

Family of Steel

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Family of Steel

by [Beth4LC](#)

Summary

Lois faces an unexpected complication from the man known as Marcus Bridgewater. Meanwhile, Jordan struggles to manage his latest power.

Notes

Thanks to my Discord friends for spitballing this with me! It was good to have people to bounce ideas off of even if that's part of the reason it took me so long to get this written. 😊

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

Seven Years Ago

There were a lot of things that sucked about Jordan's dad being Superman: people trying to take their picture everywhere they went, not being able to go to normal school, having him leave and go save people no matter what else was happening... But even with all that, it was also just plain *cool*.

"Dad, can you turn this into ice?" He held out his cup of apple juice and put on his best smile.

Even though his dad didn't do it right away, he still chuckled from across the table. "Then you're not going to be able to drink it, bud."

"Yeah, but I'm done with it. And it's so cool to watch!"

"Oh, and Dad, then you can just melt it with your eyes, right?" Jon sat up in his chair. "Do mine, too!"

"Not inside the house," their dad said firmly.

Jon gave a big sigh. "You *never* use your powers here. If I had powers I'd use them all the time!"

"Well, my parents always taught me that there was a time and a place for my powers. And maybe it seems more boring, but I still like doing things without my powers."

Their mom was smiling and nodding too, and Jordan rolled his eyes when she leaned over to kiss their dad. But then an idea came into his head.

"Hey, are me and Jon gonna get any powers? 'Cause we're your kids?"

Jon pulled in a small gasp, but both of their parents shared one of those looks where what they were going to say was never fun.

"Nothing's for sure with this, but Grandpa El says no," their dad finally said.

"Oh." Jon slumped down in his chair.

"But that's a good thing in a lot of ways," their mom said. "There are a lot of hard things that can come with the powers."

Jon rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right, Mom."

“No, Jon, it’s true,” their dad said. “Having powers is a big responsibility. And there were some times when I was growing up that it was really hard.”

Jon didn’t look like he was buying it, but Jordan started to worry about the whole thing. Was Grandpa El right that they wouldn’t get powers? What would happen if he *did* get them?

“Hey. Jordan.” His dad was stretching out his hand towards the cup, and Jordan handed it over. A steady stream of mist blew down, freezing his leftover juice solid.

“Yes!” Jordan pushed himself up onto his knees. “That was so cool, Dad!”

“Dad, do mine next! Please?”

Laughing, their dad grabbed Jon’s cup and did the same thing. Then he started looking around for other stuff. Jordan jumped out of his chair to help.

Maybe the powers stuff was kind of weird to think about for now, but he knew for sure he didn’t have anything right now. He didn’t have to worry about it just yet.

Present Day

Ever since marrying Clark, Lois had become more of a morning person. It was hard not to be when she was greeted by her smiling, handsome husband manning the stove with a fresh pot of coffee already made. This morning, however, was a tough one.

Jordan slumped over the table, completely disconnected from everyone else by the black headphones that were shoved over his curls. Although he had joined everyone for breakfast at the usual time, he hadn’t said anything yet, and wasn’t making any sort of effort to join in with what was going on.

Jonathan was also out of sorts, chewing on his nail fretfully as his leg bounced underneath the table. “What if I stayed home from school today, too?”

“Jonathan...” Lois sank into the seat opposite him. “It’ll be better for you to face all this head on. Putting off seeing your friends isn’t going to help make it better.”

He shrugged, ducking his head down again.

Lois buried a sigh. Seeing him latch onto football so strongly in the last few weeks had been so exciting, but now she was swimming in guilt over the whole thing. They should have looked into things and made sure there’d be no issues before they let him get on the field. Instead of giving Jon a place to belong, he had ended up getting it ripped away from him just as his hard work was coming to fruition.

“Have you talked to any of the guys on the team about it yet?”

“No. I mean, they’ve all messaged. Said they feel bad and whatever...” He fiddled with the knife at his place.

It made sense to Lois. Sympathy was something that she also struggled with accepting, and that wasn't what Jonathan needed most from this. He needed to be included just like any other kid.

