" Green Lantern waves a hand about vaguely.

"Kon had been out in Metropolis the first day, remember? The crimes that seemed to abruptly stop before we could get to them?" Batman finishes inputting the coordinates.

"Oh, I see. That's... odd," Flash looks at Kal, who seems rather overwhelmed.

"The kid's what? Seventeen? Of course he's not going to be out patrolling everyday. I don't think even Bats sends his little guy out every night," Green Lantern points at Batman.

"Robin. He is called Robin," Batman says.

"Yeah, well so are two other boys at some point apparently. It's not my fault the naming system for your sidekicks seem broken."

"Robin chose his own name," Batman growls.

"Hey! Everyone needs to settle down. We would be in the Hall right now if it weren't for your bickering," Hawkgirl's wings flare out to the side in irritation.

"Hawkgirl is right, we should go now," Wonder Woman announces.

"We can ask Kon about his weird patrol schedule when we get there, okay? Flash whispers to Kal.

"Alright."

They all shuffle into their own Zeta Tube and are transported to the lounge in the Hall of Justice.

Quietly, Kal floats over a couch and peers over the edge. His entire back stiffens and he frantically looks over the other couches in the room.

"Kon'a not here," Kal looks at the rest of the Justice League as he talks, face creased with concern.

"Good, maybe the kid's in an actual bed this time," Green Lantern walks over to the couches, gives them a cursory glance and sits down on one.

"Doubt it," Hawkgirl remarks. "Kid talked about sleeping on the couch way too casually for it to be a one time thing. Besides, didn't you see him sat on the floor during the movie? Kid seems to have a weird relationship with furniture."

"None of that matters right now! What matters is that Kon isn't here - neither for the meeting or to sleep on the couch - and yesterday he was injured! What if he was hurt badly?" Kal wraps his arms around himself.

"Nightwing talked about Kon as though he was fine though," Flash puts a reassuring hand on Kal's arm.

"Could be a flare up. Gets worse before it gets better and all that," Hawkgirl sits next to Green Lantern. "Maybe you should go check on him, Kal. Me and Lantern can stay here and the others can go to the meeting room - if any of us see him, we'll come get you, okay?"

"Yes, of course! I'll get started," Kal hurries out of the room speedily.

"He's more wound up than a Jack in the box..." Flash mumbles.

"At least searching gives him something to do that'll work off the nervous energy," Batman pats Flash on the back. "I'm sure Kon is fine but a worried parent rarely listens to reassurances without seeing their child physically in front of them."

"Personal experience, Bats?" Green Lantern snickers.

"We save parents and children regularly, you've seen how parents get when they are separated."

"Not what I meant but sure. Don't think any of us have forgotten that the Robins are apparently all your kids."

"Did none of you realise that before coming here?" Batman asks in disbelief. "What did you think Robin was to me? A random child I picked off the street? A neighbor's kid?"

Green Lantern shrugs, "either or. Never took you as the parental type."

Flash perks up, "oh, I totally forgot about that! So, since we've met your kids, when are we going to meet Mrs Bat?"

"Excuse you?" Batman's head tilts to one side and his lips twitch downwards.

"Or maybe it would be Mrs Man? Mrs Batman?" Flash puts up a finger for every variation of the name.

"I'm not married, Flash."

"So, fiancé then?"

"Flash."

"Or girlfriend, that's an option too, I guess."

"Barry!" Batman snaps his fingers in front of Flash's face. "While I appreciate the enthusiasm to get to know your teammates better, in this case it is entirely unnecessary and unwarranted."

Batman inhales softly before blowing the air out of his mouth. "There is nobody for you to meet as there is no romantic partner in my life. There is no co-parent either before you ask."

Flash's mouth falls open. Green Lantern is staring at Batman and Hawkgirl has gone still. Martian Manhunter's shoulders are tense. Wonder Woman has a hand clasped over her mouth.

"I- I am so, so sorry, I didn't realise-"

"Flash, calm yourself. My single parenthood is entirely of my own choice and is nothing to be upset about. I love Robin dearly and I wouldn't change anything even if given the chance to," the corners of Batman's lips pull themselves upwards and a sliver of his white teeth show. It takes a minute for Flash to realise Batman is smiling at him.

Flash and everyone else relaxes. "That's good," Flash says. "Glad to hear that I didn't just make everything massively awkward."

Batman nods and his face, thankfully, returns to normal.

"When you lot head to the meeting room bring some breakfast food with you from the kitchen, alright?" Hawkgirl says as she runs one of her hands through her feathers.

"We will do that," J'ohn nods. "See you soon, Hawkgirl. And you, Lantern."

"Bye, J'onzz."

J'ohn walks out and Wonder Woman, Batman and Flash follow him out.

Green Lantern turns to Hawkgirl. "What are you up to, Shayera?"

"What makes you think I'm up to something?" Some loose feathers fall to the ground.

"You took charge pretty eagerly back there whilst usually you're happy hanging back unless someone does something stupid. I want to know what it is," Lantern says. He looks at Hawkgirl's wings and adds, "do you want some help with those?"

"Yes, please," Hawkgirl turns her back to Lantern and stretches out one wing to the side. He leans forward and starts running his hands through her feathers.

"So? What was the deal with separating everyone?"

"Kal will get some much needed one on one time with Kon when he finds him. I'm hoping it'll boost his morale a bit - he's been so upset recently and that's not good for anyone," she pinches the end of a baby feather between her fingers and watches the cartilage crumble.

