

An Incredible Sequel

By [Deadly Chakram](#) <dwelf82@yahoo.com>

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Summary: A family outing to the movies is anything but relaxing for the Kent family.

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"Okay, how about this row?" Clark asked, nodding toward the half-empty row of reclining armchairs with his chin, as he carefully balanced the loaded tray of snacks he was carrying.

Lois scrutinized the seats carefully before finally shaking her head. "Too close."

"Maybe up there?" Clark asked, jutting his chin out in the direction of the mostly occupied row three steps up.

"Ugh, *no*," fourteen-year-old Rebecca complained, rolling her eyes in a perfect match to the way her mother always did.

"Anthony and his new girlfriend are in that row. They are *not* going to see me here with my *parents*."

Clark ignored his daughter's sulky mood and idly wondered when his cheerful, smiley baby girl would return. It wasn't that puberty had turned her into someone he could no longer recognize, but there *were* times when he just didn't understand her moods. Luckily, Lois seemed to be an expert on teenage girls, and he was happy to let her take the lead on things when it came to Becca.

"Well, I don't..." he began, but his daughter interrupted.

"The back row," she said definitively. She pointed with the large cup of Dr. Pepper in her hand. "There. Five seats in a row, on the left."

"Everyone okay with that?" Clark asked.

There was a general murmur of assent, so he led the way up the stadium-style slope of the theater to the empty seats. Christopher, his nineteen-year-old, took the far seat and immediately put his feet up with the electronic footrest. He reclined as far back as was possible, then took a large swig of his Mountain Dew. Then he reached over and grabbed the immense bucket of popcorn that his older brother, Michael, was carrying.

"Hey, remember, you need to *share* that, baby bro," Michael teased him gently.

"Yeah, yeah, just as long as *you* get up and get the free refill on it," Chris shot back with a lopsided grin that was the twin to Clark's.

"Ugh, *nerds*," Rebecca said, giving her brothers another eye roll. But Clark's sharp eyes couldn't miss the slight smile tugging at the corners of her mouth as she took the seat next to Michael.

Clark sat next to his daughter, leaving the aisle seat open for Lois. He carefully put down his burden of snacks. Then, like his sons, Clark reclined his chair as far as it went, enjoying the way he could stretch his back out a little that way.

"Okay," he said finally, as Lois situated herself in her seat. "Mikey, the Goobers were yours," he said, more for his own benefit than his son's. "Chris, here are your Reese's Pieces. Becca had the Sour Patch Kids." He dutifully doled out the boxes of

candy.

Lois reached over and took the box of Snowcaps before he could offer them to her. "Thanks," she said, flashing him a brilliant smile. She leaned over his seat and kissed his cheek, making him smile dopily.

"No problem," he said softly, gently capturing her lips for a lightning quick kiss. After all, it didn't take much to embarrass his children these days, especially his daughter.

Then he turned his attention to his box of Swedish Fish before grabbing the Cherry Coke Lois had carried into the theater for him while his hands had been occupied. He took a long sip of the sugary drink before popping one of the gummy fish into his mouth. He chewed thoughtfully as he stared at the large screen in the front of the room. But he no longer saw the projected ads on the screen. He was lost to the memories spinning through his mind, of a day fourteen years ago, when his sons had been barely out of toddlerhood and his daughter had been just a baby, too young to accompany him to the movies.

Clark looked over to his boys, now mostly grown. He could still see the babies they'd once been, even in their adult features. He could still see the precocious little boy that Michael had once been. He'd been studious even as a toddler, and it was no wonder why he'd gone into the science field. In fact, in just another month, he was set to begin interning at Star Labs while he finished off his college degree. And Christopher was still the wild, funny, free-spirited kid Clark had always known. Clark knew that, whatever Chris chose to pursue in life, he would do so with the same fire and passion he'd inherited from Lois.

Rebecca...

Clark smiled to himself. The spitting image of her mother, Rebecca Kent was a force to be reckoned with. Clark could easily see his daughter one day shaping the world through politics or activist work, or maybe even as a reporter, like her parents. As much as he was savoring watching her grow up, he could scarcely wait to see the extraordinary woman he knew Becca would become.

"Hey, remember when I took you boys to the first movie?" Clark asked a few moments later, interrupting the start of a good-natured squabble over who would hold the popcorn bucket. "It was the first movie I'd ever taken you to. You were so young." He smiled.

"Um...vaguely," Mike admitted, scratching his head. "I remember you acting really weird afterwards. Now I get why that was," he added with a wink. He laughed lightly. "That must have been a scary movie for you."

Clark chuckled. "Terrifying. Bruce and I had to call together an emergency...discussion...about the movie."

Looking back, Clark's fears about the Incredibles stirring up people's curiosity about superheroes and their potential secret identities had not been completely unfounded. Speculation had flared up for months after the movie debuted, leaving the real-world supers on their toes and more than vigilant in keeping their identities under wraps. A few warped individuals had come close to outing Lantern, and it had only been through sheer luck that John had managed to fool the public into thinking he didn't have a secret life at all.

Internally, Clark was worried that this sequel to the original film would cause new headaches. With the world constantly evolving and technology getting smarter, easier to carry and use, and more widespread every day, it was getting almost impossible – not to mention *exhausting!* – trying to keep his identity safely concealed. It was the same for the others as well. Perhaps the only one who seemed to be having an easy time of it was Arthur...but really, how much of a challenge was it to retreat to inaccessible areas of the ocean's depths to avoid unwanted attention?

He sighed softly, trying to push the thought from his head. "What about you, Chris?"

Chris shook his head and shrugged. “Sorry. I *do* remember being obsessed with the movie for a really long time though.”

“A really long time? You were Frozone for three Halloweens in a row,” Lois piped up, giving her son a loving smile.

Chris grinned and spread his arms wide. “Hey, when you find something you like...”

“I wasn’t surprised you stuck with it for so long,” Clark replied. “I *was* however, kind of shocked that you picked Frozone over Mr. Incredible, when, clearly, he was more... Superman-like,” he said with a wink.

“That’s why he was *boring* to me,” Chris playfully shot back.

Clark bit back the impulse to give his son a faux-wounded ‘hey!’ Instead, he fixed his son with an amused look. “Yeah, well, the joke was on you, huh?” he asked smugly, referring to Chris’ own immense strength.

Chris rolled his eyes and Clark stifled a laugh. All of his children had inherited his abilities, to a lesser or even greater degree. Michael could easily outmatch him for speed on the ground, though Clark could still move quicker through the air. Christopher’s strength rivaled Clark’s and his hearing was, if possible, even more acute than his father’s. And Becca...they weren’t yet sure of where her powers’ limits lay yet. That didn’t surprise Clark at all. He’d been nearly a full-grown man before his powers had stopped developing, with the last one, flight, coming in at eighteen. But Rebecca was nothing if not Lois’ child, and the competitive Lane gene was strong within her. She’d starting flying at *eleven*.

Clark was about to make a veiled comment to his kids, but the lights suddenly lowered, the curtain moved to expand the area of exposed screen, and the sound got louder as the previews started to play. None of the coming attractions overly wowed Clark, so he concentrated on his snacks. Unfortunately, he failed to check his speed, and the box of Swedish Fish was empty before the last preview ended and the reminder to silence all cell phones flashed onto the screen. With a disappointed frown, he set the box aside, settled back into his recliner, and took Lois’ hand.