Just like Jordan did. Turning to her other son, she gave him a gentle nudge to get his attention.

"Do you want some orange juice?" she asked, miming subtly at the same time.

He eyed her warily. "I can get it myself."

Okay, yeah, her fourteen year old was more than capable, but Lois still felt the need to do *something* for him. She couldn't take away the pain that flooded his head whenever he tried to pull the bulky headphones off, nor could she help train him in filtering through the chaotic tangle of sounds that he was trapped in. Clark, of course, would be taking the lead on that.

He brought over a bowl of scrambled eggs and then took his place at the table. The atmosphere felt stilted as everyone dished up, and Lois narrowed her eyes when she saw Jon typing into his phone.

"Hey. No phones at the table."

"I'm just asking Jordan something," he defended, nodding towards his brother. "What, you want us to start playing charades?"

"There's no need to do that. He's going to figure this all out soon," Clark said with an encouraging smile in Jordan's direction.

He didn't notice it, his gaze still locked onto his lap where Lois suspected his own phone was stashed.

"I was just asking what he wants me to say to people at school if they ask where he is," Jon explained.

"Oh," Lois frowned. Jon had a good point; they should discuss that as a family. Nudging Jordan once again, she nodded expectantly as he lifted his head.

Then he just stared at her with a blank expression.

Jonathan sighed. "See, this is why texting is easier." He shot off another message to his brother.

"Oh." Jordan blinked. "Uh, I guess you can say whatever. There's not much point in hiding it, is there?"

He was right, there didn't seem to be. Just the other day, he had been removed suddenly from school because of his overloaded powers. Lois had already given Principal Balcombe permission to explain it to anyone who was worried about the incident. The superhearing stuff was just the natural continuation. But was it too much to ask that her kid could get some damn privacy with this whole thing?

The idea nagged at her the whole time she was eating breakfast, and she did her best to hide it as she gave Jordan an encouraging smile and kissed Clark goodbye. Then she drove her and Jon into town.

“They’re still going to be your friends,” she told him as they crept closer to the school. “Or if they’re not, they’re not worth keeping anyway.”

“Mom, it’s not like I can be all that picky,” he muttered.

She stiffened at his words. Coming to Smallville was supposed to *help* him make friends, not the opposite. And she was determined to see him grow in this way even if she had to push him herself.

“Hey. Yes, you can. Just because you’re had to climb more obstacles than most doesn’t mean you should put up with people who aren’t going to support you.”

He shrugged, unconvinced.

“I’m sure it’s going to be fine, sweetie. Are you still good to walk home on your own today?”

“Yeah, Mom. I’m not seven anymore.” Rolling his eyes, he climbed out of the truck.

“If only. Okay, I’ll see you tonight.”

After that conversation, it was hard to switch into ‘work mode’, but she did her best. Her research had shown that the man she had been talking to was definitely not Marcus Bridgewater, and she was determined to get to the bottom of it today.

Maybe someone else would have wanted to hang back and gather more information, but that had never been Lois’ style. Instead, she booked an appointment to see him in his office.

Oddly enough, he was unsurprised when she told him that she knew he had lied about his name.

“It’s a name I’ve taken to using here,” he admitted, “but Mr. Luthor knows that’s not who I am.”

“The rest of Smallville doesn’t,” she pointed out. “Not sure if that’s going to help build trust in his project in the mines here.”

His expression darkened. “You’re right, it’s not.”

There was a beat of silence, but Lois refused to be the first one to talk. The first person to talk was always the person who lost. Finally, Marcus nodded to himself.

“Okay, you want answers? You get your husband to agree to a meeting with me.”

She scoffed. “That’s seriously what all this was about? You trying to get a one-on-one with Superman? You know you’d have better luck just hanging around the diner, right?”

“It’s more than that. I need somewhere private.”

That sounded even more worrisome. What was this guy’s *deal*? First, it was the strange comments to her, and now he was insisting on a private meeting with Clark?