"So, you're trying to help Superman which by extension is helping the team?" Green Lantern pats at the side of her wing.

Shayera shakes her wings a bit to shake loose some of the more stubborn feathers.

She bites her lip and says, "If we're a fence, we need to support the other links, right?"

Green Lantern grins. "I couldn't agree more."

"Anyway, enough about what I've done, let's talk about you getting buddy-buddy with Manhunter?"

Lantern rolls his eyes despite Shayera not facing him. "It's nothing really. He just... wanted to be called by his actual name instead of his hero alias, you know?"

Shayera pauses. Giving both her wings a quick inspection, she deems them acceptable and folds them back behind her. She turns to face Green Lantern but doesn't meet his eyes.

"Shayera?"

"I understand it well. When... When you are surrounded by people not like you and your name - your proper name - isn't used, it feels almost... alienating. Like you have to changed yourself for people to want to see you," her red hair falls in front of her face slightly. Lantern pushes it back.

"Well, I call you Shayera. And I'm sure the others will use it as often as you'd like if you ask."

"You don't know that - I don't know that. I'm not sure they'd understand how much it means to not be called by your name. For ones like me and- and J'onzz, it's what little left of our culture we carry," Hawkgirl rests her head on Lantern's shoulder.

"Like Wonder Woman's outfit was important to her?"

"Exactly!" Hawkgirl says. Then she gazes at Green Lantern for a moment and squints. "That was you making a point, wasn't it?"

"Yep. Look, I know it's not the same but I'm sure we all have something similar to that. I mean, you've already crossed off Diana and J'onzz and you can also cross me off so that only leaves what? Three people left out of the Justice League?"

Hawkgirl nods.

"So, you'll be fine, Shayera. Trust me and trust our teammates."

"I'll try harder."

"That's all I ask."

Kal roams the halls, alert for any sort of sound. Footsteps, breathing, anything.

He's hyper aware of how he's flying instead of walking but he doesn't care, can't care at the moment. It's scary to think of how attached he's gotten to this boy from a different universe but he knows-

No. Hopes that this world's Superman would be equally as worried as Kal is right now.

So caught up in his own head, he almost passes a slightly ajar door - until he realises he can hear breathing from it. He recognises it as one of the spare bedrooms.

Knocking on the door gently, Kal whispers, "Kon, are you in there?"

When there's no response, he pushes the open slowly.

Sat on the floor and sleeping are Kon and two other boys: all dressed in their nightwear. Kon has his head leaning against the bed behind him and an arm wrapped around the shoulders of each of the boys.

The boy to Kon's left has black hair and thankfully has his unmasked face buried in Kon's shoulder. From his height, hair and build, Kal can only assume that the boy is Robin.

The one to Kon's right has bright ginger hair and has his face turned towards Kon's chest - once again, luckily out of Kal's sight. Kal wonders who the boy could be, he doesn't know of many red-headed heroes.

Between the boys' laps, there is a game console that Kal doesn't recognise. It seems to have turned itself off.

Smiling, Kal clears his throat, "boys, it's morning."

Kon is the first to stir, stretching his arms out above his head and yawning widely. His eyes open and he looks around until his eyes focus on Kal.

The other two start to wake up and go to sit up straight but Kal puts a hand to the back of both their heads to stop them.

"Robin, Kid Flash, don't. Superman's here. Alternate universe Superman, I mean," Kon says.

Both boys go still. A minute passes.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Ask him to leave," Kid Flash mumbles into Kon's chest.

"I thought one of you were going to do it! It's not my secret identity at stake."

"What secret identity, Kon? You don't have one to be at stake in the first place," Robin grumbles.

Kon sighs. "Hey, Superman. Mind getting out? These two need to get some masks on," Kon pats the back of his friends' heads.

"There are domino masks in the bedside table," Kal points rather unnecessarily to the unit beside Kid Flash.

"Wait, really?" Kon leans over to the side slightly and rummages through the top drawer, letting out a happy 'ah-ha!' when he grabs some. "Sweet. Robin, what size domino are you?"

"Medium b, I'm pretty sure?"

"Wait, don't those things need adhesive?" Kid Flash asks.

"Yes, obviously," Robin flaps a hand in Kid's direction sassily.

Kid grumbles. "Do we have adhesive?"

"Usually, I'd carry some in my utility belt but..." Robin trails off.

"But you don't have your utility belt right now. Great," Kon facepalms with the hand not carrying a fistful of masks.

"Back of the drawer, kiddos," Kal says, shaking his head. At this point, he's leaning against the doorframe and watching in amusement. Kon rifles around the drawer again.

"Oh, there it is!" Kon holds a tube with small writing on it and a pink cap. He takes off the cap and stares at the semi-transparent white stick of adhesive inside. "Okay, how do I do this?"

"It's kind of like a glue stick. You can either apply it to the mask or directly to the skin," Robin explains with the ease of someone who's been applying dominos for years - which he probably has, now that Kal thinks about it.

"So, which are we supposed to..?" Kid Flash mimes gluing something despite the fact that only Kal and Kon can see it. Fortunately, Robin seems to have gotten the gist because he answers not a moment later.

"I'd suggest the masks this time around. Using on the skin is all well and good when it's your personal adhesive but otherwise it's pretty gross."

"Got it," Kon says. "So, medium b for you, Robin?"