The movie started with a touching message from the cast and crew, talking about the fourteen-year gap between the movies. It was a nice gesture that Clark found himself appreciating, and he hoped the wait would prove to be worth it. Because, he had to admit, as much trouble as the first movie had caused, it had been a *really* good movie.

The movie hit the ground running, starting exactly where the original had left off. The city was in danger from the nefarious Underminer and it was up to the Parr family – the Incredibles – to stop him. Bob and Helen raced off to stop the Underminer’s oversized drill, inadvertently causing damage to the city as they struggled to keep bystanders from getting hurt or killed. Meanwhile, their two older kids – Violet and Dash – kept trying to help while passing off babysitting their younger brother, Jack-Jack, to each other. And, since the villain had chosen his hour of vengeance to occur just as a school track meet had ended, the boy Violet was interested in caught a glimpse of her without her identity-concealing mask.

Clark’s stomach dropped a little as he instantly realized, before the rest of the happy families enjoying the movie, how complicated that would make life for poor Violet. He knew all about what it was like for a secret to be revealed before being ready for it. Lois had figured out his alter ego before he’d been prepared to tell her, and even though he’d known in his heart that he *had* to tell her soon, it had been terrifying for her to know the truth. Of course, he hadn’t been some teenager with a crush at the time. He’d been a grown man, deeply in love, and ready to commit his life to her through marriage. It had only been because he’d needed to know that she loved him for all the things he *couldn’t* do as Clark, and not all the things he *could* do as Superman.

He also knew that one day, his own children might have to

face the same challenge of letting the person they loved most in the world know about their incredible abilities. As it was, Michael had been dating his girlfriend, Allison, for two years now, and had told Clark on one or two occasions recently that he was thinking of proposing in the future, once he was out of college and established in his career. And that scared Clark. Not that his son was growing older and more independent – in fact, Clark loved that his children were growing up to be such amazing, self-sufficient people. But if and when the time came for Michael to tell Allison that he was one of the heroes flying around Metropolis – *and* the son of Superman – it would make him vulnerable. Clark knew only too well what that felt like. Lois’ initial reaction to finding out his own secret still hurt him if he dwelled on it for too long, though he’d never really blamed her for being angry and needing some distance to process it all.

So he worried about his son’s tender heart. And, if he were to be completely honest, the thought of letting another “outsider” in on the family secret put them *all* at risk, not *just* Michael. Over the years, it had been imperative to let a few select souls in on the secret, all for different reasons. Dr. Klein was the only person Clark had ever trusted with his children’s health. Perry had admitted to knowing since the beginning. Jimmy had found out by accident one night when Clark had been forced to break his cover to save his friend’s life. His in-laws had found out *twice*, after a memory wiping machine had erased the first revelation from their brains. But with the birth of Michael, Lois had worried about any potential powers manifesting early, and had felt it was best to prepare her parents and sister, just in case something extraordinary were to happen in front of them.

All of them had taken the news as well as could be expected, but Clark still carried the weight of worry with him each day since. There’s a knowledge that criminals would hurt, maim, or kill for. It terrified Clark to know that he might one day inadvertently cause the people he loved most to get killed. With a mental shudder, he watched as the Incredible family – known to the public only as the Parr family – finally put an end to the Underminer’s machine and the threat he posed to the city. Arrests were made, but to Clark’s horror, it was the *Parrs* who were arrested, *not* the Underminer, who’d escaped justice by sheer luck.

In the meantime, Frozone managed to escape detection and was approached by a man who asked him if he’d be interested in changing the law which made it illegal for superheroes to exist out in public, using their powers for the benefit of society at large. Immediately, Clark’s hackles rose and an uncomfortable feeling settled into the pit of his stomach. It sounded like a set up to him. Or maybe he was just too used to dealing with traps in his own life. The first time, he’d been suckered in by Lex Luthor, who’d expressed his concern for Lois as their wedding date loomed nearer. Clark had been overconfident in his powers and blind with hatred for Lex, not to mention sick with worry for Lois. And although they hadn’t parted on the best of terms – a rejected declaration of love in the park and a proposition to Superman just hours later – he’d loved Lois too much, even back then, to ignore even the *suggestion* that something might be wrong with her. For his trouble, Luthor had caged him with Kryptonite and poisoned him almost to the point of death. It had only been dumb luck and a lot of determination to save Lois that had allowed Clark to escape with his life. But he’d been without his powers and sick for days after; a mocking reminder of how stupid he’d been.

Unfortunately, that hadn’t been the last time he’d become a victim of a set up. Once, he’d been scammed into stealing nuclear weapons. Even the surviving Kryptonians who’d come to Earth – some to beg for his help and others hell-bent on destroying him – had woven their traps as they sought any means to their own ends. And as much as Clark was loathe to do it, there had been times when others had set traps that he’d *deliberately* walked into. Sometimes it had been to save a friend – like when he’d given up

years of his own life to save Jimmy. Other times, he'd allowed himself to walk into a set up merely because it gave him his best opportunity to take on and defeat his enemies. But in no cases had it ever felt good to know he was allowing himself to take the bait and putting himself and his loved ones at risk.

Clark sighed softly and turned his attention back to the movie, trying to squelch down the misgivings he had about the man who had approached Frozone. The Parrs were led away to the police station, minus Frozone. Clark breathed a sigh of relief that at least *one* hero wasn't going to bear the brunt of the city's anger over the destruction that had occurred. *Misplaced anger* at that. Didn't the citizens of Metroville *realize* how lucky they were that there was only some property damage, and that no one had lost their lives? Clark grit his teeth, annoyed with the animated officers on screen.

He and the others in the Justice League had been fortunate, he reflected. While they always did their utmost to ensure that neither lives nor property were in danger when fighting crime, it was unavoidable that the occasional mishap would occur. Clark hated to admit it, but it was possible he himself was responsible for the most damage done, but that could hardly be helped. There were times when crashing through a wall to get at trapped victims or hostages was absolutely necessary. And he could scarcely be held responsible for the times when a foe got the better of him and sent him crashing into parked cars or worse. After all, his dense molecular structure wasn't exactly a *choice* he'd made.

Still there *had* been one instance where Superman had been arrested, back when he'd first started out. A freak heat wave in Metropolis – now known to have been caused by a leak at Luthor's nuclear facility – had been blamed on Superman. And while Clark had never been able to *prove* it, he more than suspected that Luthor had been controlling the leak somehow, making it so the temperature rose with each super feat that had been performed in an attempt to drive him out of town. The plan had nearly succeeded too. Clark had been ready to move away for good to go live in isolation somewhere, terrified that he might be a solar conductor and a threat to the people around him. But, before he'd made up his mind to go, he'd been arrested for using his powers, even though he hadn't meant to defy the court's orders.

But he'd messed up and, as he'd been taught as a young boy, he'd stepped up to the plate, admitted his fault, and taken responsibility for his actions. He'd accepted his punishment and hadn't resisted when the police had taken him to the city's jail, though, strictly as a matter of self-preservation, he'd intentionally caused enough minor problems while being booked that the officers hadn't been able to collect any identifying information on him – like his fingerprints – that could, one day, potentially expose him as Clark Kent. He hadn't felt great about the feigned ineptitude he'd put on, but he simply hadn't seen any other way other than subtle sabotage.