He leaned forward, planting his elbows on his desk. “Look, Lo— Ms. Lane. I promise you that it’s important. The fate of the entire world’s at stake.”

“Really?” Her tone was laced heavily with skepticism, but a look at his face made her reconsider. There was a steely glint in his eye, and his mouth was hardened into a straight line. Somehow, despite the wild claims, he was deadly serious.

“Look, I get why you might not believe me, but just do me a favour, okay? Watch this video when you’re on your own. It won’t explain everything, but I hope it’ll open your eyes.” He held out a USB drive, and Lois didn’t hesitate before she dropped it into her bag.

Whether or not the contents would actually convince her was yet to be seen, but she was sure it would give her more than one clue about who Marcus Bridgewater actually was.

Jonathan felt his shoulders hunch up the minute he walked into the school. People would definitely know by now about his failure yesterday. Were the group of juniors by the vending machines talking about him? How about the cheerleaders by the stairwell?

Keeping his eyes averted, he marched on. If he didn’t show that being kicked off the field was a big deal, then no one would know, right?

“Jonathan!”

He lifted his head, and felt a hint of relief when he saw Sarah coming down the hall towards him. She sort-of got what this whole Kryptonian thing was like, right?

“Where’s Jordan? I thought he’d be back by now.”

“Oh.” So much for a friend having his back. “He’s, uh, still at home. His superhearing kicked in yesterday, so...”

Her eyes widened. “Wait, really? What is that even *like*?”

Jon shrugged his backpack on. He had learned a lot about his dad’s powers over the years, but now that it was *Jordan* dealing with it all, he felt weird talking about it. Like he was totally unqualified.

“Well, he can hear pretty much everything in the world at once. Which, obviously, is totally overwhelming. My dad’s helping him figure out how to hone in on one thing at a time but until then school’s gonna suck.”

She grimaced. “Yeah, no kidding.”

“But, hey, you should come over and visit him. Today after school?” Surely, Jordan would have made *some* progress by then, and Jon knew he’d be eager to see Sarah.

But she hesitated. “Do you think he’d be, uh, ready for that? Or whatever?”

“I mean, probably. But you don’t have to. Obviously.” Already, he was regretting the impulse. It was too easy to forget that his family was *weird* and not everyone would be down for that.

“No! Wait. I mean, of course I want to. I’ll meet you at the flagpole?”

He had been the one to suggest it, so it seemed like there was no other choice but to accept. It still didn’t sound like she was all that into it, but a quick text to Jordan confirmed that he was excited for it, too. Hopefully, it would help lift his spirits during what was going to be a grueling day. Probably. Not that Jon could really understand.

Maybe it was a good thing that he wasn’t hanging around the house today after all. With his mom busy with work, he’d be completely out of place with the two superpowered members of the family. Not that he was all that ‘in place’ right now.

As he made his way through the halls, he avoided eye contact with pretty much everyone, trying to convey that he *didn’t want to talk about it*. He couldn’t handle any griping over the lost game or any nasty comments about him taking advantage of powers he didn’t even have. Even worse, people could offer him sympathy: they could flash a pained smile and talk about how much it sucked. He didn’t want any of that.

What he wanted was for all of the football stuff to have never happened.

Clark was trying his best to stay optimistic, but the stubborn force of his teenage kid’s attitude was starting to wear him down.

“Just try it one more time,” he coached, holding his finger aloft so Jordan could catch his drift.

He got a sour frown in response. “It hurts.”

“I know, bud. I wish it didn’t, but I promise it’ll get better as you practice.”

That made a puzzled look appear on Jordan’s face, and Clark bit back a sigh. So far, he had avoided Jon’s method of texting to communicate, but he was starting to wonder if there was some merit to it. The yellow legal pad they had started with this morning was rapidly shrinking.

The whole experience had been trying for both of them, but countless security scares in his childhood had meant that Jordan was used to being stuck in a house with someone he was annoyed with, and Clark was willing to take that as a positive thing right now. They had taken several breaks, but ultimately Jordan needed to learn to push through.