"Yeah."

Kon slathers a black domino with adhesive and unceremoniously presses it to Robin's unsuspecting face. Robin makes a disgruntled noise.

"What about you, Kid Flash? What size?"

"I don't know, I don't wear domino masks!"

"Let me do it," Robin says and moves to sit up across from where Kid Flash is. "You look like a small a. Hey, Kon?"

"Yes?"

"Pass me the adhesive and the red mask, please."

Kon hands both to Robin. Robin quickly applies the adhesive to the inside of the mask, leans over and swiftly sticks it to the front of Kid's face.

Kid Flash looks up and around the room in his temporary mask. "This is so strange..." he says.

"You get used to it," Robin picks up the game console and puts it away in a compartment of the bedside unit. Getting up, he offers a hand to both of his friends. Both take one and also stand up.

It gives Kal a proper chance to look at what all of them are wearing. Robin is in a yellow long sleeved shirt and lounge pants, Kid is in a Flash T-shirt and Superman joggers while Kon is in a tall, hawaiian shirt and black, below the knee shorts.

"Let's get going. The rest of your team are in the meeting room, yeah?" Kon asks.

Kal nods.

"Then what are you waiting for, Superman? Lead the way."

Ignoring the Past

Chapter Summary

The conversation over breakfast, where the team and the future heroes discuss everything from yesterday's kryptonite to how they got here.

Chapter Notes

Here is the breakfast meeting at last! I hope you all love the word cereal because you'll be seeing it a lot this chapter.

Kal and the boys head to the Zeta room and meet up with Hawkgirl and Green Lantern first - Kal had insisted because he had wanted to make sure Hawkgirl and Lantern knew everything was okay.

Lantern gave Robin and Kid Flash a curious look but smiled nonetheless. Hawkgirl had smirked for some reason - Kal had a feeling that she had thought he was overreacting earlier.

After that, they had all gone together to the meeting room.

When they had gotten there, Nightwing and Red Hood - once again, not wearing his helmet - were there already.

On the table were bowls, spoons, two jugs of milk, several boxes of cereal and paperwork.

The stranglers sat themselves down and the meeting had begun...

Nightwing, Red Hood, Robin, Kid Flash and Kon all sit on one side. The Justice League sit on the other.

Kal decides to start the conversation with the most pressing matter. "So, liquified kryptonite..." he starts.

"Of course, that's what we're starting with," Red Hood groans and pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Is there an issue with that?" Lantern huffs.

"No, just that it's not all that complicated. It's kryptonite, it's in a liquid form, what more do you need to know?" Hood gestures widely before leaning his chin against his palm.

"A lot!"

"Aqueous," Robin says quietly.

"What?" Hawkgirl asks.

"It's not liquified exactly. It's aqueous - mixed with something other than itself," Robin says as he grabs a bowl and a box of cereal.

"And you know this how..?" Hawkgirl mirrors Robin's movements. Despite the question being directed at Robin, it's Nightwing who answers.

"I went back to the building, got a sample and tested it in the cave. It's part oil, a fifty-fifty split."

"So, it's part oil - who cares?" Lantern waves a hand to the side and fills a bowl with a sugary cereal he doesn't recognise.

"I care. And you should too because it means that the kryptonite wasn't for the purpose of attack or injury - it was to make the machine work," Nightwing crosses his arms.

"It could have worked with just pure oil," Batman states. He grabs a box that has already been opened and pours the contents out into two bowls.

"But could it have nabbed Superman with just pure oil?" Red Hood asks before turning to Kal. "How did you feel just before being sent here, Superman?"

"Nauseous, heavy, a bit of an ache, I guess?" Kal pours some milk into the bowl and then some crispy cereal.

"Like how you feel around kryptonite?" Robin says knowingly as he takes the jug from Kal and puts some into his own bowl.

"Lessened slightly but... yeah, exactly how I feel around kryptonite."

"Wait, we thought it was sensory overload because of an overlap in times," Flash is already eating out of one of the ceramic bowls - Kal isn't sure when the man had filled his bowl - waving around a spoon questioningly.

"Did you hear anything, Supes? Was it loud?" Kid Flash - extremely like Flash it seems - has a bowl full of cereal in front of him and fidgets with his spoon while talking.

Kal shakes his head.

"No further questions needed. If that isn't damning evidence I don't know what is," Red Hood grins.

"That is all well and good but why was the kryptonite needed?" Wonder Woman asks as she pours out some mixed fruit and nut cereal.

"Why do you think? From what Superman has said, being sent here wasn't immediate. Luthor needed a way to incapacitate him so that he couldn't run when he noticed something was up," Robin explains and shovels some cereal into his mouth.

"Wouldn't even have to run," Kon says. "If he had walked away at a decent speed, that probably could have gotten him out of range."

"Are you suggesting the machines were area specific? We were in the Watchtower," John grabs some chocolate cereal and shakes some into his bowl.

"Luthor's rich and money talks. If he asked for a couple of drones to be put around the general location of the Watchtower, he'd get it," Red Hood scowls.

"But the machines here are so much bigger," Flash spins his spoon around his fingers.

"That's because they were doing the heavy lifting," Robin taps the side of his bowl.

"It would also explain why they'd all be pointed at the same area. Why go through the hassle of building three incriminating buildings otherwise?" Nightwing draws a triangle on the table with his finger - the exact positioning of the three LexCorp buildings facing each other.