Looking back on his brief prison stint, he felt the hot shame and embarrassment creep up the back of his neck once more. It has been humbling and humiliating to submit to being caged like a common criminal. He could still hear the taunts and the teasing of his fellow inmates. He could still clearly remember the threats they'd made – empty ones, to be sure, but still carrying enough venom in their words to make Clark flinch internally. He could still recall how distressing it had been to think of himself as a criminal, when he'd dedicated himself – in both his alter-egos – to upholding the law and being a pillar of justice. He'd worried too that he would lose the public's trust now that Superman had a rap sheet.

But his time behind bars had been mercifully short. And while the public had initially turned their backs on the alien hero who they'd erroneously believed to be inadvertently harming them, once it was discovered that the heat had been in no way connected to Superman's activities, the public had once again embraced their hero with open arms. That had been *almost* as big of a relief to

Clark as finding out that he wasn't a danger to anyone and that he could remain in the city he loved, working next to – and eventually wooing – the woman that held his heart.

Clark smiled a little to himself as he watched the animated drama on screen. At least superheroes were legal in his world – even when he'd been ordered not to use his powers. The Parrs weren't so lucky. Supers were expressly prohibited from being superheroes. Laws had been written making it illegal to be their natural selves in the world the Parrs lived in – not just in their city, but, apparently, all over the world. Refusing to dwell on that fact for too long, he picked up the thread of the movie again.

Finally allowed to leave the police station, the Incredibles made their way back to the hotel they were staying at, since their home had been destroyed by the evil Syndrome in the previous movie. Bob's friend, Rick Dicker, a government employee hired to keep supers in check and under the radar, drove them to the hotel where he proceeded to let Bob know that it was time he give up on the superhero work and that the program he'd worked for had been shut down. But he *did* promise to look into the incident with Tony, the boy who'd seen Violet without her mask on.

Two more weeks at the hotel were promised to the Parrs, but after that, Rick wouldn't be able to help anymore. The family was facing homelessness. A sadness settled in Clark's heart, as well as a righteous anger. The Incredibles had tried to *help*. Yes, there had been property damage. And yes, the villain had gotten away. But to be forced out onto the streets with nowhere to go – no home, no job, no prospects – with three young kids was *inhumane*. It made Clark's blood boil to imagine a world where he and his family would be homeless. He wasn't rich by any means – a reporter's salary only went so far – but he couldn't fathom not having the means to keep a roof over their heads, food on the table, and clothing on everyone's backs. But poor Mr. Incredible had none of that at the moment, and he lamented that fact over a family dinner of takeout Chinese food.

Clark hated admitting it to himself, but he knew he'd have to swallow his pride if the day ever came that he couldn't take care of his family. Even if it meant asking Bruce for financial assistance while he job searched, he would *ensure* that his family wouldn't have to go without a place to live. It didn't matter to Clark *what* that job might be, so long as he had one. So he was shocked when Bob turned down his friend Lucius' – also known as Frozone – generous offer to take in all five members of the Parr family into his own home. Clark understood the idea of not wanting to be a burden on anyone, but given the choice between being a temporary inconvenience to someone and life on the streets, it seemed like a no-brainer to him. Then Lucius dropped the bombshell. A wealthy business owner named Winston Deaver wanted to meet Mr. Incredible, Elastigirl, and Frozone that night to discuss the illegal status of superheroes.

Bob seemed to jump at the chance while Helen was a bit more cautious and reserved, to the point where she offered to stay put with the kids. But Lucius convinced them that Mr. Deaver wanted all *three* of them, so, reluctantly, she put on her old super suit from years ago – not the iconic red and black one all of the Incredibles had worn during the last movie – and left Violet in charge of her brothers for a few hours. Together, the three heroes went to meet with the multibillionaire at his home. Clark's hackles stood on end as the man slowly made his way down the staircase to meet them when they arrived. All his grand talk of the old days and being a big fan of the supers made Clark uneasy. A part of him felt like something was very, very *off* about the whole situation. The more the man gushed over his guests, the sicker Clark felt. All of it seemed rather rehearsed, despite the fact that, since it was only a movie and an animated one at that, it *would* have been rehearsed and rerecorded over and over again.

Flashes of his meetings over the year with Lex Luthor ran through Clark's mind. Luthor had been *very* good at putting on a

pleasant façade for the public, pretending to celebrate Superman as much as the average denizen of the world, when, in actuality, he'd been plotting since the beginning how to utterly destroy the Man of Steel. He'd come terrifyingly close to that goal on a number of occasions. Few other villains had ever caused Clark as much fear and as many problems as Luthor had.

But Luthor's act was good. Even after he'd been exposed as the criminal mastermind that he'd been, plenty of people who'd grown up worshiping the Luthor name had refused to believe he'd done the horrible things he'd done. No amount of solid evidence had swayed those people, and Lois and Clark had initially lost some of their credibility with that demographic. Superman had been blamed and reviled for not showing up and plucking the billionaire from the jaws of death when Luthor had died the first time after taking a swan dive from the penthouse balcony of his skyscraper. It hadn't mattered that, as far as they knew, Superman hadn't been in the area when Luthor had chosen suicide over a life spent in prison. None of them had known that Clark *would* have saved Luthor if his powers had been functional at the time – if only to ensure that the man didn't escape justice.

So Clark was immediately suspicious of Winston Deaver as he sweet-talked the supers on screen, regaling them with the idea of proving their worth to the world and getting the laws changed to legalize superheroes once more. Something just felt malicious about the whole plan, though Clark couldn't point to any one thing that could prove the man wasn't as good-intentioned as he made himself out to be. It was almost a relief when Winston's slightly bumbling sister, Evelyn, arrived late, dropping things in the wake of her passing. But that mild shot of comic relief was short-lived as Evelyn and Winston divulged the dark truth of their past and the reasoning for wanting to bring supers back into the world. Their father had been murdered just after the world's superheroes had been forced underground, with their heartbroken mother passing shortly thereafter. But the two siblings seemed split on where they placed the blame for those deaths. Winston firmly held the government responsible, for making the superheroes too afraid to answer the calls their parents had made for help. And Evelyn clearly placed the blame on their father, for relying on outside help rather than getting himself and his wife to the safe room they'd had.

Clark saw both sides of the argument. On the one hand, it was easy to rely on superheroes to get you out of a jam, *especially* if you were personally friends with those heroes, as it appeared the Deaver family had been. If he were to be honest, he thought Lois had, in the earlier days of their relationship, taken her friendship with Superman for granted. From all accounts, Lois had *always* had a penchant for getting into trouble, but that seemed to explode once she realized that Superman had befriended her and always managed to make sure he was close by to fly her out of any trouble she might find herself in. Lois, of course, had never fully admitted that he was right, but once she knew who Superman *really* was, and especially once they'd welcomed their children into the world, she had shied away from taking unnecessary risks...most of the time. It was a fact that allowed Clark to breathe a little easier whenever he had to rush off and let Superman attend to a rescue far from her side.