“Okay, let’s try...” he cast his eyes around the room, trying to think of something that would be gentle enough for Jordan’s sensitive ears. “Music? Try to focus in on this song.”

He pulled up a gentle piano sonata on his phone. Jordan had loved playing as a kid, even if finding a regular teacher had been difficult to manage. Maybe this would help him tune in?

Brow furrowing, Jordan stared at the display on the phone. The volume had been kept purposefully low, but that wouldn’t have mattered. After a couple seconds, his eyes lit up in delight. He flashed his dad a broad smile.

“Yes!” Clark forced himself to keep his voice to a whisper, but he flashed Jordan a big thumbs up. “Okay, so now you need to—”

“Arg!” Jordan clapped his hands over his ears as Clark’s phone let out a cheery jangle. Lois was calling him.

“Sorry, bud.” He swiped the screen to answer the call as Jordan jammed the headphones back into place. “But that was *great!*”

“How’s it going over there?” Lois asked through the line.

Clark snuck one more glance over to Jordan. “I think we’re finally making progress.”

“That’s great, babe!”

She didn’t say anything else right away, and a suspicion started to come over Clark. “How’s the investigation into your friend going?”

“He’s certainly not my *friend*. And I need you to take a look at something for me. Should I come to you, or...”

Clark glanced back towards Jordan. They had been together all day, and maybe a break would do them a bit of good.

“I’ll swing by. You’re at the Gazette?”

Although Lois hadn’t been officially hired there, she was well-entrenched with Chrissy Beppo and met with her most days to compare notes on the Luthor investigation. After giving Jordan some ‘homework’ to practice with, Clark zipped into town and walked through the office door.

“Oh! Hi!” Chrissy blinked at him from her desk as Clark nodded to her in greeting. She never seemed completely comfortable with him, and Clark was doing his best to tread cautiously. Right now, it wasn’t a priority. Something in the way Lois had spoken over the phone nagged at him.

She was in the cramped conference room, and she started when Clark came inside.

“Okay, I changed my mind,” she announced. “Maybe you shouldn’t watch this after all.”

He pulled up a chair beside her. “What is it?”

“Well, it’s a video. ‘Not Marcus’ gave it to me. And, Clark, I don’t know where he got it from or... or what it really even means...” Her heart thudded heavily, and he automatically put his hand around her.

“Hey. Lois. It’s okay. We’ll figure it out together, right?”

“Yeah.” She nodded. Then she rested her head against his shoulder.

“So, what’s on the video?”

With a wary glance, she lifted the lid of her laptop. “You don’t need to see the whole thing. Trust me, it’s better off that way. But just this frame should be enough.”

The image frozen on the screen confused him at first. It was of Lois. She was standing on a rooftop of some sort with a microphone in hand. There had been enough times in her career that this very scene had played out, and he really didn’t understand what the issue was.

But then he saw what else was on the screen. It was *him*. He was wearing a black suit and was hovering menacingly over Lois’ shoulder, eyes alight with an ominous red glow. The image was still, but it was obvious where things were headed.

“Lois. This—”

“It’s not doctored,” she told him blankly. “Dixon’s still working at the Planet, and she took a look at it for me. But I just don’t *get* it, Clark. Where the hell did this come from? Why does a supposed environmental scientist have it?”

“Well, we knew he was lying about who he was.”

“Yeah... Speaking of which, do you think you can take the drive to my dad? They can run it through the system for prints. It’s a long shot, but it could give us a clue.”

Despite the serious situation, a smile grew on his face. How was it that he was lucky enough to be married to such a brilliant woman?

“Yeah, I’ll run it over. What else do you need?”

She hesitated.

“Lois.”

“Okay, fine. He wants to meet with you. But, Clark, there’s no way that can be a good thing. Especially now with this video.”

“No. But I can be prepared. And if this is going to finally get us some answers...”

Maybe it wasn’t exactly fair. Dangling the prospect of ‘answers’ in front of Lois Lane was always more enticing than she could say no to. But the idea of this guy giving Lois such a

disturbing video nagged at Clark's nerves. He wanted answers, too.