"But that doesn't explain why liquid - sorry, aqueous - kryptonite exists in the first place? Why would Luthor make something like that only to not use it offensively?" Kal questions.

"He uses it for lots of things," Kon's voice is just barely audible.

"What do you mean?"

"Kryptonite is an effective power source which is good for things you don't want to have a paper trail for. And he mixes it with a bunch of stuff," Kon lifts his knees to his chest, feet barely on the edge of the chair.

"Like?"

"Oil, petroleum, grease, petrol, saline, charcoal..." Kon's eyes flicker from one side to the other as he lists all the things that come to mind.

"Charcoal isn't a liquid," Batman says. He pours milk into the two bowls in front of him and sticks a spoon in each. He pushes them towards Nightwing and Red Hood respectively. Sheepishly, they both start to eat.

"It's not."

"Why mix it with charcoal?" Lantern shakes a spoonful of cereal for emphasis.

"I'm not sure. He just does. Amusement, maybe?" Kon shrugs.

"Okay, so now that we know that - what are we meant to do?" Flash wonders aloud.

"The aqueous kryptonite is the future's problem. We just need you all to focus on getting home," Nightwing looks at the Justice League.

"And how are we meant to do that? We have no leads!" Lantern grumbles.

"We do. Maybe not a great one but... a lead nonetheless."

"So? What's the grand plan then?"

"Break into LexCo and threaten Luthor for information," Red Hood says simply.

"Seriously?" Hawkgirl's wings go limp against her back as she stares at the boys in disbelief. "That's the best plan you have?"

"Yes, it is and be glad for it. We are trying to get you back home, not reinvent the wheel," Robin huffs. Gesturing to the paper he has beside him, he continues. "Look, there were missing sections in the blueprints and I think if we can find out what it was, we can get you back home."

"And you think the missing pieces are related because..."

"Because Luthor wouldn't have moved it for no reason, especially when he didn't move the machines," Robin taps at the machines in the blueprints.

"Mark our words, it's important. Important enough that Luthor can't rely on luck," Red Hood claps Robin on the back and nods at the Justice League.

"They do have a good point," Wonder Woman admits.

"So, we're all agreeing on breaking and entering?" Lantern asks.

"Yep."

"Yeah."

"Looks like it."

"Who's going?" Flash gestures to the table at large.

"What do you mean, who's going?" Kal looks over at Flash. "This is Luthor, we need all hands on deck."

"Actually, we'd only really need one person to threaten him technically," Hawkgirl taps a spoon against her bowl.

"We're all going," Nightwing declares. Robin coughs and crosses his arms over each other in an 'x'.

"Hold on. No, not happening - Kon?" He looks over at his friend.

"Sorry, but... I know the most about Lex in this situation. I sort of have to come," Kon hugs his legs tighter.

"No, you don't. Nobody is going to make you," Kid Flash says hurriedly.

"Do you even want to?" Robin presses a hand to Kon's shoulder.

"Of course not! When does anyone want to face off against Lex? But I know I'm our best chance navigating the building and the guard patrols."

"But it's not safe!" Kid Flash rises out of his seat, knees hitting the table. The table shakes slightly and the milk in the bowls ripple.

"Doing any of this isn't safe! If we only ever did safe things, everyone here would have hung up their capes!" Kon shouts and buries his face in his knees. "I- I wouldn't even be here right now if we all played it safe... and I don't know about you but I, for one, am grateful for every reckless decision that got me here!"

"Kon..." Robin sighs.

"So, yes. I am going and nothing you or anyone else says will convince me otherwise. I know what I'm in for - I know probably better than anyone else here," face still buried and in his knees, Kon reaches out blindly to pull Kid Flash back down into his seat.

Kid Flash reluctantly sinks back into his chair. He grabs Kon's hand and squeezes it.

"Are there any more complaints?" Hood asks as he pushes his now empty bowl away from himself.

"Do we have a map of the building?" Batman fixes up a bowl for himself.

"LexCorp have only been improving their cyber security in the last couple of years. Hacking into their systems would not only take forever but would also alert Luthor, which is the last thing we want to do," Nightwing's foot taps against the floor.

"I can draw one up," Kon looks up.

"That's kind but unless you have photographic memory, it won't be accurate," Lantern says softly.

"Fine. It won't matter anyways - I know the place like the back of my hand," Kon puts his feet to the ground.

"Why?" Hawkgirl asks.

"Why what?"

"Why do you know the place like the back of your hand? And for that matter, why do you keep calling Lex Luthor by his first name?" She tosses some of her hair over her shoulder to get it out of her way.

"None of your business."

"What is with you and-"

"So, what do you say we stage our break in tomorrow?" Nightwing stands up and claps his hands together. Most of the table flinch.

"Why not today?" Lantern asks and puts a hand over Hawkgirl's.

"I want to give our kryptonian teammates a little more time to recover before we throw ourselves at Luthor," Nightwing's head only tilts slightly but it's clear that he's glancing at Kon. "Any other questions?"

"Yes," Kal nods and turns in his seat. "Kon, you haven't patrolled since we got here. Is there a reason for that?"

"Some of the Titans covered for me over the weekend. I think you'd know them? Starfire, Raven, Beast?"

"Wait, Beast? I haven't heard of that one," Lantern says.

"Used to be Beast Boy?"

"Oh, I do know him," Lantern smiles and then pauses. "I can see why he changed it."