On screen, Bob Parr was visually ready and willing to go along with the Deavers' plan. But the Deavers didn't want *him* be their test subject. Of the three supers, *Elastigirl* was the one they wanted. Mr. Incredible looked deflated, though he tried to hide it. Instead of dwelling on not being the one chosen, he began trying to talk his waffling wife into taking the job. Eventually, she relented and took the job, while her husband stayed home – and by home, they meant the spare mansion Winston had given the Parr family – with the kids. Clark silently sipped his Cherry Coke as he watched Elastigirl ride off on her new motorcycle in her new super suit – again, courtesy of their “benevolent” benefactors. With each

new gift the Parrs discovered, the more Clark's mistrust of the wealthy siblings grew. It was like they were trying too hard to gain the Incredibles' friendship and trust.

Still, Clark was glad to see that, in this movie, since it came on the heels of the previous film's adventures, Bob was still a very involved father. He did his best to make sure his children ate well, got to school on time, kept the house as clean as he could, and even tried to help his son with his math homework. Clark could easily relate to those tasks, especially Bob's frustration with trying to understand the “new” math Dash was learning. He'd often been the one in his own family to watch the kids while Lois met with a source or covered a story on her own. He loved being able to encourage her career and seeing her shine in her own right, instead of always “just” being one half of the Lane and Kent team. And he adored spending time at home with his kids. They gave him a new purpose in life and he absolutely enjoyed getting the chance to nurture them and be involved in their lives.

He smiled to himself in the darkness. Bob was certainly trying, but it was clear he could barely keep up with the demands of the household. Clark admired him – admired anyone, really – who chose to stay home and tend to the house and kids while their spouse got the chance to get out, go to work, and associate with other adults all day long. While he loved his kids, it also always felt wonderful to get back to work as both a reporter and hero. He *needed* that interaction with the world, as well as the knowledge that he'd done something to make the world a better place. But even when it was his turn to stay home and take care of the daily, familial obligations that arose, he'd always had the benefit of his powers. What was the burden of washing half a dozen loads of laundry when it took all of two seconds to throw the clothes in the washing machine and roughly five seconds to fold after drying? Ten seconds if he didn't leave the clothes in the laundry basket and put everything away in everyone's dressers and closets. In fact, his skills in keeping the house clean, organized, and functioning like a well-oiled machine – not to mention his prowess as a chef – had earned him a gag gift one Christmas from Lois; a mug that read “Domestic Goddess.”

In any case, he felt bad for the struggling Mr. Incredible. The character was physically strong, but he lacked the speed Clark had. Which meant that everything took more time, more effort, and more energy, leaving the character exhausted by the end of the day, to the point where he kept dozing off while trying to get little Jack-Jack to sleep. Clark chuckled at the image of Bob nodding off while reading his young son a bedtime story. He was intimately familiar with how dull some kids' books could be; all in the effort to lull a baby to sleep.

He knew too how much Mr. Incredible was suffering by having to sit on the sidelines while his wife went out and did the work he wanted to be doing. Twice he'd been in Bob's shoes, wanting so much to be involved in what only his wife could do. The first time, they hadn't yet been married. Lois had already known his secret, which, looking back, Clark had been extremely grateful for. He'd been shot with a red Kryptonite laser and his powers had been transferred to Lois. She'd taken on the identity of Ultra Woman, graciously stepping in to fill the void left by Superman's inability to assist at crises. Being left in the dust had hurt Clark more than he'd ever let Lois know. He hadn't been angry with her. No, his heart had been bursting with *pride* seeing her step into his boots and using her newfound powers to help people.

But he'd felt worse than useless at the time as he'd paced his apartment, wondering where Lois was, if she was safe, and how she was mentally holding up. He'd known only too well what it felt like to have the weight of the world resting on one pair of – admittedly super-strong – shoulders. He'd known how easy it could be to lose oneself to the depression that could creep up after a rescue gone wrong, a life lost, the inability to be in more than

one place at a time. He'd known – still *did know* – the guilt that came along with the depression, though he'd been forced to learn to deal with it in healthier ways since the early days of his first rescues. It wasn't a matter of becoming desensitized to the horrors he witnessed day after day. It was a matter of surviving, that he learned to lock away those images in his mind and move on. He was only one person, and powers or not, he could only do so much. He wasn't a god and had no desire to be one.

Thankfully, it hadn't taken *too* long for them to figure out a way to get Clark's powers back where they belonged. Just a few tense, frustrating, depressing days. Just long enough for Ultra Woman to develop a rabid, horny, shameless fan following...not too unlike when Superman had first gone public. Even Jimmy had fallen under Ultra Woman's spell, sending a tasteful, small, inexpensive – compared to the others – floral arrangement to the Daily Planet's newsroom, which had somehow become the unofficial drop off spot for fan mail, and other, less modest offerings.

Clark had *again* felt sidelined after he and Lois had been married, though that time, he'd blessedly been able to *keep* his powers. Perry had been given a promotion and, for a short while, had made Lois the new Editor-in-Chief of the paper. Clark hadn't minded working under Lois at all. He had no problem with his wife taking charge and making more money than he had. But being the new editor had meant long days and even longer nights for Lois. She was never at home, and, if she was, she was on the phone handling one crisis or another. And he'd been powerless to help. The stress of being thrust into the new job with no warning and barely any training had taken its toll on Lois in the form of sleepless nights, extreme irritability, and poor judgments. Clark had been left angry and frustrated at how much harder she'd been on him than the rest of the staff, even if some part of him knew that she was probably subconsciously trying to prove to the newsroom that she would afford no special or preferential treatment to her husband.

Once again, Clark had felt left in the dust while Lois raced ahead and achieved goals he knew he couldn't. Not that he *wanted* to be editor. He *needed* to stay active as a reporter and have the freedom to leave the bullpen whenever he needed to so that Superman could continue his work. Being editor would bind him to his office and kill any chance of sneaking out unnoticed when cries for help reached his ears. But the job had left Lois almost too busy for him. He rarely got the chance to speak with her outside of the newsroom. Their love life had suffered. He'd worried that he would lose her completely to the paper, and had found a new respect for Alice White, who'd put up with Perry's unequally split attention between her and the paper for far longer than Clark thought it would be possible. He'd loved Lois and supported her in her new role, but privately he'd wondered if their still-new marriage would survive the beating it had been taking.

It had been a relief to them both when Perry had stepped down out of his new position and slipped back into his old job of editor, making Lois a regular reporter again. The rocky road the Planet had been traveling on as it became accustomed to a new and inexperienced leader had instantly smoothed back out as the Chief had once again taken the reins. More importantly, the strain and tension in their marriage had instantly vanished. Back then, Clark had likened the feeling to the way a fishing line could go taut as a whopper of a fish got hooked. The rod itself could bend almost to the point of snapping; the line's weight limit would be put to the absolute test. The fisherman would lean back in his seat or arch his body backwards as he fought to maintain control, delicately balancing on that fine line between fighting too hard and breaking the line and not fighting enough and losing the trophy beneath the water. And then, suddenly, the fish would break free. The fisherman would fly backward at the unexpected change in the fight, the line would go slack, and the rod would straighten out

again. Exhausted, the fisherman might just lean back, relax, and be grateful not to have destroyed his favorite rod in the end.