He could see her expertly weighing the options in her head. And then finally she came to her decision. "Fine. Superman will go meet him. But I'm coming with you."

Chapter End Notes

I think puzzleboat was the first to feature texting as a work-around for superhearing. Of course it's what these boys are going to do!

Chapter 2

Seven Years Ago

As soon as Superman landed in the backyard, Lois was tearing across the pavement towards him. Her heart was still racing from everything she had seen online, and she needed to be able to hold him close, proving to herself that he was *here* and *safe*.

Sinking into his arms, she settled into a desperate, hungry, soul-searing kiss.

“You’re never leaving home again, you hear that?” Her voice was muffled by Clark’s lips, but she knew he would hear it anyway.

“I know. I’m sorry.” He pulled away just far enough to respond. “I thought that—”

“That you’d be able to fight off a Kryptonite-powered robot *by yourself*?”

“Cyborg.”

“Don’t edit my rants, Smallville.”

She settled against his chest, leaning her weight almost fully against him. The rare smell of his sweat filled her nose. After all these years, she had thought she was used to watching Superman fly into incredible danger, but today felt different.

Today, the whole world knew *who* Superman was and what he had waiting for him at home. She had been flooded with well-meaning calls and texts as soon as news of Superman’s battle with Metallo had reached the news, and although a lot of people meant well, it only served to highlight how much she didn’t know.

“Are the boys...”

“Sleeping, thank god,” Lois answered. “They were already on their way to bed when the news hit.”

“Good. I really am sorry, Lois.”

“I know. I’m just glad you’re okay.” It was all part of being married to Superman, and even if there were times that it was incredibly hard, she wouldn’t want Clark to be any different.

He draped his arm around her shoulder, and they made their way back into the house. As Lois laced her fingers through his, she felt the familiar warm metal of his wedding band. From the first day everyone found out the truth, he had kept it on, finally able to show the world who he was coming home to after all the incredible feats he accomplished.

She let its solid presence wipe away the very last traces of her fear.

Present Day

Slowly, Jordan was making progress. He had managed to focus in on the sound of the clock in the living room, the rustle of the pages of his book, and the rushing of the pipes all without any pain. He was now working on keeping the headphones off despite the distracting tendrils of sound that whispered around him.

Having his dad leave had actually been helpful in a way; less pressure compared to having Superman giving him encouraging glances as he tried to relearn something as basic as *listening*. Still, it had been a while since he had left and Jordan was starting to wonder when he heard footsteps thundering on the deck. Wandering cautiously into the kitchen, he arrived just in time to see Jon come through the door.

“Hey! The headphones are off!”

“Arg! Jeez!” Jordan cringed backwards as the sound of his brother’s voice stabbed into his skull. He was tempted to cover his ears again, but then he caught sight of Sarah.

Last time he had seen her, he had almost blown up the school hallway and his dad had needed to come take him home. Wincing at the smallest sound was the exact opposite from the image he wanted to portray, so he did his best to focus his attention and look somewhat normal.

“You doing okay?” she asked warily.

“Yeah. Totally.” He gave her what he hoped was a breezy smile. “My dad, uh, taught me how to latch onto certain sounds, so now it’s just a matter of practice so I can—”

The sticky sound of their fridge opening broke his concentration, and he turned to glare at his brother.

Jon shrugged apologetically as he pulled a couple cans of soda out. “Is there anything that *doesn’t* hurt your ears right now?”

“Not really.”

It was a bit depressing to realize that although he had come a long way, there was still so much more for him to go. And even if he had been excited for the chance to see Sarah again, he felt a familiar anxious feeling swelling within him at the thought of them being alone together. He was a total part-Kryptonian freak, and she was completely normal. When his brother made a move to head upstairs, Jordan stopped him.

“You should hang out here. Help Sarah fill me in on what I’ve missed at school.” Eyes locked on his brother, Jordan tried to communicate all of the jumbled thoughts that were in his head. Unlike what countless tabloids had theorized on, they didn’t have telepathy, but there was still an unspoken communication they often managed.