"Still, is there a reason you missed patrol?" Kal asks.

"I only patrol three days a week. It's... complicated but the general gist is that I deal with the smaller issues. No drugs rings, no gangs, no trafficking. Only things that can be dealt with immediately," Kon picks at the skin of his fingers. Kal cringes.

"Why's that?"

"Well, I haven't been doing this for very long," Kon says.

"Do you... do you want to do this? Being a hero, I mean."

Kon looks up at the ceiling and pulls at his pierced ear.

"At first I didn't really know. Then I did my first day and... it just felt right, you know? The helping, the comforting, the people - it all just... fit," Kon says as he tugs at his earlobe.

"That's good! That's... I'm happy to hear that, Kon," Kal says genuinely. It's nice to know that Kon is doing something of his own volition, Kal thinks.

"I'm going to go now if that's all," Kon gives Kid's hand a squeeze before letting go and getting up.

"But you haven't eaten anything," Kal protests.

"I'll get something from the kitchen," Kon looks down at the table. His throat bobs and Kal notices something the rest of the room, except for Kon himself, can't hear: the sound of gagging. "I hate cereal."

Kon walks off after he pushes his chair in with his foot.

"Kal," Lantern sighs. "How have you managed to upset the kid this time?"

"I didn't do anything though!" Kal says and then he turns around to look at Batman and asks, "did I?"

"Not that I could tell."

"Hold on, what did he mean 'this time'? What did you do?" Red Hood gets up out of his seat, hands twitching.

"Nothing! Just..."

"If it had been nothing, why had Kon been clinging to my leg yesterday during the movie?" Kid Flash crosses his arms. Apparently, upsetting Kon had been enough to lose any good will Kid Flash had had for Kal.

Which is understandable, Kal thinks. He hates an alternate version of himself for mistreating Kon so he'd be a little bit of a hypocrite to condemn Kid Flash's scepticism.

"Kal didn't do anything. The kid's just overly sensitive," Hawkgirl huffs.

"Excuse you?" Robin gets up and his voice is cold.

"If your Superman has upset Kon somehow, we need to know," Nightwing crosses his legs and leans back in his chair.

"We're not sure what was done that upset Kon," Lantern says.

"How can you not be sure?" Kid Flash's foot taps against the ground impatiently.

"We're just not, there's nothing I can think of that should have upset him..." Kal explains awkwardly.

"Just because you don't think there's something worth being upset over doesn't mean there isn't," Batman turns his head to the side to look at Kal.

"What- what do you mean?"

"Being upset is emotional, Kal. It doesn't always have a logical reason behind it."

"But..."

"Oh, I get it," Hawkgirl leans over the table to put a hand on Kal's forearm. "Kal, have you ever just had the worst day and the littlest thing has set you off? One thing goes slightly

wrong and suddenly, you're a wreck?"

Kal can't help but think of the day his parents told him that he was an alien. That morning, he had been late for school, caught in the rain and had fallen down a short set of steps which had ruined a pair of new jeans. Then his parents had told him he was an alien later that day (in kinder words, he doesn't remember them ever actually using the term 'alien') and he had just broken down sobbing.

It wasn't truly the alien bit that had upset him - he had already been developing powers and had had suspicions he wasn't exactly the same as everyone else - but the long string of unfortunate, uncomfortable events that had happened.

But the only truly bad thing he can think of about yesterday was the kryptonite encounter and even then, that had happened afterwards.

"Yes... but what does that have to do with Kon? He had been with us all day and there wasn't anything awful happening."

"Kon was probably very overwhelmed in that moment, Kal," Batman says. "And most likely still is. Give the boy some time and some patience, alright?"

Nightwing looks between Kal and Batman, sighs and announces, "Alright, fine. We'll let you off-"

"Seriously?" Kid Flash exclaims.

"But try not to test your luck. Even if you are legitimately from another universe and not just a ploy sent by Luthor, that doesn't exempt you from being held to the same standards as our own teammates," Nightwing gets up and dusts himself off. Red Hood snorts.

"He's saying that if you hurt Kon, you'll have hell to pay. Are we clear?" Red Hood's gaze is most definitely directed at Kal.

"Clear as crystal."

"Okay, glad to have that sorted," Nightwing pats both his brothers in the back. "We're heading to patrol. I'm assuming we can trust you not to destroy the place while we're gone?" He asks teasingly.

"Of course," Batman nods.

Robin collects his papers and then he, Nightwing, Red Hood, and Kid Flash all walk out. Nobody talks again until they've heard the Zeta tubes go off.

"So, are you going to explain whatever situation you apparently got yourself into while we," Batman gestures to himself, J'ohn and Diana, "were away or do we have to assume?"

"I offered for him sit on one the couches and he just- just got really irritated and practically latched on to Kid Flash."

"That is strange..." J'ohn mumbles.

"Why were the boys all in their pyjamas still?" Diana asks.

Kal fights back the urge to smile. "They all fell asleep in one of the spare rooms. The three were cuddled up to each other on the floor."

"Aw, cute," Flash chuckles. "Did you get a picture?"

"No, I didn't have anything to take a photo with. And even if I did, why would I?"

"Parents just do that kind of thing - sometimes, even aunts or uncles," Flash shrugs. "I figured alternate us would have appreciated it."

Batman hums affirmatively.

Kal sighs. Maybe he should start writing things down - even if biological kids aren't an option, he could always adopt in future. Maybe an older child who's in need of a home...