It had been easy for Lois and Clark to slip back into their normal routine with Lois back to her old job again. Both had, of course, needed to make some awkward, uncomfortable apologies, but in the end, like a sword forged in fire, they had come out of things stronger than ever. He only hoped the same could be said for the Parr family by the time the credits rolled – though he guessed that would be the case. After all, Pixar might be known to bring tears to an audience's collective eyes, but he doubted they would want to deal with a heavy subject like separation or divorce.

In any case, Bob Parr was struggling. Dash needed help in school. Violet, who was supposed to go on a date with the kid, Tony, from the beginning of the movie, got stood up. And he himself was exhausted. Then, to make matters worse, the still *very* awake Jack-Jack mistook a raccoon for a robber, thanks to an old television show and the raccoon's natural "bandit mask" markings. The babbling toddler – who also, apparently took his role as a child of superheroes very seriously – instantly grew suspicious of this furry new intruder. Instincts – and a case of "monkey see, monkey do" – led the little boy to become fiercely protective of his family and their new home. He went after the raccoon in a hilarious chase-scene style sequence, during which a dozen or more powers manifested in the toddler. In the end, the terrified raccoon got away and Bob was faced with the challenge of dealing with his son's new superpowers – which had been witnessed by the audience, but not the parents – at the end of the first movie.

Bob was exuberant over Jack-Jack's powers, not yet realizing what a challenge it would be to help his son get them under control. Up until then, Bob had lamented the fact that his youngest child appeared to be "normal," with no unique powers of his own. Clark winced. He couldn't imagine feeling bad if his own kids hadn't inherited any of his powers, or developed unique ones of their own. It had never mattered to him if their Kryptonian heritage expressed itself as the ability to bend steel with their bare hands or soar through the sky, or if those genes had been suppressed and they were just as vulnerable and powerless as a regular Earthling.

Violet, in the meantime, had confronted Tony about their date and the boy acted like he remembered neither the date nor her. When he finally asked Violet if he knew her, Clark could see the devastation in her face. When she complained about Tony seeing her in her super suit and then acting like he didn't know her anymore, Bob made an off-handed comment that it was for the best and that, back in his day as a super, their friend Dicker had to erase so many memories in order to keep the supers safe after their identities were discovered. Violet blew a gasket as she realized what had happened. Tony hadn't been feigning his ignorance. Dicker had erased her from his memory. Clark grimaced as he snuck a peek at his daughter. He couldn't really blame Violet when she moodily declared that she renounced all superpowers and superheroes. He never wanted to put his daughter in a position like Violet; where the family's super activities caused her or any of his kids to be harmed – physically or emotionally. He'd suffered enough after Lois had figured out his identity and demanded some space to figure out her feelings about it. And he had firsthand knowledge of the special hell it was to have Lois literally forget who he was to a nasty bout of amnesia. Torture didn't cover how gut-wrenchingly difficult those weeks had been for him.

Meanwhile, Elastigirl was enjoying going back to work as a superhero, despite how hard she'd tried to make Bob understand that *breaking* the law wasn't the way to go about *changing* the law. Clark cracked a smile as even she admitted that she was being a hypocrite. But he couldn't really blame her. The thrilling scene where she tried to outrace and save an out of control train on her brand-new motorcycle left him breathless and tingling with a rush of adrenaline. He was intimately acquainted with how addicting it

could be to make rescues that should be impossible. And, while he didn't need a motorcycle to get around, he'd raced trains too – some for rescues and some just for fun when his powers had first started to manifest. That thought sent a warm feeling through his body. He'd been so young, back then. His speed had been exciting, not terrifying, the way some of his other abilities had been. He'd enjoyed competing against the speeding locomotives as a way to test his limits and gauge how much faster he'd been becoming by the day. He'd been blissfully unaware of how much the world would come to depend on his ability to cover vast distances in seconds. How many lives had been saved, simply because he could zip into and out of a fire in the blink of an eye, towing out those trapped within? How many people had been saved by his ability to span the globe in minutes, to lend his aid at natural disasters?

He was ridiculously happy for Helen Parr as she basked in the rush of a job well done once the train was stopped and the passengers were saved. But saving the train hadn't been merely a plot device meant to get Elastigirl on board with Winston Deaver's plan to reintegrate supers into society. As Helen demanded answers from the conductor, the movie's villain was revealed – the Screenslaver, who used subliminal messages and flashing light patterns to get his victims to do his bidding. Clark involuntarily shuddered. He'd dealt with an underhanded magician's assistant who'd used, admittedly cruder, technology to brainwash kids in order to kidnap them. And Clark himself had similarly fallen prey to hypnosis. That had been truly scary. He'd been completely under the control of someone else, and it had only been through the absolute force of his will that he'd been able to break the hold on his mind. His euphoria for Helen instantly cooled and was replaced by a palpable feeling of foreboding.

But nothing more insidious happened next other than Helen being introduced to a small gang of other supers, each with a unique ability of their own. She seemed to be a little uncomfortable at first and Clark could relate to that a bit. It was always a bit awkward, though flattering, to find out that he had inspired someone to become a first responder, to go into the military, to use their own powers for the greater good. Sure, it felt great to know he was making an impact in the world, and that it was having a ripple effect of calling others to throw their abilities into the mix as well. But, even after all these years of being in the lime light as Superman, it still felt distinctly odd to think that his actions had altered the lives of others so drastically. But Helen handled the situation gracefully and Clark had a little hope that she'd made some new friends that would be out in public, using their abilities, just as soon as supers were made legal again.

Back at home, Bob angrily called up his friend, Dicker, and complained about the memory wipe. But the older man seemed barely fazed, if at all, brushing it off with a comment that memory wiping wasn't an exact science. But Bob, ready to help and defend his daughter, got some information out of Dicker before the end of the phone call, including the name of the restaurant where the kid worked. Trying to be helpful, Bob took his kids for dinner at The Bored Platter, where Violet was absolutely mortified by her father's attempts to get Tony acquainted with Violet. Here Rebecca shot Clark a warning glance, her expression all business and all Lois. It practically screamed at him to *never* do what Bob was doing. As it was, Clark had earned her – albeit, brief – scorn the previous year when he'd taken it upon himself to try and help her and her friend, Tammy, after the girls had had a falling out over a boy they'd both liked.

Becca shook her head and mouthed the words “Don't you *dare* get any ideas, Dad!” Clark nodded and quickly crossed his heart in a promise. Of course, he couldn't *completely* swear not to intervene in a situation if it got bad enough. But he would do his best to uphold his oath not to embarrass his daughter any more than it was inevitable for a young teen to be embarrassed by the

fact that she had parents at all. Becca frowned, as if she could read his thoughts, then pointed back to the screen.