Finally, Jon nodded. “Okay, sure. But you didn’t miss much. If I had known how boring normal school was, I wouldn’t have been so into going.”

It was still a little awkward as Jordan's hearing slipped from time to time, but Jon somehow managed to keep things flowing smoothly no matter what. That was almost like a superpower in itself, and Jordan was glad for it right now.

"So, how long until you're back at school?" Sarah asked.

"Well, my dad says that it took him a couple weeks before everything settled in for him." That was a depressing thought. Maybe Jordan could push things a little faster than that? "I was thinking that—"

An ear splitting screech ripped into him as Sarah pushed her chair back along the tile floor.

"Sorry," she winced. "I didn't mean—"

"It's fine. I know I gotta get used to it eventually. But, uh, that's probably why I can't go to school just yet."

"He's gonna kill it when he comes back," Jon said brightly. "And, hey, we can totally pass on messages to him and stuff. There's gotta be a way we can work that to our advantage, right?"

Sarah's brow lifted. "So Jordan'll be able to hear anything in the entire school?"

"He can hear any of the fluctuations in the collective sonic frequency," Jon explained.

"Well, that makes no sense at all," she frowned.

"It's actually kind of cool." Jon sat forward in his chair. "So, there's this increased sensitivity—" He broke off when his phone buzzed. "It's Grandpa."

Jordan watched as his brother lifted the phone to his ear. *Technically*, he had the ability to hear the other end of that conversation. It was kind of wild to think about, and it felt different than the other powers he had gotten so far. This was a sort of always-on way of experiencing the world that was different from almost everyone else on the planet.

"Jordan." Jon nudged him, bringing him back to reality. "When did Dad leave here?"

"Uh... Maybe a couple hours ago?" Now that he thought about it, it was kind of weird that Jordan hadn't heard an update yet. The man in the metal suit was still at large, after all. Usually, his parents would have at least checked on him by now.

"Well, I guess Grandpa's trying to get in touch with both him and Mom. They're not answering their phones."

An ear splitting sound cut through, and Jordan gasped and hunched himself down protectively. What the hell *was* that?

"Grandpa, you gotta shut that off! Jordan can hear it and it's way too loud." The sound cut out, and a muffled noise came from the phone.

Groaning, Jordan reached for Jon's phone and pressed it to his ear. "I'm okay, Granddad, but do you think you can not do that again?"

"I'm sorry Jordan; I didn't think." His voice sounded tinny through the speaker, but at least it wasn't painfully loud. "It didn't work anyway. No sign of your dad."

More bad news.

"Look, you and your brother just sit tight," he instructed. "I'm sure there's a good reason for what's happened."

Maybe there was a good reason, but Jordan still didn't feel settled about it when he hung up. There were only a handful of reasons why their dad wouldn't answer an ELT and none of them were good. He caught Jon's gaze, and saw a similar fear within it. You'd think that for sons of Superman they wouldn't be used to feeling this powerless.

"Jordan, maybe you can find out where they are."

"Huh?" Jordan frowned. "Don't know how I'm supposed to do that if Dad's not answering an ELT."

"Well, can't you, like, listen for them?"

His jaw dangled. "Jon. I can barely listen to what's in *here*. I can't..." The idea of reaching out into the wide world was terrifying.

But Sarah was watching him. The idea of completely failing at this in front of her was even worse than any pain he might endure.

"I don't even really know what to do," he admitted warily. "Dad only taught me how to focus on stuff that I could see."

Jon nodded, eyes glued on Jordan. "Okay, so Grandpa El told me a lot about it."

"Wait, really? When?"

Jon shrugged. "Remember that one summer when you got super into Kryptonian epic poetry? Well, I got bored of that pretty soon so while you were listening to all that stuff, I was just asking him whatever I could think of about Dad's powers."

That made sense. Jon *had* been bored with Jordan's fascination with Kryptonian mythology and the practical elements of superpowers would fall in line with his 'action first' interests. But it did put them both in a weird position.