But then people would have to look over his legal papers, including his very much forged birth certificate. One which might not hold up under extensive scrutiny.

Kal sighs again. He wishes being here didn't make him long so badly for a family of his own, especially when it's not a viable option for him.

The Justice League look around at one other and give quick concerned glances at Kal.

"Hey, it's alright. I'm sure alternate us won't be too upset about one missed picture opportunity," Flash says in a reassuring tone. Hawkgirl adds;

"They don't even know, so when you think about it, there's nothing to be upset about."

Kal chuckles. "That's not what has me down, it's just- just difficult being here, knowing that I'll never have this kind of future..." He looks at where Kon had been sitting.

"There's always other ways of having kids, you know?" Lantern tries to cheer Kal up.

"Ways that would involve thorough background checks, you mean? My civilian identity's birth certificate and medical documents are all forged. I don't think I'd even make it past the first screening," Kal laughs humourlessly.

"I could always pull some strings if need be," Batman abruptly suggests. "If you ever genuinely consider adoption or fostering."

Nothing but breathing can be heard for a minute as the Justice League collectively stare at Batman in stunned silence.

"Batman, are- are you seriously offering to illegally help me bypass the adoption system?"

"That's not exactly what I said but... that's the gist of it. I know you, I know you're a good person and you've lived among humans for long enough that I can safely say you know how human children work," Batman shrugs as though he had offered something minor like getting Kal a drink.

"I- I don't know what to say, B... Thank you, I'll keep it in mind." Kal is truly touched by the gesture but also slightly concerned by the ease of Batman offering to, presumably, break several laws.

Though Kal supposes he shouldn't be surprised. Batman is from Gotham, which Kal has learnt doesn't play by the same rules as the rest of the world. It's entirely possible that the Gotham foster system is lax enough that Batman could shuffle some things around which is depressing but useful.

Green Lantern begins to speak, breaking Kal's train of thought.

"Hey, since we have some time to kill alone, what do you say we do some training?"

Today Away From Yesterday

Chapter Summary

Training and all that comes with it.

Green Lantern hits the floor with a hard thud, bouncing a couple of times on the mats.

"Good one, Shayera," he sits up and rubs at his aching back. "Though I don't think this is entirely fair."

"Excuse you?" She crosses her arms. She has a teasing smirk across her face and her ginger hair is in disarray.

"You're using your wings for leverage even if you're not flying," he explains.

"I can't help that, it's reflex."

"You could tie them down with boxing tape," he suggests playfully. Then hurriedly adds, "only if you're okay with it, of course."

The thought of binding her wings makes her uncomfortable - it would be what any smart captor would do if they captured her. It's taking away an easy escape, a quick weapon and most of all, leaving her vulnerable. But thinking about doing it in the Hall, surrounded by a group of heroes who have her back... It's not as scary.

Shayera hums, stretching her wings forward to get a good look at them. "I'm going to need help to wrap my wings. Diana, would you mind?"

"Not at all," Diana says, stilling her punching bag and walking forward into the make shift ring (several currently not in use punching bags arranged in a circle and connected with duct tape) in the middle of the room. "Do you have any tape on you?"

When Shayera shakes her head, Batman throws a roll of it into the ring. Diana picks it up and gestures for Shayera to turn around.

When Shayera turns, she looks over at the others in the room.

Flash is happily running circles around the room while Batman reads out the different speeds from a speed gun.

Green Lantern is stretching and quietly murmuring about being 'bruised for days', which he won't be - Shayera made sure to floor him on the thickest of the mats.

Martian Manhunter is enjoying the climbing wall, challenging himself to not use his levitation abilities.

Shayera can feel Diana firmly pulling tape around her wings and binding them to her back. Diana gently rests a hand in between Shayera's shoulder blades. "How does it feel, Hawkgirl? Not too tight?"

"No, it's all good," Shayera says and flexes her wings. The bonds are secure but with enough give to not pull at her feathers. "And there's actually something I'd like to ask you all," she makes her voice a little louder to catch everyone's attention.

They all turn to her curiously.

"When we're not on the field, I'd like if you all could call me Shayera instead of Hawkgirl," she smiles hopefully and hopes they don't notice how she digs her nails into her arms nervously.

Agreement sounds out across the room.

"Not a problem, Hawk- Shayera. Sorry, that might take a bit to get used to," Flash chuckles.

"As long as nobody gets them mixed up in public, I see no issue with it," Batman chimes in.

"Whatever makes you most comfortable, Shayera," Diana pats Shayera on the shoulder.

"Of course," Martian Manhunter agrees.

Lantern simply looks at Shayera with a soft smile.

Shayera breathes a sigh of relief. "That... was a lot more nerve-wracking than I thought it'd be."

"But went a lot better than you imagined, right?" Green Lantern chuckles. "Come now, stop stalling just because you know you're going to lose."

"Bring it," Hawkgirl rolls her shoulders and gets into a fighting stance. Diana gets out of the ring and walks over to the corner of the room, where Kal is sat alone on one of the benches.

"Kal, are you feeling okay?" She asks.

"What?" He blinks up at her, his expression blank for a moment before smiling at her. "Oh, I'm fine."

"Really? Because usually you'd be the first one to affirm anyone's doubts or worries..."

"What do you mean? Did something happen?" He looks around quickly and when he sees everyone seemingly in bright spirits, he relaxes.