Clark had been right to worry about the Screenslaver. The villain hadn't *just* wanted to derail – so to speak – the brand-new train line in the city. He wanted to make a statement, get the world's attention, and taunt Elastigirl. When she appeared on a television interview about the near-crash, the Screenslaver struck again, this time endangering the lives of an Ambassador and her staff. It was only through quick thinking and a lot of pushing her limits that Elastigirl managed to keep everyone alive. And now, she had the beginnings of an idea to track and trap the villain. She would do a remote, audio-only second interview, during which she would use a device built by Evelyn Deaver and track the signal when the Screenslaver struck again. The plan worked flawlessly and soon Helen was in the Screenslaver's lair. He did his best to kill her and escape, but she, like Clark's own amazing wife, wasn't going to let a little detail like that stand in the way. She chased the criminal down and finally brought him to justice, but not before he'd destroyed all of the evidence linking him to his crimes.

Clark frowned. That was too easy. The movie was only, what? Maybe halfway through its run time? Something fishy was going on...

As usual, his instincts were right. The Screenslaver was nothing more insidious than a pizza delivery boy. Could it be? Had Helen captured the wrong man? Or had the delivery boy been used? A nauseous feeling tightened Clark's intestines into knots. He was, unfortunately, familiar with catching the wrong person and pinning a crime on them that they weren't responsible for. Granted, most of those mistakes had been made a long, long time ago, back when he'd been a very green reporter who'd been too trusting of sources who hadn't had his best interests at heart. Baron Sunday had been a prime example of that. Clark had blindly listened to his sources without doing his due diligence, eager to break the story and prove his worth as a reporter. But he'd been deliberately fed bad information and an innocent man had gone to jail. An innocent man who'd later on tried to exact his revenge by attempting to kill Clark.

Clark was a different person these days. He'd been a much better, smarter reporter by the time the Baron had enacted his revenge plot, but learning that he'd been responsible for Baron Sunday's needless incarceration had really hammered home to Clark how important it was to take nothing at face value ever again. It had been heartbreaking and humiliating to find out he'd caused senseless suffering in the man's life. In the years since, it hadn't been uncommon for he and Lois to follow leads only to discover that the person they were investigating was innocent, and that someone else was responsible for a crime – someone who they'd work tirelessly to find and bring to justice. Maybe the experience with Baron Sunday should have discouraged Clark from continuing on his reporter's path, but he wasn't so easily disparaged. The whole thing had been invaluable eye-opening instead, and it had made both of them better reporters in the end.

He bit his lower lip as he watched the movie play out, feeling a great sense of comradeship with Elastigirl. He knew how awful she had to be feeling in that moment. How confused. How vulnerable. And how horrified and frightening it was to know that the *real* villain was still out there, enjoying watching someone else take the fall for him.

It's got to be Winston Deaver, he thought, his earlier unease with the billionaire bubbling back up to the surface.

Meanwhile, Bob was busy at home, with his son, working on decimals for his math homework, when something on the television caught his attention. A show was on talking about the Incredible, Mr. Incredible's old car, briefly glimpsed in the opening of the previous movie. Stunned, Bob mentioned that he'd been told the car was destroyed beyond repair. But to his horror, a collector now owned it. Furious, Bob found the old remote to the

car, pressing all kind of buttons that made an array of things happen in the car – like water jets and the appearance of a rocket launcher. But before he could steal back his own car, his sense of morality – and maybe just a little bit of being too mentally down beaten to care enough – he stopped himself and disengaged the gadgets that were currently terrifying all the people on the television screen.

A scream rang out. Violet had discovered that Jack-Jack had powers. Bob reluctantly informed his older children of their younger brother's abilities and Violet – quite rightly, in Clark's opinion – asked if he'd told their mother yet. Bob admitted that he hadn't, because he didn't want Helen to worry about things at home. Clark suspected that the *real* reason was much more selfish. If Bob told Helen about Jack-Jack's powers and the ensuing difficulties they were enduring, Helen would certainly abandon her work in favor of being home with the kids, which would cripple – if not outright kill – the push to legalize supers again. And if that happened, Bob would never be free to resume the identity of Mr. Incredible; at least, not publicly. Instead, in a perhaps boneheaded move, Bob kept the information under wraps until he was nearly insane from lack of sleep and the inability to predict when his son might burst into flame or pop off into another dimension.

Clark silently shook his head ever so slightly. He couldn't even *begin* to fathom keeping a secret like that from Lois. He'd been *so* excited and proud to share each new power his sons and daughter had developed with Lois. Sometimes, she'd been there to witness it or to have one of the kids confide in her about their newest ability. Each time, she'd called him up on his phone or, if that wasn't practical, called out for Superman, luring him to where she was. Then she would bubble over with enthusiasm as she told him what was going on. And he'd done the same for her if he was the one who discovered a new power in their children first. He remembered with a smile how he'd been so thrilled about finding out about Michael's first emerging power that he'd tripped over his own two feet in a rare moment of gracelessness and plunged down the stairs head first until he'd crashed into the wall hard enough to make a vaguely Clark-shaped imprint in the drywall. He'd spent the next day repairing the damage with the biggest, stupidest grin on his face.

Remembering it now made that same grin cross his lips again. How different things were as a parent! He still could easily recall the blinding terror caused by each of his powers making themselves known. Back then, he hadn't really had any way of knowing what to expect. No one on Earth could do the things he'd found himself suddenly able to do. But with his parents' determined and gentle natures, he'd found ways to control each of his gifts until his restraint on his powers had become as natural as breathing. Now, as a father himself, Clark had been able to step back and be the calm center in the storm of his children's lives. He'd experienced what they were going through and he had the perspective of hindsight to aid him. Using and adapting many of the techniques his parents had employed with him, he'd guided his sons and daughter in testing their powers and finding their own, unique ways of controlling them.

Still, like Bob, he'd occasionally found himself getting burnt out between his duties at home, at work, and out in public as Superman. There had been times when he'd been so tired that he'd nodded off for brief moments as he'd patrolled the city. There had been times when he'd wanted nothing more than a quiet dinner alone with Lois. He'd been – and still was – beyond thankful that he'd been able to rely on his and Lois' parents to babysit for them, giving them the respite they needed to recharge and reconnect with each other. So he was pleased to see Bob bringing his youngest child to Edna Mode, family friend and costumer to heroes. On a personal note, Clark had grown to really like the character of Edna as the years had passed and he'd watched the movie more time

than he could count, so he was thrilled the filmmakers had managed to squeeze her into the sequel. Edna agreed to help Bob by watching Jack-Jack overnight and making the baby a new supersuit to help with controlling the child's numerous powers. But it was what Edna said to Bob that struck Clark far more than her offer to help him.

"Done properly, parenting is a heroic act," she told him before emphasizing once again, "Done properly!"

Clark couldn't agree more. Out of all the things he'd ever done in his life, out of all the wrongs he'd righted, out of all the disasters – natural and man-made alike – he'd helped avert, out of all the lives he'd ever saved, the *most* important thing he'd *ever* done was to be a father. It was true that most men could sire a child, but he knew from experience that not all of those men could be called a father. He'd been lucky in his life to have not one, but *two* fathers. Jonathan Kent was the best father Clark could have ever have hoped for. He'd always, *always* been there for Clark, no matter what. Nothing had ever seemed to scare Clark's father. Not finding an orphaned baby in a spaceship, not his son's unexpected, emerging powers, not Clark's determination to bring Superman into the world, not even Clark's decision to leave Kansas behind to travel the world and, eventually, settle in Metropolis. Clark was eternally grateful to have his dad in his life. But he also had to acknowledge his biological father, Jor-El; a man who'd loved his infant son so much that he'd sent the child to Earth in the hope that he would escape Krypton's imminent, violent death. Without Jor-El's selflessness, Clark would have been long dead before he'd even had a chance to live.