"So, uh, what am I supposed to do?" Jordan asked.

Jon sat forward. "Okay, so Grandpa said that it's like layers of sound? All the different frequencies and distances and stuff? So I guess you search through that?"

Layers. It sounded totally weird, especially when most of what Jordan had experienced was an avalanche. But he gave a shaky smile to Sarah and then closed his eyes.

He could hear the hum of the refrigerator, the shuffle of clothing... It was all a lot louder than he was comfortable with, though. An all-too-familiar pain between his eyebrows surged. But he wouldn't let it stop him.

Digging deeper, he latched onto the sound of Jonathan and Sarah breathing, their bodies unconsciously syncing up as they watched him anxiously. Everything else was way too intense, and he dug his fingers into his palms to help him stay with it. His parents were counting on him. He wanted to show Sarah what he was capable of and...

Thudding heartbeats reached his ears, and Jordan stifled a pained groan. It was all *too loud* and all too much. He couldn't even remember where he *was* let alone find—

Someone was shaking his shoulder, and Jordan pulled himself back to reality, taking a deep breath as if he had been trapped underwater this whole time.

"I can't do it. I swear, I could hear every little sound in this room and still..."

"Well, Jordan, you're not supposed to focus on the room, idiot." Jonathan rolled his eyes in exasperation.

Jordan blinked. "*What?*"

"Yeah. You're supposed to, like, pull back."

"You didn't say that!"

"I mean... I thought it was kinda obvious."

Glaring, Jordan shrugged his brother's hand off his shoulder. "None of this is obvious, Jon. Just because you—"

"Uh, guys?" Sarah waved her hand to get their attention. "Isn't this kind of, like, urgent?"

The reminder sent a cold shock through Jordan, wiping out his heated annoyance as he turned back to his brother. "Yeah. It is. Okay, so what am I supposed to do?"

"Well, I think if you, like, pull back and try to take in the big picture it might help?" Jon suggested. "Then you can sort through all the stuff."

He looked weirdly confident for someone who didn't have superhearing, but it sounded like as good of a plan as any. Closing his eyes, he allowed his focus to drift outside of the room.

He could hear wind rushing through branches, distant motors running, voices from the town... Then, suddenly, something caught his attention.

"Clark!"

There was a whirl of something mechanical mixed in with the sound of his mother's voice, and then Jordan caught onto someone else, too.

"You keep calling him that, Lois. When are you going to see that it's nothing more than a facade?"

A horrendous thud carried across the distance, and then Jordan heard something he never had before: his dad's pained groan.

Snapping his head up, he gripped onto his brother's arm. "I found them! We gotta go help Dad."

It was hard to hear what was happening here while still keeping an ear out for where their parents were. Jon was saying something, but Jordan couldn't completely understand it.

"Jon, we don't have a lot of time."

Sarah was talking. Forcing his focus back into the room, Jordan caught the tail-end of what she was saying.

"...get there on your own?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "But we've got to try something."

A gleam lit up in Jon's eyes. "I think I have an idea."

'Seeing stars' had always seemed like a quaint expression to Clark, and it was one he had nodded along with enough times back when he was still pretending to be human.

Now that he had up close and personal experience with it, he was learning how unpleasant and terrifying it was. Dizzying, blurred shapes danced across his vision. The red lights sapped his strength and kept him from healing. He couldn't focus long enough to figure out where in the warehouse he had been thrown, and all he was left with was the sound of Lois' choked breathing from somewhere on the other end.

"You have to stop this!" she shouted at the man they had learned was actually the stranger. "He would never hurt anyone in this world."

"I can't take that risk."

The reply was exactly what Clark feared, and he summoned up as much strength as he could to push himself off the ground. He had to fight against this. He had to be there for his family—

Another terrible blow landed against the side of his head, and he collapsed once more.

"It's no use, Kal-El. I've been planning this for months, you know."

The crunch of the stranger's boots made Clark's scalp tingle. Everything was sensitive. He could tell his body was starting to shut down. What would happen if he had to suffer another

hit?