"Did you not hear Shayera just now?" Diana slides over onto the bench beside him, brows creased in worry.

"Hawkgirl said something?"

"She has asked us to call her Shayera when not on the field," Diana says slowly. "I'm worried for you, Kal. We all are."

"I'm fine-" he runs a hand through his hair and tugs at it when his fingers get snagged.

"You are not. You are not and you do not have to be. Let us help you and tell us what is wrong," she pleads.

"Everything. This world is all so... wrong," he sighs and rests his head against the wall behind him. "Kon is obviously hurting and this world's Superman has seemingly done nothing."

"We do not know that for sure-"

"You've seen the kid, Diana. No well loved kid is like that, not one," Kal's eyes search the ceiling as though answers are written there. They're not, of course.

And for a moment, all Diana can think is how unlike other children Kon has seemed. How completely strange his behaviour has been, how compared to other kids who are presumably close to him in age, he has seemed almost alien.

"Well... maybe not human children," Diana cautiously suggests. Kal's eyes dart to hers and she finds herself uncomfortable under his intense gaze.

"What do you mean by that, Diana?"

"Just that Kon is not like the children we rescue or that we see day to day. He is not human, Kal, and we need to keep that in mind," Diana carefully chooses her next words. "For all we know, some of his more... unique quirks, may just be a result of being kryptonian."

"Kryptonian, Diana. The word is kryptonian."

"Are those not the same thing?" Diana asks. Kal supposes it's a fair question as Diana refers to herself equally as an amazon and as amazonian - to her, the difference is negligible.

"No, it's... Krypton is exclusively the name of the planet and kryptonian is purely the name of the species. They're not interchangeable, it would be like calling J'ohn a Mars," Kal explains.

Diana snorts. "I see my mistake now."

Kal watches as Shayera and Green Lantern take turns in gaining the upper hand. Shayera will toss him down onto the mats and Lantern will snag one of her ankles and they'll both hurriedly get up and return to circling.

It's like watching puppies play fight. Neither wanting to hurt each other, just wanting to prove something.

Kal wonders if Kon does any of this with his friends. Would he be comfortable enough to wrestle and rough house with humans, people so terribly fragile in comparison to

kryptonians.

Kal knows control, is intimately familiar with idea of restraint because of a human upbringing. But Kon? Kon hasn't mentioned being related to anyone other than Bizarro, who's undoubtedly also kryptonian.

Would Kon have ever learned how to not hurt someone when playfully shoving them? Or when training?

"And you are gone again," Diana snaps her fingers in front of Kal's nose.

"What?"

"I will leave you to think about what I have said. For now, try not to chastise yourself for things you have not done," Diana gets up and takes in Kal's expression. "You, as yourself, are not this boy's father or guardian. You are simply a man who shares the same face."

"I know..." Kal really does try not to let his frown deepen but there's only so much he can do with his emotions so twisted.

Diana tucks her hair behind her ear roughly and turns to face the rest of the room.

"Try not to look so upset. In a way, this is incredibly fortunate - you now know that things can be worse so that you can appreciate what is better," she says. "And Kal?"

"Yes, Diana?"

"If you ever take up Batman on his offer of..." Diana waves a hand off to one side, probably trying to think of the gentlest way of saying 'breaking the law'. "Assistance through the adoption system, I have no doubt you would be a great father."

Diana turns her head to look over her shoulder.

"After all, bad parents would not care this much about a child from an alternate universe - especially not one that they will never have to see again," Diana walks away, light on her feet.

Kal feels his breath catch in his throat. Diana is right, so absolutely awfully right. Once they find a way back home, Kon will still be here. He'll still be here with a Superman who doesn't care for him, hurting in silence and thinking the mistreatment he goes through is normal.

All the whilst Kal will be back home, knowing that there was a child he didn't save. He can't let that happen.

He won't let that happen.

They train for four hours in total. As equipped as the Hall of Justice is, it doesn't have much in way of entertainment aside from hurling your teammates onto cushioned mats and

exchanging blows.

They really ought to put some board games here at some point. If they ever need to lay low, they'll appreciate it.

Batman makes a mental note to buy some books and games for the both the Hall and the Watchtower. He'll have to ask his teammates about what genres they like or else it will purely end up being gothic novels, children's books and parenting guides (actually, maybe he should recommend some of those to Kal - he's sure he has a couple on the adoption and foster care system as well)...

Or he could just send out a survey. He likes that idea better than asking in person - it could be a survey for feedback on team spaces. It'd be undoubtedly useful.

He shuts the speed gun off and goes to the large, heavy duty black cabinets against the back wall, putting the gun back in its designated spot.

He can see Lantern and Hawkgirl taking apart the ring and lining up the punching bags into rows. Then there's Diana wrapping up and putting away the boxing tape and Flash and Martian Manhunter putting away other miscellaneous gear. Kal is just stood awkwardly to one side, seemingly having no clue what to do with himself.

Batman heads over and when he's close enough, puts a hand on Kal's shoulder. "Are you doing alright?"

"Why is that all anyone seems to ask this week?"

"Because your teammates are worried about you," Batman says and then more quietly adds, "because we are worried about you."

"And now you're starting to sound like Diana," Kal groans.

"I don't know why you say that like it's a bad thing - Diana is a very intelligent woman and her willingness to help others is a great trait to have," Batman takes a long hard look at Kal. "Superman-"

"Hey, you all might want to see this!" Flash calls out. "There's some weird buttons on the wall that I swear we don't have in our universe's training room."