As a father himself, Clark counted himself lucky every day of his life for the three amazing children he'd helped bring into the world. They were equal parts Lois and himself; unique souls blended of Earthling and Kryptonian genes – a heritage never before seen anywhere in the universe. He *loved* being their father. Everything about raising his children had brought him peace and belonging – from changing the worst blowout diapers, to rocking them to sleep in the dark, to teaching them how to read, to helping to mend their broken hearts when they felt the alienation that came from their Kryptonian genetics and the resulting powers it gave them.

Of course, he'd never considered those actions to be "heroic" before. He'd always just thought of them as being part of what it meant to be a parent. But Edna's deliberate choice of words – "parenting is a heroic act" made sense now that he thought about it. Parents – all of them, not just himself or even Lois and himself – *were* heroes in their own right. Raising tiny people to become productive, polite, functioning members of society was not an easy task, super powers aside. Every child had the same opportunity to use their own unique gifts to either the benefit of society or to its detriment. Unfortunately, as both a Daily Planet reporter and a superhero, Clark had seen plenty of examples of those who'd channeled their efforts into the wrong kinds of things.

Clark smiled to himself. He'd raised – was *still raising* – the next generation. And his sons and daughter were shining examples of goodness. Already his boys were out there, helping in the roles of new supers and Rebecca, though still barely into her teenage years, had often expressed a desire to join their ranks when she became old enough. Clark was insanely proud of his kids. He would have been even if they'd chosen to steer clear of the superhero path.

I wouldn't have blamed them for opting out of that line of work at all. It's not an easy burden to bear, he thought to himself as he scratched behind one ear. It's rewarding but...there's a lot of sacrifice involved. How many times did I nearly lose Lois before she knew I'm Superman? How many honors convocations and dance recitals and karate competitions and field trips have I narrowly missed because Superman was needed? How many goodnight stories did I miss because of a cry for help?

He sighed. It took a lot of courage to walk the road of superhero work and he'd never sugar-coated it for his children once they'd discovered his secret. To know that they were *willing* to take that on both terrified him and made his heart swell with pride.

Focus, Clark, he chided himself a moment later, in an effort to bring his attention back to the action on screen.

Elastigirl was being toasted by Winston Deaver, for her hand in bringing the Screenslaver to swift justice. Clark smiled to himself a little, knowing exactly how proud Helen had to have been feeling in that moment. While he'd never needed the pomp and circumstance of an actual *party* to celebrate his victories, he'd be lying if he said he'd hated seeing the praise Superman received from the media. Even now, after decades in the suit, he loved knowing that most people around the world regarded him as a kind of distant friend and as a pillar of justice. But Elastigirl's triumph was short lived. In a twist that blindsided Clark, it was Winton's *sister*, Evelyn, who was the *real* Screenslaver. In a devious, well-executed move, she captured Elastigirl, monologued about her motives for doing so, and absolved Winston of any wrongdoing, painting him – with a hefty amount of disgust – as a soft-brained idiot who still clung to the illusion of safety and goodness that superheroes had once given the world.

The next morning, a much more well-rested, optimistic Bob picked up his son from his overnight stay with Edna. While Bob's head spun a little, Edna showed him the gadgets and gizmos she'd imbued Jack-Jack's new suit with, calling him a "polymorph" because of his multitude of powers. That made Clark smirk a little. Would Edna call Superman – and his children – a polymorph as well? After all, he and his children all had a host of abilities at their beck and call. However, unlike little Jack-Jack, their powers had manifested one at a time, for the most part, not all at once like the toddler on screen. That had always been a relief to Clark. Sure, it had sometimes felt like he'd *never* stop developing powers when he was young, but at least the long, drawn out process of gaining all his abilities had given him time to master each one before something new came along and disrupted his new sense of normal.

A newly hopeful Mr. Incredible brought his son home and, after a while, he showed his other children how to use the suit's tracker to see which power their baby brother was about to use, and how to handle it. Everything was going well and everyone seemed happy. Clark knew it was too good to last. And, just a few moments later, Bob got a phone call luring him to the ship at DEVTECH, where the Deavors were hosting a gathering of lawmakers who were all ready to officially sign superhero legality into immutable law. He left his kids in the care of Lucius, and then, like a moth to a flame, he went to where he was told his wife was in trouble. The other supers Helen had met – now also enslaved by Evelyn's special Screenslaver glasses – attacked and overpowered Lucius. But Violet and Dash managed to get the remote to the Incredible and escape with their little brother. Using voice commands, they directed the car to take them to the ship as well.

Sneaking aboard, the three Parr siblings had to dodge the other supers, fighting back with everything they had, and managing to disable, break, or remove the mind-enslaving goggles from them; all the while chasing after their wayward toddler brother, who, like most kids his age, hadn't been able to stand still and had wandered off. It took some doing, but eventually the kids had rescued everyone, including their proud and very relieved parents. But it wasn't time to celebrate yet. The yacht was on a collision course with the city's shoreline and nothing but good old-fashioned superhero muscle and smart thinking could save the day. Evelyn tried her best to escape the impending disaster, but Helen stopped her. In the end, a catastrophe was very, *very* narrowly averted, Evelyn was taken into police custody, Winston's name was cleared of wrongdoing, and the supers, much to their delight, were made

legal again.

Clark found himself breathing a sigh of relief as the credits began to roll. Of course, it *had* been a family-friendly movie, so there'd been no doubt in his mind that the city would be saved. Nor was it a surprise that the superheroes had been reinstated to their former position of legality and acceptance. But he still couldn't help but to feel a sense of relief to see the asinine banning of superheroes and superhero work be reversed. And it felt satisfying to see the Parr children be a crucial part of that process. If it hadn't been for them, the city would have been doomed. Their parents likely would have died in the resulting crash from the boat running at full speed into the shoreline. Superheroes, in general, may have gone from simply being forced to live underground lives in a world where their powers were illegal, to being actively hunted down in the ensuing fear and anger that surely would have spawned from the yacht's crash.

Clark shuddered to think of a world in which *everyone* was out to kill his family and himself, instead of just the occasional nutcase or genuine villain. It was terrifying enough to deal with the people who thought they could threaten Daily Planet reporter Clark Kent to get their way or to get to Superman. And it was exhausting enough to deal with the lunatics who wanted Superman dead – for one reason or another. He didn't think he could deal with having the *entire world* out for his blood, not to mention the added pressure of keeping his children out of harm's way.

It wasn't as if it was new to him, to worry about some psychopath going after his kids to get to him, but it *was*, luckily, a *rare* event. But it was never far from his mind just how quickly things could change.

Still, Clark *had* to internally smile at the way the movie had spun events so that the Parr *children*, rather than the adults, had saved the day. It had been a nice, unexpected turn of events that Clark really hadn't predicted when the movie had first started. But, deeper than that, it hit home for him. His sons had, on more than one occasion, helped him out of a tight spot. Nothing life or death, thankfully, but their help had always proven to be invaluable. And though Rebecca was still developing her abilities, Clark didn't doubt that Lois Lane's daughter might one day outshine all other heroes.