“I’m not like that person in the video,” he groaned. “I would never hurt Lois or anyone else.”

“You say that, Kal-El, but I know what happened on my world. How can you say yours is any different?”

“I have a family here! I need this world to be safe for them!”

Surprisingly, there was a pause. Had what he said actually gotten through? Lifting his head, Clark met the man’s curious eyes. Was there some kind of stirring within them?

“Clark! Get out of here! I’ll be okay, I promise.”

Lois’ voice shocked Clark back into the present. He couldn’t sit around and hope for a change of heart from his attacker; he needed to act.

She had been tied to the RV right after the first hit of the hammer, and there was no way Clark was leaving her here, no matter what she said. And there was also no way he’d make her watch him die. He’d figure a way out of this. One way or another—

A horrendous crash knocked Clark back to his knees. There was the roar of an engine, bright white lights, and then—

The stranger was hit violently by a red pickup truck. He flew across the room far away from Clark. Squinting, Clark tried to make out who his rescuer might be. The truck looked suspiciously familiar...

“Dad!” The door creaked open, and Jonathan of all people tumbled out. “Dad, what’s—”

“The lights.” It was the only thing Clark could manage to say. He wasn’t seeing stars anymore, but there was a black mist that was gradually solidifying over his field of vision.

He could hear a shuffling around him, a scraping sound, and then, finally, a crackle of electricity followed by a shower of sparks.

His bones sang in relief as he felt his strength come flooding back into him.

“Dad!” Jon was standing by the RV, hammer laying at his side. Jordan was blinking in confusion as he pulled himself off the side of the truck. Lois was there, too, her bright, relieved smile banishing the last traces of shadow from the room.

Clark let out a sigh. There was still more to do. The stranger needed to be dealt with and his motivations needed to be unpacked.

But Clark had no doubt that everything would work out just fine.

Lois had never been more proud of her kids. At the same time, there’d only been a few incidents in their lives when she’d been more upset with them or scared for them, and it was

making for a confusing tangle of emotions within her.

“You had *Sarah* over here?” she asked in frustration.

Jordan shifted guiltily. “Well, yeah, but she went home before we got in the truck. We knew we shouldn’t bring her into something dangerous like that.”

“Mmhmm.” Her eyes narrowed. They may be trying to pass off their actions as being responsible, but there were a few glaring issues that she noticed. “And why didn’t you call your uncle?”

Jonathan and Jordan exchanged a look.

“Well, we didn’t know if he’d answer right away,” Jon finally defended. “And besides, if what’s-his-nuts managed to get the drop on Dad, then Uncle Tal was in danger, too, right?”

“So was Jordan,” Clark reminded them. “Are you sure you’re okay, bud?”

It probably shouldn’t have been a surprise for any of them that Jordan had reacted to the red lights. He got his powers the same way that Clark did, after all. But even though he was a little subdued, he managed to give both Lois and Clark a reassuring smile.

“Yeah, I’m fine. It felt weird for a bit, but I was better as soon as Jon smashed those lights. Bro, that was totally badass!”

A smile lit up on Jon’s face. “Yeah! But I still can’t believe you figured out your powers so fast.”

“Well, ‘cause you helped lots. *And* you drove us there! I can’t believe that you just smashed through... Uh... I mean...” Jordan petered out self-consciously, eyes straying to his serious parents.

“It’s... okay.” Clark smiled cautiously. “You saved my life tonight. And we’re both proud of your courage and your quick action.”

“We’re not saying you two should run headfirst into danger as soon as something happens,” Lois added. “But for tonight... you did good.”

They had been creative and courageous and brave... It shouldn’t have been a surprise. They were Superman’s sons, after all. For years, Lois had tried to keep them insulated from the danger that was out there in the world, but tonight felt like a turning point in a lot of ways.

Jordan’s powers were continuing to grow and he rightfully wanted to use them to help. Jonathan’s bravery and creativity were also blossoming. They wouldn’t be content to stay tucked safely away for forever.

And something told her that they were going to feel ready to take on responsibility far sooner than she would be to see it.

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