Everyone gathers by the panel near the door and sure enough, down the side are a set of six buttons.

"That is... odd," Diana remarks. She was one of the more frequent users of the training facilities and had never noticed them before.

"That's one way to put it," Lantern steps closer to get a better look. The buttons are all the same size and they're the same colour as the panel they're on.

"At least three of those are perfectly normal buttons that we also have," Batman grumbles and starts pointing at buttons. "That one is for air conditioning, that is for heating and that

one is for emergency contact."

"Why do we need an emergency contact button?" Green Lantern asks.

"In case anyone gets locked in here."

"This is our building, in what scenario-"

"Mind control, betrayal, hacking-"

"Mind control is reasonable but do you really think anyone here is going to turn to a life of crime?" Lantern gestures to the group at large.

"This is one of the highest tech buildings ever, you've said so yourself, so why would hacking be an issue?" Flash asks.

"I don't think it's likely but it's best to be prepared for every possible situation."

"Paranoid much?" Green Lantern rolls his eyes.

"Lantern," Diana says scoldingly.

"If having an emergency panic button makes anyone here feel safer than I think it is a good idea even if it will never be used," J'ohn puts a hand on Lantern's shoulder.

"J'ohn has a point, Lantern," Kal looks towards J'ohn curiously. J'ohn's knowledge of other people's emotions makes him great at de-escalating fights but he also sometimes ends up saying more than he should. Kal wonders if this is one of those times.

Does Batman feel safer because all of his back-up plans and contingency and constant over-preparation? Kal had always, perhaps unfairly, assumed it was just a strange compulsion the man had. Like how Flash is constantly moving, even when unaware or how Lois is always chewing on the ends of her pencils.

Somehow, the idea that maybe Batman wasn't just doing it 'just because' frightens Kal. Because for him to be constantly be scared of what-ifs and being caught off guard has to have a reason behind it.

Normal, well-adjusted adults don't live in constant fear of what-ifs like kids do of the dark. So what must have happened for Batman to see danger in every corner? In what is meant to be the safest building in the world?

"Well then, what do the other buttons do?" Green Lantern points at them.

"Let's find out," Shayera knocks her knuckles against the panels.

"Is that a good idea?"

"I'm assuming that the other us isn't going to do anything to injure their own team," she shrugs. "Besides, they don't even know we're here."

"It could be a Batman contingency."

"It's possible," Batman confirms. "Not likely unless any of you have done anything to make me believe the Hall is unsafe, but possible."

"You heard the man, it's unlikely at best," Shayera grins and with hesitation presses the first mysterious button.

Kal's enhanced hearing allows him to hear the quiet clicking in the walls as the lights shut off for a second. When they come back on, they're duller and have taken on a red hue.

"Mood lighting? You've got to be kidding me," Green Lantern chuckles.

"Anti-climatic much?" Flash looks up at the lights, giggling slightly before adding, "I guess it could be useful if we had a light sensitive teammate in future though. They're less harsh than the usual lighting."

"Okay, that's the first button. What about this one?" Shayera presses down a second button.

There's an audible click of metal as silver shutters descend around the room, covering everything from the ceiling to the floor to the door. Kal feels a spike of anxiety as he realises that the metal is part lead.

"Strange," Diana hums as she runs a hand over the shutters. "What are these for?"

"They're lead," Kal chokes out. "They're all lead."

A cage, Kal thinks. No sunlight and entirely encased in lead - if he had just been exposed to kryptonite, it'd be the perfect place to hold him.

More proof that this universe's Superman is awful.

Batman feels the walls and looks up to lights and his lips twitch in the way that suggests he wants to smile. "This... this is ingenious," he mutters and then louder, "the shutters block sun and the lights must be red sun lamps."

"And your point?" Lantern asks.

"This would allow Kal run himself down to the point of being de-powered - which would make it easier for our more experienced fighters to teach him actual technique without Kal being worried about holding back," Batman gives the shutters a firm hit and seems pleased by the lack of movement.

"Neat!" Flash grins. "And I bet it would be super useful in situations where his powers don't work as well or could be too destructive."

"It would be nice to be able to properly spar with Kal," Diana chimes in.

J'ohn, from next to Kal, whispers, "Kal, are you alright? You seem distressed."

Loudly, Kal says, “let’s just test the last button and get out, okay?”

Shayera obligingly presses the last button. The shutters retract first and then the lights shut off and change back to what they looked like before. They’re warm.

“So this one is just an off button for the other two?” Shayera asks.

“I suppose so,” Diana looks around the room.

“That’s odd. I don’t usually put separate off buttons, I just have it so that if you press it again it’s off...” Batman looks curiously at the panel.

Kal shakes himself off.

“Wouldn’t it be better to have a switch then?” Flash leans over to have a look himself.

Kal starts walking.

“No, in an emergency it’s easier to push a button and a switch would be at risk of being broken in one position.”

Kal opens the door.

“Oh, I see. I guess switches would be a bit of a hassle with teammates who have super strength.

Kal leaves.

End Notes

Hi, there. This fic is also on Wattpad under the same name. I only post on Wattpad and here so if you see this anywhere else, it's been stolen. My Wattpad and account here are both Kitty_Camren and I only have one account for both. Other than that, please enjoy!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!