For a long time, Clark had been a loner superhero. Then, little by little, others had emerged from the shadows – some with legitimate powers and others with nothing more than gadgets and gizmos that gave them the upper hand in a fight. Suddenly, Clark hadn't felt so alone – especially once he forged friendships with some of the other supers. It had been nice to know that there were others who understood the things he often went through as Superman. And once the Justice League had been established, it had really solidified for Clark how much he could depend on his newfound friends.

And yet, even with the League in place, Clark had still done most of his work alone. He was used to working a certain way, and it didn't help that most of the others couldn't do the things he could do. Batman couldn't save a disabled airplane. Wonder Woman couldn't hear the cries for help coming from half a city away. Flash couldn't lift thousands of pounds of rubble in an earthquake rescue effort.

But Clark's children *could*. And when his boys had first donned their own super suits, Clark *had really* known what it was like to not be alone. He *loved* knowing that his kids were fighting alongside him, rescuing people, putting criminals in jail where they belonged, righting wrongs, and doing their best to help make the world a better place. So it was nice to see the movie acknowledging that super-powered children could be just as important – and just as effective – in saving the world as their more famous parents.

"You guys want to get some dinner out?" Clark offered as they all stood up and exited the row of theater seats while the credits

continued to roll and the ending music blared in the darkness.

“Absolutely!” Michael enthused. “Pizza?”

“Nah, Chinese, bro,” Chris grinned, draining the last bit of his drink.

“I was kind of hoping for seafood,” Rebecca said quietly, a contemplative look on her face.

“Hey, are you okay?” Clark asked as he stepped to the side, letting Lois and his kids walk out into the aisle first.

“Yeah, fine,” Rebecca said distractedly. “It’s just...that was a lot to take in, you know?” she added in a near-whisper.

Clark nodded his understanding. “We’ll talk in the car,” he promised.

Rebecca’s face lit up in a brief smile. “Okay.”

No one said anything more until they were out of the theater. It was Lois who broke the silence as she jerked a thumb in the direction of the ladies’ room. Everyone agreed that a stop into the restrooms was in order before they left the building. Ten short minutes later, they were all heading out into the humid summer evening. The car was at the far end of the movie theater’s parking lot and, normally, the family would have lightly chatted about what they had just seen - the best parts, the worst parts, and their overall impression of the film. But not today. Today they were all holding their tongues until they were in the safety of their car, away from prying ears.

“Dad? Was it like that, the first time you saw the first movie?” Rebecca asked as she shut her door.

“Like what?” Clark asked as he buckled his seat belt.

“Terrifying. Like...like the walls were kind of closing in around you?” she elaborated vaguely.

Clark rested his wrists on the steering wheel as he sighed. “Yes. Your brothers were way too young to *really* notice how uncomfortable the movie made me...how on edge I was...but...yes. I felt like I had this...invisible spotlight on me, announcing to the world that I was just like the Incredible family. That Superman lived among them, passing himself off as a normal person...or at least, trying to...so that he could have a normal life. That he, like Bob, had a wife and kids, the same as any ordinary man.”

“More than that,” Lois chimed in with an amused smile. “He called an emergency meeting of the League to discuss the possibility that the movie might make *everyone* start looking to expose *all* of the supers’ identities.”

Clark felt his cheeks heat up in a blush. “I was really worried,” he defended himself. “All of us had been targeted before by people looking to score their fifteen minutes of fame that would come from unmasking the true identity of a superhero. I’d had a number of really close calls myself...I mean *really* close calls.”

“That’s true,” Lois put in thoughtfully.

“Are you worried about this new film?” his daughter prodded. “I mean, it could stir that up again, can’t it?”

Clark sighed again as he turned the question over in his mind. “I guess I’m a little worried, but maybe not as much as I was the first time around.” He gestured vaguely in the direction of the movie theater. “It’s true that it’s getting harder for all of us to retain our privacy. Between cell phone cameras and surveillance equipment and social media, it’s becoming increasingly more complicated to find that balance between being present superheroes that the public sees and trusts and keeping our privacy and identities intact. But there have been so many superhero movies and cartoons and comics and whatnot by this point that...while this movie *might* make people think about the whole secret identity thing again, it’s kind of old hat now. People have been surrounded by the idea for so long that they probably won’t be fazed too much by this movie.”

Rebecca hummed thoughtfully, but did not speak. For a moment, silence reigned again, only to be shattered by the rumble of Lois’ stomach. Clark laughed as what tension he’d had in his body over the movie bled out of him.

“Hungry?” he chuckled.

Lois laughed in turn. “I guess so.”

“How about that steakhouse in midtown?” Clark offered. “Since nobody can agree on any other place.”

There was a general sound of assent in the car and Clark nodded as he pulled out of the parking space.

“So, what do you think the chances are of getting a third movie?” Michael asked as Clark took a right at the light at the exit of the parking lot.

“I don’t know,” Clark admitted with a shake of his head.

A part of him almost hoped the franchise was over while the greater part of him almost hoped the movies would become a trilogy one day. After all, the films *had* been excellently done, even if they caused *actual* superheroes no small amount of anxiety.

“Sorry, Clark,” Lois apologized as she answered. “But I think there’s a good chance of another one. First of all, the movies have been really good. People love them. And secondly...the Underminer is still out there,” she added with a laugh and a wink.

“That’s right,” Michael piped up brightly. “They never *did* bring him to justice.”

“And Frozone hasn’t gotten a movie centered around him yet,” Chris tacked on happily.

“True,” Michael replied, and Clark could see in the rearview mirror the sage nodding of his eldest son’s head. “It wouldn’t be fair to have one movie for Mr. Incredible, one for Elastigirl, and none for Frozone.”

“He’s not an *Incredible* though,” Becca teasingly argued.

“He’s from a different family.”

“So? He’s just as awesome as the others,” Chris defended lightly.

“Nerd,” Becca shot back with a laugh.

Clark chuckled and shook his head. “I guess only time will tell,” he mused. “It’s too early to know yet. But I think your mother’s right. If the movie does half as well at the box office as I think it will, I’d say the odds of a third movie are probably pretty high.”

“Let’s hope so,” Chris said, and Clark didn’t have to sneak a peek at him to know his son was grinning.

The car grew quiet again for a while. Clark was just starting to fully relax as he navigated the city streets – sluggish in the sticky summer heat – when Christopher spoke up once more.

“Hey, Dad?” he asked.

“Hmm?” Clark asked, throwing a glance at his son in the rearview mirror.

“Can I ask a question?”

“Sure,” Clark nodded, “what’s up?”

“So, in the movie, Mr. Incredible had this really cool car, right?”

“Right,” Clark hesitantly said, drawing the word out in slight suspicion of what his son’s question might be.

“And Uncle Bruce has the Batmobile...”

“Yes?” Clark prodded, dragging this word out as well.

“So why do we schlep around in a fifteen-year-old Jeep? How come *you* never had a cool car too?” Chris asked cheekily.

Clark shook his head slightly in amusement before answering. “Because, son, unlike Mr. Incredible and Batman, I can *fly*.”

THE END